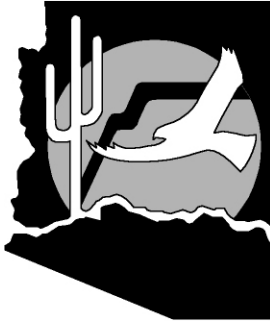


## Arizona Association for Environmental Education



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November 19, 2004

Dr. Edmund H. Portnoy  
Director of Grants Programs  
Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust  
2201 East Camelback Road, Suite 600 B  
Phoenix, AZ 85016

Dear Dr. Portnoy:

This proposal is submitted by The Arizona Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) based in Phoenix. AAEE is a nonprofit organization working to enhance the quality of environmental education in Arizona and to advance professionalism among all who are involved with environmental education. Since 1980 AAEE has served professionals working in the education, eco-tourism, research, conservation, and youth development sectors of Arizona's economy.

AAEE will collaborate with The Environmental Education Exchange (EE Exchange) in Tucson to implement key components of the project. The EE Exchange is a nonprofit 501(c) (3) organization established to enhance and expand the environmental literacy of inhabitants and visitors in the unique desert regions of the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. Over its 14-year history, EE Exchange has supported a wide range of public agencies, private organizations, school districts, and businesses.

**Reason/rationale for the request:**

AAEE proposes to address the need for a shared understanding of environmental education among a diversity of Arizona stakeholders. Traditionally, the Arizona environmental education community has been comprised mainly of formal classroom educators, generally Anglo, middle-class citizens. Also historically, local, state or regional organizations within Arizona have acted independently with little consideration for each other's agendas or goals. The result has been serious fragmentation of efforts and the unrealized strength that meaningful collaboration can accomplish.

The Environmental Education Training and Partnership (EETAP) program of the EPA reported on the successes in states where a coalition of diverse stakeholders act together to organize and promote environmental literacy across sectors. California and Illinois both integrated efforts through state-wide EE consortia with significant gains.

California recently integrated K-12 curriculum and environmental education guidelines to strengthen education standards across their curriculum.

The important contribution of environmental education toward student success was highlighted in a study recently supported by the Pew Charitable Trust and carried out in 40 schools across the U.S.: *Closing the Achievement Gap: Using the Environment as an Integrating Concept*. It clearly demonstrates that learning in the out-of-doors results in significantly better achievement outcomes. South Carolina and Washington state have both recently published evaluations of programs incorporating the tenets of EIC®, corroborating the results of this study by Dr. Gerald Lieberman and Linda Hoody.

Another compelling reason for coordinating the efforts of environmental organization in Arizona is the changing demographic of our state's population. Each year brings a new influx of people, most of whom know little about the southwest region. There is important work to be done to bring citizens to a knowledge and skill level that allows them to both enjoy the region to the fullest, but also to participate in conserving water and other critical resources we share.

#### Identification of the need for this project

As the state professional society for environmental education with over 400 members, and 306 institutions in our online EE Database, we are the recognized leader of environmental education in the state of Arizona. Our Board and members represent professionals working in all aspects and levels of the field. Through our workshops, evaluations, and partnerships over our 20-year history, we have acquired a comprehensive understanding of the challenges we face to reach our overall goal: promotion of environmental literacy among Arizona citizens of all ages.

When AAEE was selected as one of eight states by the National Environmental Education Training Partnership of the Environmental Protection Agency for leadership training and capacity building in 2000, we began a serious analysis of our strengths and weaknesses. We launched a new scope of work to build internal strength and knowledge, which would prepare us to meet external challenges to accomplishing our mission. During this process our leadership and partner EE organizations identified the need to gain a shared understanding of EE – what it is, and the role it plays in education and conservation of Arizona's natural resources – as the key step to finally achieving a statewide collaboration to deliver high quality and meaningful EE to citizens.

#### **Target Audience:**

While this project targets key stakeholders in environmental education across many sectors (un-represented, under-represented, and key institutions in Arizona), the true audience is ultimately the students, families, and citizens of Arizona who will benefit from an organized and engaging approach to environmental literacy.

The most effective means of addressing Arizona's challenge is to first create a shared vision and related comprehensive understanding among stakeholders of what environmental education can and should be in Arizona. We believe this can be accomplished by stakeholders answering two basic questions, "What is environmental education?" "What is the value of quality environmental education to our state?"

