

People



Support



Steps Toward Success

Lessons from the EETAP States Program



Dedication



Change

Environmental Education and Training Partnership*

The Environmental Education and Training Partnership (EETAP) is a consortium of leading national environmental education organizations that fosters environmental literacy in America's schools, nature centers, government agencies, and other institutions. It does this by identifying and implementing essential professional development and support services for educators working in formal and nonformal education settings. EETAP is committed to ensuring that ethnically diverse and low-income communities benefit from and actively participate in education that advances student learning and environmental literacy.



National Environmental Education Advancement Project*



NATIONAL
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION
ADVANCEMENT
PROJECT

The National Environmental Education Advancement Project (NEEAP) supports the development and expansion of quality environmental education programs through a variety of state and local capacity building efforts. Many NEEAP efforts encourage the development and implementation of comprehensive environmental education programs at the state and local level.

*EETAP and NEEAP are based at the College of Natural Resources (CNR), University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. The CNR is home to the largest environmental education program in the country. It provides graduate and undergraduate degree programs in environmental education.

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The Grassroots of EE Capacity Building

The Roots

An era passed in July, 2005 when we lost a great leader, Senator Gaylord Nelson, the “father” of Earth Day. Before his passing, Rick Wilke had the opportunity to speak to Senator Nelson who said, “never, ever, ever, ever give up!”

The spirit of this statement is embodied in those who have chosen to make environmental education their profession. They are the teachers, interpreters, nature center and environmental education association directors, college instructors, researchers, curriculum and program designers, local-state-federal agency administrators, journalists and filmmakers, and many, many others whose professional lives are dedicated to unleashing the power of education to inspire and equip individuals, change society, and contribute to a more just and environmentally sustainable world.

No one ever said that this was going to be easy, least of all Gaylord Nelson, Aldo Leopold, Rachael Carson, and other men and women who inspired following generations to “take up the torch” and build a profession unlike any other. Indeed environmental education is contextual, high quality education. It integrates subject areas, addresses the life-long learning process of citizens and much more.

Environmental education (EE) plays an increasingly important role as our citizens are faced with making decisions on issues such as global warming, biodiversity, land use, energy consumption and many others. To assist our citizens in environmental decision-making, we need to build the infrastructure to support EE. We need to build EE capacity. The process of EE capacity building has been taking place since the first Earth Day was launched and the first National EE Act was passed in 1970. These foundational grassroots educational and legislative steps were followed in 1971 when a professional association, the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) was established. The field of EE, with its goal to create an environmentally literate citizenry, had begun.

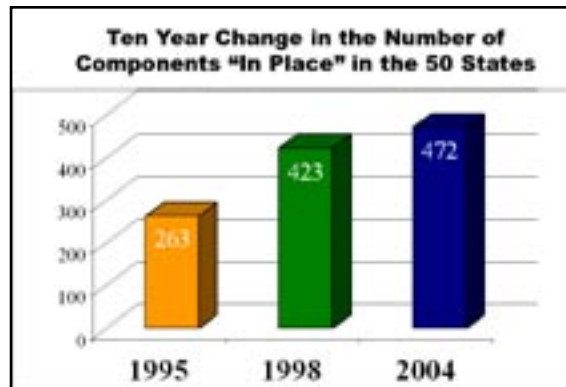
Growth of State-Level EE Capacity Building

While EE leaders at the national level were developing the infrastructure needed to define a professional field, similar processes were taking place in the states. For example, state-level legislation was being enacted creating staff positions in agencies and K-12 EE learning requirements. Across North America, university programs addressing EE training and research as well as nonprofit state EE associations began to sprout up. As the decades of the 1970s and early 1980s progressed, EE leaders in a handful of states provided the leadership to gain support and implement state-level EE programs such as required EE preservice teacher training, EE grant programs, EE interagency committees, K-12 EE outcomes/benchmarks, trust funds to receive public and private sources of funds for EE, and more.



The “wheel” model (shown in more detail on page 3) resulted from our research on six of these states. The model describes the program, funding and structure components that are common in some combination or another in successful comprehensive environmental education programs. Over a 10-year period, we have tracked the progress of states in implementing the

components of comprehensive EE programs. The diagram to the right, from our 2004 survey of the status of EE in all 50 states, shows a steady increase in the total number of components in place across the country. There was also a steady increase in the number of components being developed with 160 underway in addition to the 472 in place by 2004.



Lessons Learned from the States

The implementation of 209 additional components of comprehensive EE programs across the 50 states over the 10-year period between 1995-2004 would never have been possible without the talent and dedication of environmental education leaders at the state-level. These leaders are the people who have a solid grounding in the goals of EE, the vision and conviction to organize others, develop plans for coordinated action and provide inspiration, support and leadership to see these plans come to fruition. They are the subjects of this publication and it is here that their collective wisdom is presented.

