

California eeGuidance for Equitable Pay and Hiring in Environmental Education





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Introduction

Environmental education, like many other sectors, endeavors to answer the calls to examine its history of institutional racism and discrimination, adopt more inclusive hiring practices and address inequities in compensation and benefits packages to make our field more equitable, welcoming and sustainable.

In 2023 the Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (AEOE) collaborated with the California Environmental Literacy Initiative (CAELI) to conduct a landscape analysis to understand the current state, ongoing needs, and growth areas for the environmental education (EE) field in California. The landscape analysis conducted in California was based on the survey conducted by the Southeastern Environmental Education Alliance. The survey tool was developed by EcoRise and the project was funded with the support of the Pisces Foundation, Clarence E. Heller Foundation, and Ten Strands. The survey questions and outreach strategy were informed by members of the CAELI Community-Based Partner Innovation Hub EE Landscape Analysis working group. Outreach was conducted to more than 700 organizations that were identified as EE providers. Approximately 125 organizations participated in the initial survey effort. Data shared in this report reflect the findings from the survey, which we believe to be fairly representative of the field.

Increased data availability and transparency around pay, especially for entry-level Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) employees, is still needed to provide quantitative support to the experiences of inequitable working conditions heard from educators in the field. Factors that contribute to the inequitable working conditions, particularly in terms of pay and compensation, include: limited funding and allocation of funds for salary; prioritization of 'mission-driven' work over competitive salaries that leads to employee exploitation; program and organizational dependency on grants that are project specific; and the historical undervaluing of education and BIPOC individuals relative to executive roles in the sector. Addressing these issues requires adequate information and data to help support educators when advocating for more equitable compensation. Valuable talent and representation are continuously leaving the education sector to afford the continuously increasing costs of living in the U.S.

Using the landscape analysis findings, we make the case for a reimagining of more equitable hiring and pay practices. This report provides recommendations and highlights some best practices for environmental and outdoor education organizations. Once applied, these standards and resources will help improve employee retention, attract more diverse talent, create a sustainable career path, and establish our field as a viable profession.

Why Is This Important In Environmental Education?

Environmental organizations have historically been and are still majority white, and while many full-time staff are female, leadership and board members are generally male.¹ As a result, access and program design have not supported everyone who wants to work or participate in environmental education.

This is not sustainable.

America is changing: racial minorities are set to become the majority by 2050, people who have grown up in the information age are reaching adulthood, more people are living in urban areas, and poverty is increasing.² The environmental education workforce needs to change accordingly to better support this shifting population.

¹ Green 2.0. (2020). [2020 NGO & Foundation Transparency Report Card](#).

² National Environmental Education Foundation (2015). [Environmental Literacy in the United States: An Agenda for Leadership in the 21st Century](#).

Given the overrepresentation of certain demographics, the field may not seem welcoming to non-white, non-male prospective employees. Additionally, the environmental education provided often lacks multicultural contexts because of a lack of common lived experiences between teachers and students.³ This disconnect may contribute to the lower environmental literacy rates among Black, Hispanic, and lower-income students.⁴

Underrepresentation and Privilege Within Environmental Education

The data from the AEOE landscape analysis shows us that 45% of environmental education staff and 32.9% of senior staff identify as Black, Indigenous, or Persons of Color (BIPOC), which is significantly lower than the California state average of 60% per 2020 US Census Data. Anecdotally, we know that the majority of environmental educators identify as white, native English-speaking, able-bodied women. This results from many contributing factors, including pay disparities and traditional notions of who teaches environmental and outdoor education.

Throughout history and into the present, there have been a number of institutional barriers for minoritized people that prevent them from entering and sustainably remaining in these systemically privileged organizations. These barriers show up in many ways, both visible and invisible. In present times, this might look like higher education requirements tied to hiring or promotion (white students have higher graduation rates than Black, Hispanic, and American Indian students⁵), low pay for recent college graduates (Black, Hispanic, and American Indian college graduates generally have higher levels of student loan debt⁶), or being the only person of color on a staff (in a 2019 study, BIPOC environmental educators reported feeling isolated, marginalized, and excluded when working in a predominantly white space⁷), just to name a few.

