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HABITAT  
COUNCIL<sup>SM</sup>**

EDUCATION & AWARENESS



# Formal Learning Project Guidance

Stakeholder Informed



# Introduction

Formal learning projects are designed for primary, secondary and college students who are subject to state, provincial or national learning standards.

Any formal learning topic, including language arts, visual arts and history can be taught in an outdoor environment. For Conservation Certification, formal learning programs using nature and conservation as frameworks for science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM) and environmental education are preferred.

Incorporating STEM education into your project provides an opportunity to build proficiency in an important field for future workforce development and show what STEM careers look like in the real world. Also, integrating environmental education into your project allows you to use place and experience to instill important concepts related to living in the world today while helping learners to easily internalize and recall knowledge by presenting it in new and novel ways.

# Building Your Program

Projects are divided into four categories: **Habitat**, **Species Management**, **Education and Awareness** and **Other Options**. You can build a program with more than one of each category but you must associate your program with at least one habitat. This Formal Learning Project Guidance is in the **Education and Awareness** category. You will be able to associate your formal learning project with any **Habitat** or **Species Management** projects.



**Habitat** – Projects that focus on conservation actions to protect, restore and manage different habitats.



**Species Management** – Projects addressing the conservation needs of targeted wildlife species or groups of species.



**Education and Awareness** – Projects to improve awareness, understanding and skills relating to conservation and the environment.



**Other Options** – Specialized projects that add value to your conservation efforts.

Browse the Project Guidance library at [wildlifehc.org/pg](https://wildlifehc.org/pg).

# What Do Formal Learning Projects Look Like?

As with all education-focused projects in the context of Conservation Certification, formal learning projects are firmly rooted in the outdoor environment, using a corporate habitat as the vehicle for teaching. Using the habitat enables students to learn a variety of concepts, skills and attitudes essential to primary, secondary and college level classes, by strengthening process skills and reinforcing themes outlined in state and national standards. Formal learning projects should therefore feature a way for students to connect with the natural world to allow for hands-on study, close observation and collaborative thinking.

Additional features that can be incorporated into a formal learning project to further increase its value to learners and educators include:

- Science based programs that correlate to concepts outlined in state, provincial or national learning standards
- Equipment such as gardening tools, hand lenses, field guides or water testing kits
- Signs along trails or throughout habitat
- Gathering spaces for discussions
- Access to shelter or a plan for alternative activity in case of inclement weather
- Access to basic sanitary facilities and potable water

# Considerations for Corporate Lands

Projects implemented on corporate-owned lands have different circumstances and challenges to those on public lands, protected lands or wild lands.

## **Which types of corporate lands are best suited for formal education projects?**

Formal learning projects can be conducted on corporate habitats of all sizes and scopes, and are beneficial to both the corporate host site and the surrounding community for three primary reasons:

- Formal learning projects allow companies to build meaningful relationships with the local community, as they involve collaborating with schools to provide them with resources and expertise.
- Formal learning projects allow companies to have a role building an educated, scientifically literate public.
- Incorporating STEM education into formal learning ensures that more students are equipped with the skills and interest to fill jobs, which rely more and more on STEM knowledge.

In addition, formal learning projects can have environmental justice and socio-economic benefits. In underserved communities, formal learning projects using corporate habitats may be the only extra resources local schools can depend on.

## Addressing challenges

The corporate context presents certain challenges for implementing formal learning projects. Understanding these concerns and potential ways to overcome them can help your project succeed in the long term.

Concern	Response
<p>Some teams may encounter resistance to providing students or teachers access to corporate landscapes, funding for transportation, etc.</p>	<p><i>Demonstrate the project's relevance and the value of the relationship by communicating goals, curriculum, and staff training protocols. Waivers and agreements can also help counter this resistance.</i></p> <p><i>Finding teachers and school administrators who are passionate about conservation and STEM education may improve participation.</i></p>
<p>In some cases, teachers may be reluctant to teach in outdoor settings, or may not be trained in science, math or environmental studies.</p>	<p><i>WHC staff can work with teams to arrange teacher training in recognized, exemplary curricula such as Project WILD, Project WET or Project Learning Tree, with pre-developed lessons and assessments.</i></p>

Concern	Response
<p>Employees who can act as guides to the habitat may be reluctant to lead a class of students in a lesson because they are not trained as teachers.</p>	<p><i>On-site protocols can establish that teachers accompany their students and remain in charge of their classes at all times.</i></p> <p><i>Employees can also attend training in recognized, exemplary curricula to boost their confidence in leading conservation education lessons.</i></p>
<p>Students may have negative attitudes about, or disinterest in, STEM disciplines.</p>	<p><i>Provide students with positive STEM role models.</i></p>

# Getting Started with Formal Learning Projects

**For a project to qualify toward Conservation Certification, you must be able to answer “yes” to five questions.**

1. Is the project locally appropriate?
2. Does it have a stated conservation or education objective?
3. Does it provide value or benefit to the natural community?
4. Have outcomes been measured and is there supporting documentation?
5. Does it exceed any pertinent regulatory requirements?