We would like to thank the U.S. EPA’s Office of Environmental Education (OEE) for their decade-long support of environmental education capacity building that has resulted in the progress reported above and the insights gained and documented in this publication. Additionally, progress on the level so far attained would not have happened without the leadership and determination of EE leaders in states and provinces as well as national partner organizations.

Abby Ruskey Rick Wilke

Abby Ruskey and Rick Wilke
Cofounders, National EE Advancement Project



Introduction

Relationships have been forged, change has brought opportunity, adversaries have become partners and a new sense of identity has emerged for both Sally and the EE community. While this community does not see themselves as defined by EETAP, the EETAP States Program has been the common thread woven through the initiatives that have allowed the community to move forward with enthusiasm and a defined sense of direction.

This quote, taken from an article about a state team member, encapsulates the spirit of the EETAP States Program.

*D*uring the past five years teams of environmental educators from eight states have been supported through the Environmental Education and Training Partnership (EETAP) grant to undertake some amazing capacity building projects. From searchable Internet databases of environmental education (EE) resources, to state-level professional EE certification programs, to gathering data about the influence EE can have on students' standardized test scores, these teams have completed an impressive variety of projects.

The goal of the EETAP States Program was to help state leaders quickly, yet effectively, increase the amount and quality of EE training in their states. With a relatively modest amount of funding and a network of national EE partners, ambitious teams from Arizona, California, Illinois, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah and Washington proceeded to accomplish that goal with great success.

This publication passes along the important lessons that were learned during the completion of the program. Although each state worked on unique projects, there were many common experiences shared by all of the teams. In hopes of helping environmental educators throughout the United States gain from the lessons learned by these eight states during the completion of their projects, four over-arching themes are explored here.

You Make the Difference focuses on the importance of recognizing the contributions individuals make to the success of any project.

It Takes a Village encourages you to look beyond your comfort zone to discover new partnerships.

When All Else Fails, Play Nice explores the challenges of working in groups.

Adapt and Overcome describes some possible techniques that might help groups function better.

Complimenting these themes are excerpts from environmental educators who directly participated in the EETAP States Program. The excerpts are taken from stories about their experiences in the program that were recorded at a workshop held in September of 2004. The excerpts are anonymous to protect the authors and have been intentionally altered to remove personal information.

Hopefully the hard-earned lessons described here provide you with tools that make your work easier. By listening to and learning from each other's experiences we can maximize our effectiveness.

EETAP States Program



EETAP States Program

The EETAP States Program is one of 15 major activities undertaken by the Environmental Education and Training Partnership (EETAP). Designed to quickly increase the quantity and quality of environmental education (EE) training at the state-level, the EETAP States Program has supported teams of educators in eight states to work on a wide variety of capacity building projects during the past five years (2000-2005).

Who was involved?

The National Environmental Education Advancement Project (NEEAP), an outreach program of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, was chosen in 2000 to administer the EETAP States Program on behalf of EETAP. NEEAP's previous experience administering the Demonstration States (1994) and EE2000 States (1995-2000) programs made it the logical choice for managing this next generation of state-level capacity building programs.



States (1994) and EE2000 States (1995-2000) programs made it the logical choice for managing this next generation of state-level capacity building programs.

Through a competitive process with applicants from more than 25 states, proposals from eight states (Arizona, California, Illinois, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah and Washington) were selected for funding through the EETAP States Program.

Recipients were encouraged to select a team to fill the roles of Project Manager, Fiscal Agent, Communications Coordinator and Evaluation Coordinator (See Figure 1). This four-person team structure was suggested in hopes of distributing the workload among a small group rather than having an individual solely responsible. In general the team structure provided an opportunity for more individuals to get involved in the state projects by filling one of the four roles. This structure was used successfully by most of the eight states, though it was adapted to meet each team's specific needs.

Figure 1

Project Manager	Responsible for the management, planning and implementation of the project. Liaison between NEEAP and state volunteers. Provides pivotal leadership role within each state.
Fiscal Agent	Represents the organization that will receive and manage the federal funds. Provides accounting documentation. Works in coordination with the Project Manager and NEEAP staff.
Communications Coordinator	Responsible for promoting the state's successes with internal and external audiences. Works with the Project Manager, NEEAP staff and media outlets.
Evaluation Coordinator	Implements evaluation to measure project results. Works in coordination with the Project Manager and NEEAP staff.



Capacity Building Projects



Each of the eight state teams created a work plan focused on developing at least one new program for building EE capacity in their state. Their projects were based on the model for *Components of a State-Level Comprehensive EE Program* (Ruskey and Wilke 1994)¹; better known as “the wheel” (See Figure 2).

Examples of the team’s projects include creating online databases of EE resources, developing a state EE master plan, implementing a professional certification program, creating a state-wide network of environmental educators, plus many more. In all, more than 30 major components were undertaken by the eight state teams during their five years of involvement with the EETAP States Program.

