



## The eeBLUE Community Partnership Tool

Understanding the background of a partnership between an environmental education organization and an out-of-school (OST) partner<sup>1</sup> is crucial for successful collaboration. This outlined tool focuses on three key elements: Background, Goals, and Intended Audiences.

### Background

#### Goals

This resource establishes clear goals by helping partners clarify expectations across the partnership, define roles and responsibilities, and identify available resources. This step is essential for aligning both organizations' expectations and fostering a shared understanding of the partnership's purpose and goals.

#### Initiating a Relationship

A structured approach makes initiating a relationship between an environmental organization and an OST partner easier. This approach allows for effective communication, trust-building, and shared commitment to the partnership.

#### The Base for Partnership

This tool can be used as a guide to help partners establish the groundwork necessary for a strong partnership by encouraging open dialogue and addressing key considerations before program implementation. This proactive approach helps prevent misunderstandings and sets the stage for a collaborative, productive relationship and stronger, relevant program implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> This resource was built through evaluation and feedback from working with 21st CCLCs (e.g. afterschool program, boys and girls club, summer camp, 21st CCLC, etc.), therefore could be applied to 21st CCLCs and like OST partners.

# Intended Audiences

## Environmental Education Organization Staff

This tool is designed to help the staff of the environmental education organization (EEO)-STEM provider better understand the partner's history, goals, and expectations and to actively participate in defining their roles and responsibilities.

## Out-of-School Program Leadership/Staff

This tool is equally relevant for program leaders and staff, fostering mutual understanding and effective partnership. OST partners can also use this tool to begin a relationship with a STEM/EEO provider they would like to partner with for programming.

# Recommended Use

## Timing

This tool should be used before, early in implementation, and during partnership planning to ensure understanding and collaborative success.

## Guidance for Use

This resource facilitates open and honest communication between partners by providing a framework for addressing important questions related to their partnership. Although the suggested questions offer a good starting point, partners are encouraged to ask additional questions and explore specific areas based on their circumstances.

This tool, as outlined, is valuable for organizations that are focused on environmental education, as well as for OST partners that are looking to establish successful STEM partnerships. Following the guidance provided here can help foster open communication, align expectations, and set the stage for a collaborative and impactful partnership. In conclusion, it is an effective tool for establishing mutually beneficial relationships and co-created programs.

# Internal Exploratory Phase: Program Content and Past Experience

During the initial phase of a partnership, it is crucial to explore both partners' program content and past experiences. This phase can be achieved by asking each other questions about their mission and organizational strengths to understand their core goals and identify potential areas of alignment. It is essential to discuss gaps or needs to determine if a potential partnership could offer support in areas where help is required to build capacity. Additionally, it is vital to assess past experiences with environmental education, explore staff comfort and experience levels, and gauge the interests and activity styles of the youth they serve. This phase sets the foundation for tailoring the partnership for maximum impact and relevance for both organizations and the youth we aim to serve. It is recommended to schedule a meeting in person or online to establish a connection and initiate the relationship.

## Guiding Questions

### Overall Questions

- What is the mission/goal of your program/organization?
- What are your organizational strengths?
- In what areas is your organization looking to grow or build capacity?
- What support can we provide to support your organization's mission/goals?
- What do you want from this partnership? How can this partnership enhance your impact?
- Would your staff be interested in STEM professional development?

### Past Experience with Environmental Education (to be asked of Out of School partner)

- Has the site provided any environmental education programming for youth in the past?
- Have the youth participated in environmental education during the formal school day (if known)?
- How would you describe the comfort/experience of the site staff in participating in environmental education programs?

- What were the strengths and challenges you and/or your staff faced during these programs or in the partnership?
- What interest, if any, does site staff have in leading content?
- Does your Out of School program have specific requirements for external program providers? (ex. Clearances, partnership agreements, etc.)
- Do you have an example of a partnership with an outside organization that worked really well? And what made that partnership work so well?
- Do you have an example where a partnership was challenging? What could have been done to make it a better experience for everyone?

### Past Experience with Out-of-School Programming (to be asked of environmental education organization)

- Has the environmental education organization worked in the out-of-school time space before? If so, how?
- How would you describe the comfort/experience of the staff in working with youth ages X-X? Specifically from the area around this program site?
- What were the strengths and challenges you and/or your staff experienced during these programs or in the partnership?
- Do you have an example of a partnership with an outside organization that worked really well? And what made that partnership work so well?

### Participants and Program Content

- What, if anything, do youth already know about current issues taught in environmental education?
- What environmental education topics might be the most relevant for the youth at your site?
- What are youth at your site typically interested in?
- What types or styles of activities do youth at your site like best?

## Community Partnership Form

It will take 30 minutes and cover administrative, logistical, and communication topics. The site-specific input will help the partners establish your input, which will help establish effective communication and streamline processes.

- [The eeBLUE Community Partnership Form](#) (copy and edit Google Form)

- [The eeBLUE Community Partnership Form](#) (copy and edit Word Document)

Once the form is complete, it is recommended to:

1. Review the responses together to allow for clarification, questions, and co-design of the program plan.
2. Establish regular meetings.
3. Revisit the program plan along the way.

## Next Steps

Building long-term relationships is vital to maximizing the impact of a project. Sharing experiences through workshops and peer-learning sessions can help build capacity and deepen relationships. Investing in capacity-building activities empowers community members to take ownership of projects, leading to more sustainable outcomes. Partners can create a supportive innovation and collective action ecosystem by nurturing partnerships and building community capacity.

After completing the previous steps, it is recommended that the leads of each organization establish a recurring meeting. This practice will help foster collaboration and ensure the continuous alignment of goals between the partners. The partners should also co-develop a program plan that reflects their shared agreements, objectives, and needs. The plan will act as a blueprint for the partnership's implementation. It is also advised that the results of these meetings be shared to document initial agreements and ideas, promoting transparency and accountability. In order to stay on track and make adjustments as needed, it is recommended to regularly revisit the program plan and establish open feedback loops for communication. These next steps prioritize open communication, joint planning, and documentation, which will lay a strong foundation for the successful execution of the partnership.

This document is a living document. If you have suggestions to improve it, please email [eeBLUE@naaee.org](mailto:eeBLUE@naaee.org).

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