## **Conservation and education objectives**

It is a requirement of Conservation Certification that formal learning projects be designed to meet one or more conservation objectives. Objectives can guide the direction of the project, help motivate others to participate and provide a basis for evaluation.

The following are suggested objectives for formal learning projects. Your team may choose one or more of these objectives, or develop your own relevant objectives.

- Using the corporate habitat as the integrating context for formal conservation education for:
  - Primary, secondary and college students, in topics linked to classroom subjects; state, provincial or national standards; or other learning outcomes
  - College students conducting research or study
- Using the corporate habitat as the integrating context for STEM education for:
  - Primary and secondary students to seek further education in STEM
  - College students to encourage STEM careers

**The following strategies are recommended to strengthen the conservation impact of your project:**

- Align with the educational priorities of a local, state/provincial or national conservation plan
- Use a proven, age-appropriate conservation education curriculum
- Address an identified need in the community
- Is developed with input by employees and volunteers who know the habitat; educators who know students' needs; and local conservation experts who may have additional relevant knowledge to add
- Provide the community with resources such as scientific equipment, teacher training, or access to expertise on a specific subject matter
- Build students understanding of key concepts, skills and attitudes necessary to achieve life-long learning goals
- Provide opportunities for students to see STEM disciplines applied in the real world
- Evaluate the formal learning process to help improve the teaching in the project
- Evaluate the impact upon students' attitudes, understanding and conservation actions taken outside of the project
- Build on multiple practices and cross-cutting concepts outlined in state, provincial or national learning standards. Instill a greater depth of knowledge and skills for students through multiple linked lessons over time
- Address a socio-economic need by providing underserved communities with access to greenspace, equipment, or expertise
- Provide students with the opportunity to conduct scientific research projects, potentially with results that inform a conservation project
- Integrate several subjects to encourage problem solving
- Enable students to see themselves in STEM careers
- Produce educational materials in a common language for the community, other than English or the official state language
- Be implemented as part of multi-site formal learning initiative that creates connectivity between students in a landscape-scale context, for example within a migratory flyway or watershed

## Partnerships

There are typically three types of participants in a formal learning project: the students and teachers, the host company, and outside experts from local conservation or education organizations.

Formal learning projects are designed for primary, secondary and college students who are subject to state, provincial or national learning standards. The activities and learning goals should be tailored to the needs and abilities of the students.

Outside experts can also be valuable partners to provide technical advice, training for employees and teachers in habitat-based curricula, and hands-on assistance with delivering educational activities. Outside partners may also be able to assist the team with funding for the project, and identify learning links to other conservation projects and priorities in the region.

## Resources

Your project may benefit from online or printed resources available for your region to support the design, delivery, maintenance, and monitoring of formal learning projects.

A search for “education” in the Conservation Registry returns over 300 projects implemented through WHC’s certification program. This is a great place to find inspiration for your project and see what others are doing in and around your location.

The following terms, in any combination, may be useful when searching online for items related to this theme:

The following terms, in any combination, may be useful when searching online for items related to this theme:

<b>STEM</b>	<b>action learning</b>	<b>programs</b>
<b>formal education</b>	<b>place-based learning</b>	<b>urban environmental education</b>
<b>environmental education</b>	<b>conservation education</b>	<b>field guides</b>
<b>place-based education</b>	<b>experiential education</b>	<b>wildlife lessons</b>
<b>science curricula</b>	<b>earth sciences</b>	<b>plant lessons</b>
<b>environmental curricula</b>	<b>education standards</b>	<b>outdoor classrooms</b>
<b>outdoor education</b>	<b>water quality</b>	<b>hands-on lessons</b>

# Understanding the Application Process

## **Documentation**

When applying for Conservation Certification, you will provide documentation of the planning, implementation, maintenance, and monitoring of your formal learning project. The following are required forms of documentation for formal learning projects; however, you may submit additional supporting materials.

**Project management plan** (curriculum/project design), should describe the following:

- How the project aligns with the appropriate learning standards or with clear learning goals from the local school curriculum
- How the project was developed
- How the project was implemented
- What type of teacher/educator training was provided, if applicable
- How the project was evaluated

**Photographs and videos** that depict the progress of the project implementation and management.

**Curriculum samples** from a proven conservation education curriculum. If a team designs its own curricula or engages a college or university student to design a site-specific curriculum, provide information about how the curriculum was developed and any assessments that demonstrate the curriculum's proven impact.

**Evaluations** that measure the impact of the activities. Materials may include pre- and post-testing results, post-project interviews, employee testimonials or letters from students and teachers regarding behavioral changes or conservation actions engaged in as a result of the project, annual reviews of the team or project, and a summary of the project's progress in achieving desired outcomes over time.

**Examples of technical advice** utilized in researching the project, such as consultants, guidebooks, websites, journal articles, etc.

## Application questions

As you complete the application online, you will be asked the following questions about your pollinator project. These questions will help us understand and evaluate your project.

	Question	Why this question is important
<b>Overview</b>	How does the education project relate to the chosen habitat or species project?	<i>Education projects must be related to an outdoor habitat or species project to be considered for WHC Conservation Certification.</i>
	What is the academic level of the target audience for this formal learning project?	<i>These questions provide us with a description of the program and the audience served to help us review the application.</i>
	How many students are reached through this formal learning project?	
	How many hours are learners engaged in this project annually?	
	How frequently are learners engaged in this project?	
	Briefly describe activities taking place as part of this education project.	
	Provide photos showing the education project.	