Within each of the eight EETAP States, hundreds of training workshops for environmental educators of all types were conducted through this program. Topics ranged from the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) *Guidelines for Excellence* to *Tools for Non-formal Educators* to EETAP Diversity Workshops. These workshops provided thousands of educators with the skills and knowledge needed to connect their programs to some of the most cutting edge initiatives in the field of EE.

Two national Leadership Clinics (2003 and 2005) hosted by NEEAP were deemed especially helpful by teams from the EETAP States. These clinics provided state EE leaders with the networking, team planning, professional development, and evaluation resources needed to focus their efforts towards achieving their goals.

EE capacity building is developing effective organizations and individual leaders in order to achieve comprehensive EE programs at the state and local level.

Figure 2
Components of a State-Level Comprehensive EE Program, revised 1998 (Ruskey and Wilke 1994)¹.



Comprehensive EE programs are a combination of structure, funding and program components which serve to incorporate EE into educational institutions at the state and local level.

¹Ruskey, Abby and Wilke, Richard (1994). *Promoting Environmental Education: An Action Handbook for Strengthening EE in Your State and Community*. University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Foundation Press, Inc. 349 pp.



EETAP States Program

A Accomplishments

It is impossible to adequately describe all of the accomplishments the eight teams achieved through their five years of work with the EETAP States Program. Given the level of projects they set out to complete, the modest amount of money they had to work with and the limited timeline to work within, it is amazing what each of the states accomplished through their participation in the EETAP States Program. Below are just a few of the highlights in each state. More detailed accounts of each state's activities can be found at the web sites provided below.



Arizona

Re-established the Arizona Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) as a unifying force for EE in the state by fostering collaboration between EE providers, developing a five-year strategic plan and implementing a comprehensive communication plan. They developed a searchable online database of EE resources and correlated EE resources to state and national EE standards.

www.arizonaee.org



California

Established cooperative relationships between the state's EE networks and traditionally under-served audiences, such as bilingual educators.

This resulted in a full strand of presentations at the 2004 Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education Conference being devoted to diversity issues that were presented by people of color. Conversely, EE presentations were also given at the California Association for Bilingual Educators conference.



Illinois

Established Centers of Regional Environmental Education (CORE²), resulting in a regional network for coordinating EE trainings and resources throughout the state. They developed a searchable online database of EE resources, which gives environmental educators a way to easily identify trainings occurring in their local area, as well as serves as a clearinghouse of state EE resource materials.

www.illinoisee.org



Missouri



Restructured the Missouri Environmental Education Association (MEEA) as an independent, sustainable organization. They helped host the Missouri Environmental Literacy Summit with stakeholders from throughout the state who identified issues that will shape the future of EE in Missouri. They also established a statewide professional certification program and an online database of EE resources.

www.meea.org

Oklahoma



Developed a state EE master plan to guide the efforts of environmental educators throughout the state. A new organization called the Oklahoma Consortium for Environmental Literacy (OKCEL) was created. OKCEL is made up of EE related organizations, and is working to implement the master plan.

www.okcel.org

Ohio



Established a statewide regional network of environmental educators focused on building relationships with five under-served audiences:

Urban/Minority, Early Childhood, High School, Language Arts and

Social Studies. Each region hosted training workshops for their target audience and provided mentors for representatives of the under-served groups that attended the annual Ohio EE Council conference. They also launched an online database of EE resources.

www.eeco-online.org

Utah



Established a state-level professional EE certification program to better define the EE profession and establish high standards for the professional qualifications of environmental educators in Utah. They developed a mentor program for aspiring certification candidates including training workshops and manuals. They also assisted other states with initiating certification programs and worked with NAAEE to plan a national program.

www.usee.org

Washington



Developed three K-20 community hubs (partnerships between universities and primary school districts) focused on integrating EE into primary school classrooms and studying the effects on the students' standardized test scores.

Research results have been documented

in a series of publications available on the web

site listed below. They established the Pacific Education Institute, a non-profit organization, in order to sustain their initiatives beyond the EETAP States Program.

www.pacificeducationinstitute.org



EETAP States Program



Spreading the News

To maximize the benefits received from the accomplishments these state teams achieved through the EETAP States Program, representatives from NEEAP and the state teams gave dozens of conference presentations at the state and national level over the past five years. These presentations provided educators throughout the United States with models of how they can implement similar programs in their states.

US EPA Office of EE
www.epa.gov/enviroed

EETAP
eetap.org

NEEAP
www.uwsp.edu/cnr/neeap

NAAEE
naaee.org

EE-Link
eelink.net

Links

Additional opportunities for learning about the team's projects are available on the Internet. Several of the state teams have developed web sites related to their EETAP States Program projects (see "Accomplishments" on pages 4-5). NEEAP also has detailed information about each of the states' projects, as well as other EE capacity building resources, on its web site (see sidebar).

Finally, this publication is meant to provide you with valuable information gained through the experiences of the EETAP States Program teams for use in your own projects. Although each of the teams had unique challenges throughout their projects, there were at least four common lessons learned by all the groups involved with the EETAP States Program.