When stakeholders embrace a shared vision predicated upon an agreed upon definition, opportunities for collaboration will be maximized. At a recent brainstorming session of state EE leaders a diverse array of stakeholders was cited as being among those that are vital to achieving a coordinated state-wide effort to promote environmental literacy among our citizens:

- School administrators
- Universities and colleges
- Agencies: State Land Dept, Forest Service, State Parks, etc.
- Business
- CEO's of large chains
- City governments
- Cooperative Extension
- Developers
- Earth products
- Ecotourism
- Environmental groups
- Faith-based community
- Funding agencies for environmental education
- Land owners
- Land planners
- Policy makers.

**Timeframe:**

The project will convene a state-wide summit on the State of Environmental Education in Arizona in early summer of 2005. The project planning, implementation, and reporting will occur during the calendar year of 2005.

**Goal:**

To develop the understanding and skills needed to create comprehensive and sustainable environmental education programs at the state and local level.

**Strategies:**

1. Identify and engage the participation of previously unrepresented stakeholders.
2. Identify obstacles to working together, and suggest solutions.
3. Develop a shared definition of what comprises environmental education.
4. Develop a plan to create a standard for best practices and programs in Arizona.
5. Coordinate the combined efforts of the Arizona EE community to promote environmental literacy among our citizens.

**Outcomes:**

1. Using their shared knowledge of environmental education, targeted stakeholders make informed decisions that support best practices for advancing environmental education throughout the state.
2. Targeted stakeholders plan and implement thoughtful actions in their individual and collaborative efforts.

### **Project Indicators:**

1. Project participant surveys (pre and post) show an increased understanding of a shared definition of environmental education and its value in promoting environmental literacy among Arizona's citizens.
2. By the end of the year, collaborations between stakeholders will be initiated.
3. By the end of the project year, the public will be able to access a best practices site and report on the State of EE in Arizona.

The project indicators include the following deliverables: 1.) a report (print and CD) on the State of Environmental Education in Arizona with recommendations to funding agencies, legislators, educators, and the public; 2.) a press conference; 3.) a web feature on the AAEE website for continued communication with summit leaders, and the creation of a best practices and programs site to benefit stakeholders.

### **Project collaborations:**

The Environmental Education Exchange (The Exchange) will manage the operational tasks and outputs of the project. Their long history of serving environmental education organizations in the state and region was recognized recently with an EPA Region XI Achievement Award. The Exchange will be responsible for developing the deliverables, and making the published account (via report, CD, and website) available to the public by the conclusion of this project.

### **How the project will be staffed:**

The current AAEE Board President, or the Board designee, will serve as Project Director.

A Project Coordinator will be recruited by AAEE to liaison with the staff at the EE Exchange and provide oversight of the project. The Coordinator will report to the AAEE Board who will provide guidance as the project progresses. The Coordinator will work with the EE Exchange to meet deadlines and standards.

The AAEE Board will provide guidance and direction to the Coordinator for the duration of this project. A contracted specialist will conduct formative and summative evaluation to measure the goal that creating a shared vision of environmental education and broadening the diversity of stakeholders involved in creating that vision will maximize outcomes for environmental education across the state.

### **How the project enhances the mission of AAEE:**

Quality of life and quality of environment can go hand-in-hand with a broad consortium of stakeholders, who represent many perspectives and interests and who participate in securing a healthy environment while also maintaining a vigorous economy.

This proposal builds on the momentum established by AAEE, which in the last five years has revitalized its Board, developed a new Strategic Plan, and, with funding from the EPA, established an on-line resource database of over 300 environmental organizations in Arizona and the region

This project comes at the perfect time in AAEE's organizational life cycle, as we implement our internal efforts to become the *publicly* recognized state leader of

environmental education, and initiate external efforts to include an array of stakeholders who have not previously been present in helping us accomplish a shared vision of environmental literacy among Arizonans.

Ultimately, our goal is to support citizens of all ages in becoming environmentally literate – to be able to demonstrate knowledge and skill to work individually and collectively to achieve a dynamic balance between quality of life and quality of the environment.

Agencies that fund environmental education will be able to more clearly target dollars to achieve the desired outcomes by consulting the best practices and programs site maintained by AAEE. As demonstrated in other successful state models, this proposal will at long last bring all the key players to the table to promote environmental literacy by engaging our citizen's more effectively in shaping the future of Arizona's natural and human landscapes.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this proposal to the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust.

Very truly yours,

Nichole Trushell  
Board President  
Arizona Association for Environmental Education