	Question	Why this question is important
<b>Objective</b>	What are the goals of this project?	<i>Strong projects have clear and measurable goals linked to pre-existing learning standards.</i>
	Do the goals correlate to established academic standards?	
	List the academic standards that the project goals relate to.	
	Does the project provide an identified community value?	
	Describe the community value and how it was identified.	
	Upload any documentation that the project supports community value.	
<b>Planning</b>	Is there a plan guiding the activities?	<i>We would like to know how long the project has been underway and the steps taken to implement it.</i>
	Provide a timeline of the project plan including planning, implementation and evaluation.	
	Upload the plan.	
	When did the first activity for your target audience take place?	
<b>Materials</b>	Does the project use materials that are both age- and topic-appropriate?	<i>This helps us assess the design of the project.</i>
	Upload samples of the materials used.	
	Does the project incorporate equipment to facilitate engagement of the learning audience?	
	Describe how these tools or equipment are used.	

	Question	Why this question is important
<b>Conservation Impact</b>	Does the project support a conservation project?	<i>Hands-on learning and participation in an existing conservation project will benefit both the learner and the project.</i>
	How does this project support a conservation project?	
<b>Evaluation</b>	Do you evaluate the formal learning project?	<i>Evaluations are important not only to document the planning, implementation and successes of the program, but they can also be used to identify areas of improvement.</i>
	Do you evaluate changes in the learners' knowledge and behavior?	
	Describe the evaluation process.	
	Upload documentation of the evaluation.	
	Summarize the results of the evaluation.	
	Do you evaluate the overall learning experience?	
	Describe the evaluation.	
	Summarize the results of the evaluation.	
<b>Employee Participation</b>	Describe how you use the evaluation to improve your project.	<i>Employee participation can strengthen a project and secure its future.</i>
	Do any employees lead or facilitate the project?	
	How many employees lead or facilitate this education project?	
	Describe how employees are involved in this project.	
	How many employee hours were spent on the following activities each year? Implementation and Planning	

	Question	Why this question is important
<b>Other Participants</b>	Do any groups or individuals outside of your company actively contribute to the project on a regular basis?	<i>It is not always possible to recruit outside groups to a project. Conservation and education partners can strengthen a project and provide different audiences, thus broadening its reach.</i>
	Select the types of groups - community members, consultants and contractors, government agencies, NGO partners, schools and universities, youth organizations, other companies.	
	List the names of the groups you work with.	
	Describe their involvement in this project.	
	How many hours were spent by the groups on the following activities each year? Implementation and Planning	
	If you work with a specialist for your education project and have a current letter of support from them, upload it here.	
	List additional sources of technical advice (e.g. website, guidebook, etc.) and describe how they were used.	
<b>Regulatory Requirements</b>	Are any aspects of the project done in relation to regulatory requirements?	<i>Going beyond compliance is a requirement for certification.</i>
	Explain how the project exceeds requirements.	

	Question	Why this question is important
<b>Alignments</b>	Does the project align with any larger scale initiatives? (e.g. STEM, regional/local initiatives, corporate strategy, etc.)	<i>Aligning conservation efforts with large-scale conservation plans and other regional conservation or education initiatives allows for projects to have a stronger and more meaningful impact.</i>
	Is the project part of a corporate level commitment to commitment to education or community?	
	Upload documentation of your corporate commitment to education or community.	
	Does the project align with an existing conservation or education plan or other large scale initiative?	
	List the plans or other large scale initiative the project aligns with and provide website links if available.	
	Briefly describe the alignments.	

## Content development for conservation certification

To inform the development of Conservation Certification, WHC analyzed the projects it was recognizing through its certification program to assess whether they were aligned with contemporary conservation and education priorities.

Following this assessment and using information from it, WHC convened Advisory Committees around conservation and education themes to develop the content that would guide practitioners and applicants in the future. This content is the basis for the Project Guidance and the online application process.

The following provided feedback on the initial draft of the Formal Learning Project Guidance:

**Libby Backman**, Project Learning Tree

**Joshua Falk**, National Environmental Education Foundation

**Pete Israel**, BASF Corporation

**Bill Jones**, Consultant to Smithsonian Science Education Center and to the Carolina Biological Survey Company

**Louisa Koch**, U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

**Vernon Marcum**, Marathon Petroleum Company

**Tracy Mouncy**, Tracy Mouncy and Associates

**Alan Unwin**, Niagara College Canada

**Marguerite (Peggy) Vavalla**, DuPont Center for Collaborative Research and Education, Retired

**Kim Winter**, United States Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

More information can be found about this process in the “Our Impact” section of [wildlifehc.org](http://wildlifehc.org) under “Commitment to Transparency.”



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The WHC Strategy and Planning team can help you build a successful project by identifying needs, making connections with partners and resources, and providing strategies that meet business and conservation goals. Contact us today.

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Every act of conservation matters.