These four lessons, and the related excerpts, are the outcomes of a writing workshop in 2004. The purpose of the workshop was to capture the personal experiences of some of the individuals involved in the EETAP States Program, and to look for the important lessons that could be learned from their stories. The excerpts are taken directly from stories written by, and about, the workshop participants. To protect the anonymity of the individual, and to keep the focus on the lessons learned across the stories, personal information has been altered.

Capacity building is never easy, especially when done on a grand scale. Hopefully the lessons learned through the EETAP States Program will be useful to those who work to enhance environmental education through their own projects.



You Make the Difference

*W*hen asked what made things succeed in her area and not others, Doris offered a succinct answer, ‘the people.’ Doris’s answer pinpoints the driving influence in many endeavors. Although there are endless reasons why a project may or may not succeed, the people involved in doing the work are often the most important determining factor.

We have all been involved with projects that soared to unimaginable heights because the right people got involved and made things happen, even when challenges presented themselves. We have all also witnessed seemingly great projects fail because the right people were not involved; or perhaps in some cases, the wrong people were involved.

In September 2003, Peggy ran for a “member-at-large” position on the board of the state EE association and was elected. She was appointed in October and actually began working on the board in November. She brought with her an incredible amount of energy and enthusiasm and a determination to really make a difference.

At the beginning of a project there is often a single individual or a small group that is championing the endeavor. These folks are usually passionate about the project and may or may not have a clear direction charted. This is a delicate stage in the life cycle of a project, and sometimes volatile interactions can take place while the project’s goals and direction are being determined.

Group dynamics inevitably come down to each member’s individual characteristics. Successful project management requires that the group be aware of, and sensitive to, a variety of personal attributes including personality, commitment level, leadership skills and personal gain. As the term “dynamic” implies, a group is constantly changing; therefore, groups should strive for a balance between the needs of each individual and those of the entire group.

“I was fearful in the beginning. A lot was expected of me!” Joyce shared. “I wanted people to have confidence that I could lead them.”

[The beginning] is a delicate stage in the life cycle of a project.



You Make the Difference

Personality is one of the trickiest elements to manage within a group since each individual not only has unique characteristics, but is unfortunately sometimes not very self-aware. Additionally, each of our personalities is constantly in flux because of a wide variety of influences we call life (e.g., stress level, personal lives, health issues, personality conflicts, hunger level, etc.) Although on a personal level we strive to be sensitive to each individual's needs, as a group we tend to ignore individual needs in lieu of getting work done. Unfortunately there is no recipe for a successful balance, but not addressing strong personality issues commonly has a predictable negative outcome. Simply being aware of your own, and others' personal needs can mitigate potential friction between strong personalities.

Gail's success also came with some personal sacrifice. Her employer and many of her colleagues' organizations and agencies could not afford to pay their staff to attend diversity and leadership conferences. Gail contributed financially and she took vacation time to attend meetings, as did many of her minority colleagues. She's appreciative of the funding opportunities available through EETAP. Without this, her voice would not have been heard.

Identifying each member's commitment level within a group can be a very useful exercise. Many times it is assumed that each individual within a group has the same dedication level and therefore can be expected to contribute the same amount of time and energy toward the project's success. This is by far the exception rather than the rule. Just as personality characteristics are constantly changing, so are individual commitment levels. Commitment level will vary based on whether the person is involved on personal time or as part of their job, their position within the group, personal circumstances and many other influences. Periodically checking on each individual's commitment level can help facilitate project management and ensure that the group is operating on correct assumptions regarding workload and timelines.

What each person forfeits to participate in the project also directly affects their commitment level. Being considerate of how much time and energy each member is contributing to make a project successful is a way your group can honor individual contributions. Regardless of whether an individual is working on the project as part of their paid job or donating their personal time and money as a volunteer, it is important to recognize that everyone makes sacrifices to participate. Although it is not always



Periodically checking on each individual's commitment level can help facilitate project management.

necessary to publicly draw attention to individual sacrifices, it is never appropriate to discount what an individual has given up to participate (even if you believe it is less important than the person is making it out to be), or compare two different people's commitments. Everyone has different perceptions, so making judgments about the value of an individual's sacrifice can possibly make the individual defensive or self-conscious, resulting in hurt feelings.

Wanda stated that her involvement in her state's EETAP efforts is different from anything she has ever done. Had she not agreed to become the state Fiscal Agent, she is certain that she would not have taken the time or shown the interest to become involved.

Wanda's association with the EETAP project has been a win-win situation. Wanda brings her cultural heritage, organizational strength, and knowledge of finance and classroom students to the benefit of the state team; while she gains knowledge and professional development in environmental education. Wanda is a diamond in the rough.

