



# **Environmental Educators of North Carolina**

**Strategic Plan**

**2021-2024**

## Mission

EENC's mission is to build connections, provide professional development, and promote excellence for North Carolina's community of environmental educators.

We do this by promoting and facilitating professional development, fostering networking opportunities, and demonstrating high quality environmental education programs and materials. EENC strives to be a leader in the field of environmental education within North Carolina, the southeast, and the nation.

## SWOC Analysis

During the January 2021 board retreat, the EENC Board of Directors and Executive Director conducted a SWOC analysis. They listed the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges.

## Strengths

- Hold an awesome annual conference and many other well-received events
- Devoted board members who truly care about environmental education (EE) and EENC
- Gathering information and feedback from the community and working to meet their needs
- Communicating with our community through social media and other interfaces
- Provide opportunities for members and non-members, and current and future professionals
- Internal and external work on Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI)
- Supporting research and program evaluation and sharing that with practitioners
- Networking and connections
- Statewide presence
- Organization and planning- internal and external
- Successful crowdfunding campaign and fundraising initiatives
- Continued relationships with the NC Office of Environmental Education and Public Affairs (NCOEEPA) and the NC Association of Environmental Education Centers (NCAEEC)

## Weaknesses

- Lack of brand awareness. Not well known by university programs and researchers. Still confused with the NCOEEPA and their listserv.
- Limited advocacy expertise and experience.
- Limited operational capacity with one staff member and a working board. Serving on the Board is a significant commitment.
- Not utilizing our members enough to support projects and committee work to build capacity and connections
- Limited human resources expertise.
- Need to strengthen high level program evaluation to identify and prioritize projects, and to evaluate how our programs advance our mission.
- Need more definitive Board Culture and Board Recruitment strategies.

## Opportunities

- Advocacy on the value of the field and of the professional development opportunities we provide, and advocacy to support for the field and its professionals: wage increases, value of PD, connections to public education, etc.
- More networking events/bring people together to build connections between educators
- Continued growth in our partnerships such as the National Association for Interpretation, NCOEEPA, NCAEEC
- Continued JEDI work, internally and externally.
- Continued growth in quality of our programs (perhaps through partnerships), both online and in person
- Supporting university programs and formal educators (school teachers and administrators)
- There are a lot of successes happening in the field, so there could be more positive and inclusive communications about this good work.

## Challenges

- Long term impacts of COVID on EE organizations and professionals: financially, struggling communities, professionals leaving the field, etc.
- Environmental problems, education, and curriculum, being seen as “extra” or not “essential” by the general public.

- Decades of White Supremacy culture in the field, making it hard to lift up the voices of Black, Indigenous and People of Color.
- Funder and donor preferences to support new initiatives rather than sustain successful programs.
- General perceptions about the term “environmental education” and how individuals and groups self-identify as environmental educators. Reaching and engaging educators who do not self-identify using this term.
- Potential changing support for various government agency support of environmental education (NC Department of Environmental Quality, NC Department of Public Instruction, etc.) based on currently elected/appointed leaders.

## Internal and External Priorities

Upon reviewing the SWOC, the Board and Executive Director identified internal and external priorities for EENC.

### Internal Priorities

- Increase diversity of Board of Directors, membership, and the broader EE community to reflect the state’s population
- Reflect and revise the roles of Board members, committees, volunteers, and staff to sustainably support our operations.
- Improve our internal evaluations
- Develop and implement a marketing plan to increase our reach and brand awareness
- Build our organization capacity through intentional relationships, especially with state agencies.

### External Priorities

- Increase awareness of the field of environmental education, both in public perception and legislation.
- Build the legitimacy for EE as a profession. Connect practitioners to research. Strengthen EE connections to North Carolina curriculum standards and NC teacher licensure renewal.
- Engage a broader community for EENC membership and programming.

- Facilitate collaboration among EE providers from diverse professional backgrounds in NC. Bridge the gap between formal and nonformal educators to connect learning in and out of the classroom.
- Work to reduce barriers to access for both environmental educators (ex: living wage pay, cost of professional development) and their participants.

## Focus Areas

The Board and Executive Director refined the internal and external priorities to identify four focus areas.

- 1) Advocacy for the Field of EE
- 2) Partnerships for Building Capacity to Advance EE
- 3) Increase Recognition of EENC as a Go-To Resource for Environmental Educators
- 4) Build Internal Capacity of the Organization

Across all four focus areas, there were two cross-cutting underpinnings:

- 1) Prioritizing Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
- 2) Considering a broad definition of environmental education - beyond classrooms and EE Centers

## Outcomes

For the next three years, outcomes have been established for each of the focus areas.

### Advocacy for the Field of EE

As a statewide nonprofit network, EENC is uniquely positioned to advocate for systemic change to support both educators and their participants. We plan to expand our efforts in this area by working to achieve these outcomes:

- 1) Work to increase EE presence in legislation, including advocating for funding to increase educator pay.
- 2) Increase access and support for participants to attend EE programs.
- 3) Advocate to legitimize the field of environmental education through targeted messaging campaigns.

## Partnerships for Building Capacity to Advance EE

In order to build capacity for the field of EE, EENC recognizes the need to build relationships with individuals, organizations, and agencies with aligned goals. This includes connecting non formal educators to pre-service teacher programs and formal educators, connecting EE practitioners to research and university professionals, and building partnerships for shared learning spaces. We will do this over the next three years by working to achieve the following outcomes:

- 1) Build EE engagement within the formal education sector.
- 2) Identify and promote opportunities to use EE research in programming.
- 3) Create strategic partnerships with organizations that have similar missions, including environmental justice organizations

## Increase Recognition of EENC as a Go-To Resource

EENC identifies the necessity for brand-consistent marketing and promotion in order to expand recognition and grow membership. We plan to increase our programming and marketing efforts by reaching the following outcomes:

- 1) Increase recognize the EENC brand as a resource for items related to our mission for new and current audiences.
- 2) Expand our professional development programming and resources to engage a broad and diverse educator community and support their efforts to provide meaningful and accessible engagement for students.
- 3) Provide opportunities for educators to responsively engage with current events and trends.

## Build Internal Capacity of the Organization

EENC recognizes that in order to continue to grow sustainably, we need to reflect on our current organizational structure and roles. EENC seeks to expand its current staffing to include a new part-time Program Coordinator and strengthen our Board skills and continue our internal equity work. To demonstrate our progress towards these goals, we will:

- 1) Reevaluate and clearly define the roles, goals, and recruitment of board members, staff, and volunteers and improve pathways for wider participation.

- 2) Maintain membership benefits that are relevant and accessible for all EE professionals.
- 3) Identify skills gaps among our leadership and provide professional development and training opportunities to increase our organizational expertise.

## Plan of Action

The Board of Directors and Executive Director developed a plan of action to achieve each outcome over the next three years. This spreadsheet will serve as a living document to track progress and make adjustments to the plans as needed. If you would like to request a copy of the plan, please contact the President at [president@eenc.org](mailto:president@eenc.org).