Part of having the right people involved includes recognizing and utilizing their leadership skills. Each of us comes from a unique background with a myriad of expertise. Sometimes these skills come from education, other times from the school of hard knocks. Again, it is important to recognize how each individual can contribute to the success of the project. Help each individual feel comfortable enough to step forward and demonstrate their skills, then give them the opportunity to contribute. Sometimes training is needed to help a group overcome a particular challenge and sometimes it is more efficient to utilize outside assistance.

Finally, keeping in mind that each of us comes to a project with personal needs will help ensure a successful project. Rarely is the product as important as the process of creating it or the relationships developed along the way. We live in a small world and it is very likely that we will encounter the same people repeatedly throughout our lives and careers. Taking time to identify why individuals belong to a particular group may not only facilitate a balanced group dynamic, but can also help us learn about the people in our lives. You can have a significant impact on the success of any project if you chose to do so. *Truly, you make the difference.*

Help each individual feel comfortable enough to step forward and demonstrate their skills, then give them the opportunity to contribute.





It Takes a Village

So you have a great idea for a project and you want to invite others to help you make it a success. Of course you're going to contact the usual suspects, your list of friends that have helped you on every other project. Your missions mesh well, you know each other's styles, and they're located just down the road. It's a perfect match.

But how about some new folks? You've heard a lot about those mysterious "stakeholders" everyone talks about; maybe you should give them a call? Or perhaps you should reach out to diverse audiences; no doubt they could bring unique perspectives to your project. And what about the powerful people who can bring influence and money to the table? What about the Governor and the Directors and CEO's of all the agencies and companies you can think of? Surely having powerful people involved will make your project a success, right?

Our first task was to figure out how we would approach the university education faculty. Dave and I knew that we had to catch their attention and then be able to provide something they needed in order to get their participation.

Assembling the right group of individuals and organizations to participate in a project can be a complicated task, but is critical to its success.

Assembling the right group of individuals and organizations to participate in a project can be a complicated task, but is critical to its success. If you gather the right people success might not only be easy, but you may even exceed your initial goals. Leaving out important representatives or getting counterproductive people involved can sometimes result in disaster.

One catch-22 to keep in mind when considering which stakeholders to assemble involves the group's goal(s). To ensure a strong commitment to the project, as many stakeholders as possible should be included in the goal setting process; however, to attract stakeholders, it is often helpful to know your group's goal. There is no simple solution to this dilemma, so your group will have to navigate this challenge as best you can.

Fortunately there are several aspects of member recruitment that are less convoluted. Geography, organizational affiliation, level of influence, audience representation, and personality type are just some of the many attributes that can help you determine who should be a member of your group.

When your project aims to affect a broad geographic area, such as an entire state, it is of course wise to try to find a diversity of representatives that characterize that area. Intuitively, physical location is a basic criterion for identifying potential members. Less intuitive criteria might include urban and rural populations, socioeconomic status, cultural background, religion, occupational diversity, demographics (i.e. age, gender, race) as well as many others. Although it may be impossible to have representatives with

It Takes a Village

all these different attributes in your group, it is possible to identify which ones are most important to your project and then actively recruit members from those groups.

Which organizations, agencies and companies are represented in your group is also an important consideration. If your project is narrowly focused on a specific goal, the list of potential members may be quite straightforward. If, however, your project is more far-reaching, your potential list may be less clear.

Common first steps for identifying potential candidates include reviewing the project goals and brainstorming all conceivable stakeholders. If your list includes virtually everyone in your state, this might indicate that your goal(s) is too broad and consequently difficult to complete, at least in a reasonable amount of time. If this appears to be the case it may be prudent to examine the project goals for clarity. Once the list of potential organizations is complete, the real work of recruiting group members begins.

The key to getting broad participation in EE was to not really refer to EE at all. When Carrie and the other women marketed the leadership clinic, their recruitment efforts focused on community renewal and vitality. And they knew that to reach the caliber of people they wanted – the decision-makers, the community leaders – they had to come across as professional.

One frequently overlooked factor of project success is the level of influence of the people involved. It is normally very difficult for people from one group (i.e. non-profits, agencies, businesses) to have a lasting effect on people from another group without the cooperation and consent of people from the second group. This does not mean that you cannot affect another group, but rather suggests that inviting at least one representative from the second group to join your group can facilitate the success of your project.

These key representatives may add credibility, visibility, access to a particular audience, or even the power to make decisions regarding your project. Depending on the goal of your project, these representatives may not need to be from the highest level in the organization or group. Many times simply having an “official” representative from any level within the target group can have the desired outcome. Most often contacting people you already know personally within the target group will provide you with valuable insight into their potential interest in your project, and who might be a good representative.



Identify which [groups] are most important to your project and then actively recruit members from those groups.

Support

The group began to focus its efforts toward inclusion, recognizing that without inclusion, the efforts of EE would fail. They worked hard to get all ethnic groups represented. To do so, they contacted new communities, made new relationships, called in some 'old favors' and relied on the expertise of veteran members, like Samantha. At the subsequent leadership clinic, her state sent a diverse team of representatives—Hispanic, African-American, Asian American, etc. To Samantha and everyone else, it was absolutely beautiful!

Consider including a member of your target audience. Surprisingly often, members of the audience that a project aims to impact are not invited to participate in the project planning itself. Despite the best of intentions to address the target group's perceived need, there is no better way of fulfilling their true needs than including them. Taking the time to make strong connections between your group and your target audience will ensure everyone views the project as beneficial.

And last, but certainly not least, personality types in your group can be a major factor in your project's success. Some people are planners, some are doers. Some think big picture, some are detail-oriented. Some provide structure, others are free spirits. Unfortunately there is no standard recipe for creating a balanced and productive mix of personalities in a particular group. Although your group will likely wish it were spending more of its time working on project goals and less on personality conflicts, the reality is we are all unique, and better for it. *As the old adage says, "it takes a village."*

Many times simply having an "official" representative from any level within the target group can have the desired outcome.





When All Else Fails, Play Nice

When All Else Fails, Play Nice

During the initial stage of a project it is instinctual for a group to focus on goals and objectives rather than personal interactions. This is normally an exciting “honeymoon” period where energy and emotions are high and optimism prevails. It is also a delicate stage in the life cycle of a project which, if not handled with care, can spawn difficulties later on.

Whether you like it or not, much of a group’s energy may be spent overcoming territorial issues among members. The various components that make up a group’s dynamic are endless. Age, gender, race, occupation, seniority, station, organizational affiliation, previous relationships, language skills, appearance, and attitude are just a few of the factors most people immediately and automatically use to judge others. It is not intentional or avoidable, but simply the way we are.

To overcome this sizable obstacle, each group needs an acclimation period where members are encouraged to get comfortable with each other. Although it would be nice if this were a distinct phase, the reality is that acclimation is a gradual process interwoven throughout the group’s maturation process.

Time may be needed to learn one another’s “lingo,” as well as working styles, both personal and organizational. This is especially vital when group members are working together for the first time. People tend to assume everyone does things their way or prefers the same things they do until experience shows them otherwise. By addressing the issue of differences proactively a group may avoid friction before it arises.

“Another thing I observed at the conference was that as a new person to the field of EE, it is difficult to understand all the institutional EE jargon!” It was intimidating to Amber.

The role of individuals, and in turn the group, at this time is to create a “safety net” for each other. If territoriality is allowed to prevail, relationships will be strained and the success of the project will inevitably be hindered by conflict. It is imperative for the group to find ways of building trust between individuals and organizations. Understanding and respecting each other’s positions is the hallmark of a solid partnership and critical for true progress to occur.

But what if conflict does occur? Unfortunately a common strategy for dealing with problems within a group is denial. Either group members look the other way when friction occurs or they try to resolve issues superficially in hopes of keeping the group together long enough to finish the project. Predictably, this is an unsatisfactory response when striving for a positive group dynamic.

Each group needs an acclimation period where members are encouraged to get comfortable with each other.



When All Else Fails, Play Nice

Fortunately there are a variety of constructive strategies for addressing conflict within a group. In some instances a leader may attempt to address an acute issue discretely outside of group time, such as during a break. This strategy sometimes works with “difficult personalities” or disruptive individuals. Asking if there is something bothering the person might be all that is needed to resolve the issue.

At other times it may be best to engage the whole group to address a contentious issue. Providing an opportunity for members to voice their concerns and discuss their positions can lead to better understanding within the group. This can be a healthy strategy for working through problems; however, if the group seems to be spending an inordinate amount of time on a tangential issue, reflecting on the group’s purpose and goals may be enough to reorient the group in the right direction.

Sally was witnessing infighting and factions escalating within the state’s EE community. Clouded by turf and funding issues an atmosphere of distrust slowly permeated the EE community. Relationships were strained, partnerships were based on unfulfilled promises and Sally was seriously questioning her own professional and personal well-being in this climate.

When internal strategies aren’t successfully resolving your groups conflict it may be time to look outside the group for help. Possible avenues include hiring a professional facilitator, recruiting an “objective, independent” colleague, calling upon a respected elder with past related experience as well as many others. Conflict is stressful for any group and reactions can be unpredictable. At this point group leaders need to focus on maintaining open communication and retaining each member’s commitment to the goal.

Of course the best case scenario is when a group is able to work together for extended periods without serious problems arising. Perhaps expecting a friction-free work environment might be a bit unrealistic; however, striving for a sensitive and well-balanced atmosphere should be within the grasp of most groups.

Although there is no magic recipe, here are a few things to remember. Start with the assumption that each member has a different perspective on and path towards the goal, if not a different goal. Creating and maintaining a solid group vision will guide your success. Don’t rush it, and return to it often.

People stepping into a process usually enter with energy; make it positive. Welcome each new member as they join the group. Don’t ignore the importance of their arrival by briefly introducing them then moving ahead with regular business as if they’ve always been there. Respect their arrival by learning why they are joining, what experience they bring, what interests them, and what their perspective is on the group’s vision.



People stepping into a process usually enter with energy; make it positive.

Reflections

“The synergy of the team was so exciting and so productive.” Bonnie saw that this group really was inclusive and interested in functional, active partnerships, not just those that provide lip-service. There was discovery of new common ground and a letting go of past differences that opened the way for this group to build mutual respect and trust for one another. On a personal level, Bonnie was impressed and pleased to see her own professional growth and that of her colleagues coming together in a synchronized fashion.

People are brought into the process to add new insights, make a connection, lend influence, give a sense of history, and many other reasons; honor them. Recognizing and formally stating each member’s role(s) within the group can help clarify perspectives and foster mutual understanding. Also, bringing new members fully up to speed, before their first full meeting if possible, can make their acclimation much easier. A mentor or buddy from within the group may be helpful.

On the other end of the process is the possibility that someone wants, or needs, to leave the group. Regardless of whether they are leaving for internal or external reasons it can be helpful to recognize that this is a natural part of the process and the person should not be stigmatized. In fact, giving people permission to leave the group, with assurances of no hard feelings, is a healthy way of dealing with this relatively frequent event. Every group should realize that people may need to leave at sometime and their exit should not be misinterpreted.

On a related note, it is also important not to attribute motives to others in the group. Everyone does what they do for a reason. If you do not know why someone is doing what they are doing, don’t make assumptions, ask them. This can foster an open channel of communication while simultaneously avoiding a hurtful behavior. If you think it is rude to question someone about their actions, consider the impoliteness of making assertions without having all the facts.

Working in a group has many advantages and disadvantages, and for better or worse is something we all have to do repeatedly in our daily lives. Even though there are countless factors that we have very little control over, one factor we do have power over is ourselves. We all have the ability to choose how we perceive the people around us and how we interact with them. Hopefully you choose to be a positive influence on others in your life. *When all else fails, play nice.*

One factor we do have power over is ourselves.





Adapt and Overcome

E Every project goes through cycles of moving forward, hitting walls, falling behind, starting again and sometimes even moving too quickly. This dance of two steps forward, one step back (if you're lucky) is simply the status quo for works in progress. However, that doesn't mean you can't do something about it.

Developing systems and structures to deal with change, either beforehand or as needed, can help your group weather difficult times. While some challenges are relatively predictable, more often they come as complete surprises.

As discussed earlier, group dynamics is one predictable issue that can cripple an unprepared group almost immediately. Few things are as frustrating as having interpersonal friction develop before any project momentum can be generated. Although some situations require a skilled facilitator, many problems can be prevented by establishing guidelines for conduct and decision-making, as well as clear roles for members.

Two state organizations with a somewhat mixed history came together to work on the project. One organization took the lead in writing the grant, the other acted as the fiscal agent. But what started out as a well planned scope of work, began to unravel as personal circumstances created significant personnel changes in the original writing team.

Guidelines might be as complex as adopting "Robert's Rules of Order" or as simple as having the group brainstorm a list of expected behaviors during a meeting early in your project. Regardless of which method is adopted, having an agreed upon set of group expectations is a valuable asset when trouble presents itself.

Additionally, defining clear roles and identifying people to fill important positions within your group may help avoid confusion among members regarding who's in charge of what. If your group involves a large number of people or will be meeting over an extended period it might be appropriate to establish formal officers, including term limits. If your group is small or only meeting a few times perhaps naming an honorary facilitator, timekeeper or note-taker can meet your needs.

Another predictable, yet often overlooked challenge for groups is maintaining a democratic representation of members. Despite the best of intentions, people with strong personalities, positions of power, seniority, or other perceived advantage, tend to dominate those with less perceived advantages. Because every individual and organization brings different values to the group it is vital that structures are developed to ensure equal, or at least more equal, representation among members. Although there is no

Having an agreed upon set of group expectations is a valuable asset.



one guaranteed method for cultivating a democratic atmosphere, it behooves your group to keep testing models until you find one you are comfortable with and suits your group's needs.

Unfortunately it is not always possible to forecast changes that affect your success. Issues resulting from people leaving the group, political changes, or even failure within part of the project are always a possibility, even if we prefer not to think about them. If no safety net exists to help the group deal with unexpected challenges the project could suffer major setbacks or even collapse under the stress.

With a myriad of potential influences affecting each individual within a group it is very likely that during the course of your project some of the people involved are going to leave. Although sometimes this can be a blessing, if the person leaving happened to be counterproductive to the group's success, more often the group is negatively affected by the unexpected loss of a valuable member. Can their departure be avoided, and if not, what then?

With the amount of energy most groups spend recruiting members it is usually most efficient to retain as many productive members as possible. Checking in with each individual periodically may help you detect problems early and potentially mitigate issues under your control. If a member does decide to leave the group, be sure to honor their contributions and thank them for their service. You never know when their circumstances may change again and if they had a positive experience within your group they might decide to rejoin.

Political changes, both internal and external, can affect any project. Internal changes might include turnover in officer positions or group members. External changes could range from a supervisor changing a group member's assignment to a new president being elected. If your group has warning about such changes, and feels they may have a serious impact on the project's success, it might be prudent to develop a contingency plan for dealing with the change. More often these changes are unexpected and the consequences must be addressed ad hoc.

About a year into the project, the agency was swirling in a sea of change. The administration changed, and the culture changed along with it. Bob's supportive supervisor was moved to a different position. The biggest change of all came when Bob was told he was no longer the project coordinator.

One challenge no group wants to address is the failure of a project. Sometimes even considering the possibility feels like a self-defeating act. Certainly many groups don't even want to talk about what will happen if a project fails; it simply is not an option.



Develop a contingency plan for dealing with change.

Change

While Kendra and others initially viewed the findings of this report as a failure due in part to a lack of data and leadership they soon found the beauty of their mess. The beauty was the recognition that they needed a systematic way to coordinate EE in the state.

Admittedly, sporting a negative attitude never adds to the success of a project, but that differs from considering undesirable scenarios and troubleshooting solutions before the worst happens. Monitoring the progress of a project can help your group discover potential weak spots and address them before they become serious. If a project doesn't turn out as expected, take the time to examine what went wrong so the mistake isn't repeated later on.

And finally, one challenge that every group eventually faces, but rarely plans for, is what to do when a project ends. Is it pretentious to throw yourself a party to celebrate your hard work and success? Heck, no! In fact recognizing a job well done is an excellent way of thanking everyone that contributed to the project's success, from the envelope stuffers to the project's funders. Furthermore, communicating your accomplishments to people outside of the project can also help you later on when you need support for another project.

Renewed relationships have been forged, change has brought opportunity, adversaries have become partners and a new sense of identity has emerged for both Sally and the EE community. While this community does not see themselves as defined by EETAP, the EETAP States Program has been the common thread woven through the initiatives that have allowed the community to move forward with enthusiasm and a defined sense of direction.

Nothing ever goes exactly as planned, but if proper structures and systems for dealing with challenges are developed, the chances of a project succeeding are greatly enhanced. Groups that take the time to consider how they might approach challenges proactively will usually come out on top when adversity presents itself. ***Be prepared to adapt and overcome.***

*Is it pretentious to throw yourself a party to celebrate your hardwork and success?
Heck, no!*



Pass It On



Pass It On

The lessons, and related excerpts, on the previous pages were distilled from personal stories exchanged during a 2004 writing workshop, called the Writing Rendezvous. That workshop was designed to provide representatives from the eight EETAP States with the opportunity to reflect upon their capacity building efforts in the EETAP States Program, exchange personal experiences by interviewing each other, and then develop written stories of each other's experiences based on those interviews. That process not only enabled participants to reflect upon their own experiences, but also learn from others.

In today's fast paced society we rarely take an adequate amount of time to fully appreciate our experiences, especially those related to our work lives. Hopefully the four lessons that emerged from examining the Writing Rendezvous stories demonstrate that there is valuable knowledge to be gained by reflecting on our experiences.

Perhaps the last lesson of this publication is that of *passing it on*. "It" being both this publication, so that your colleagues can benefit from the information provided, and also the knowledge YOU have gained through your own experiences. Knowledge can be leveraged many times by sharing it with others. Just as the Writing Rendezvous participants came together to share their experiences, you too can share with your colleagues the important knowledge you have learned through your work.

Whether it's through conference presentations, newsletter articles, web blogs or simply personal conversations, the act of passing along the lessons you've learned is a great gift to others looking to follow in your footsteps. Below are a few excellent opportunities for sharing knowledge.

Your state EE association – Most states have an organization dedicated to bringing environmental educators together for social and professional purposes. They often distribute a newsletter and host an annual conference.

North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) – This national organization is dedicated to promoting excellence in EE. NAAEE offers a newsletter and web site (naaee.org) of organizational activities and hosts an annual conference each Fall that serves as a major gathering place for leaders in the EE field.

NAAEE Affiliates Network – This group of EE leaders collaborates to maximize their effectiveness through the sharing of ideas and resources among states and provinces. The NAAEE Affiliates Network hosts an annual workshop, occurring just prior to each NAAEE conference, which is a great opportunity to interact with EE leaders from throughout North America.

EE-link – The online database of resources known as EE-link is designed to support students, teachers, and professionals in the EE field (eelink.net).

Environmental Education and Training Partnership (EETAP) – This partnership serves as a national leader in the delivery of EE training to education professionals. EETAP supports many of the highest priority national initiatives in the field of EE (eetap.org).

The benefits to be gained from working together as individuals and organizations are endless. Hopefully this publication has provided you, and in turn the groups you belong to, with some helpful insights distilled from the experiences of those that participated in the EETAP States Program. *Thank you for passing it on.*

Knowledge can be leveraged many times by sharing it with others.