A quick search on almost any environmental education job board makes clear that full-time environmental education positions are vastly outnumbered by seasonal summer internships and part-time positions, often without any possibility of growth or promotion. Anecdotally, we know that many starting environmental educators must take additional jobs to earn liveable wages while working these seasonal or part-time positions in order to gain the experience needed for the more competitive full-time roles. This perpetuates the cycle of staff turnover, inadequate entry-level pay, and a lack of viable advancement opportunities within the environmental educator role. For emerging students, both at the collegiate and high school levels, the lack of sustainable opportunities can lead to them questioning if they see a future in the field of environmental education beyond summer internships and part-time positions.

It is important for leaders to do the work to identify, understand, and provide support for some of the racial, linguistic, dis/abled, and genderized perspectives and experiences of their staff and participants. Without this kind of cultural humility, microaggressions are likely to occur. These incidences—often everyday, subtle interactions and behaviors that may seem benign to the person committing them—do emotional, psychological and physical harm to people on the receiving end. When microaggressions come from leadership or leadership allows microaggressions between staff or program participants to go unaddressed, it presents another layer of challenge for marginalized individuals and groups to feel safe and valued as a part of a staff team.

³ Blanchet-Cohen, N., & Reilly, R. C. (2013). Teachers' perspectives on environmental education in multicultural contexts: Towards culturally-responsive environmental education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 36, 12–22.

⁴ Stevenson, K. T., Peterson, M. N., Bondell, H. D., Mertig, A. G., & Moore, S. E. (2013). [Environmental, Institutional, and Demographic Predictors of Environmental Literacy among Middle School Children](#). *PLOS ONE*, 8(3), e59519.

Note: We acknowledge different people use different language to self-describe their identities. Throughout this paper, we use descriptors aligned with the terminology used in the U.S. Census.

⁵ National Center for Education Statistics (2019). [Indicator 23: Postsecondary Graduation Rates](#).

⁶ Williams, W. (2022). [Student Loan Debt by Race](#). Investopedia.

⁷ Lawrence Hall of Science and Youth Outside (2019). [Examining Equitable and Inclusive Work Environments in Environmental Education: Perspectives from the Field and Implications for Organizations](#).

About This Document

There are several key areas that employers must change to make environmental education careers more accessible to a broader population, including pay and benefits, position design, recruitment, processes and practices. This document provides researched explanations of why these areas matter and outlines specific minimum standards for employers to enact immediately. We also identify the target standards that we all must work toward to transform employment in our field. Citations and resources are embedded throughout this document and collated at the end for further learning.

Acknowledgment of Limitations

We acknowledge there are limited data and gaps in published information related to environmental education employment. When possible, we have provided references to existing resources. At times, we utilize unpublished and anecdotal information that is commonly known in our field but not publicly documented. We also recognize that the best practices for equitable hiring and employment are ever-evolving. This report will need to be updated as our collective understanding continues to grow.

The information referenced is as carefully researched as possible. Be sure to check with your human resources professional for legal guidance and more detailed support in implementing these standards.

Pay and Benefits

“Offering a competitive benefits package, in addition to competitive pay, reduces the likelihood an employee will find the grass greener elsewhere.”⁸
-- Society for Human Resource Management

Pay and benefits are key factors in a person’s decision to take a job and stay in it. Attracting, retaining, and replacing effective employees are significant draws on organizational resources. Offering fairer and equitable compensation packages encourages talented educators to join the field—and stay and grow. It also reduces the administrative and capital burden on the organization.

- To hire a new employee: \$4,000⁹
- To replace an hourly employee: \$1,500¹⁰
- To replace a salaried employee: ½ to 2x annual salary¹¹

These estimated replacement estimates include the costs of recruiting and hiring, onboarding and training, time to peak productivity, and general culture impacts. Stronger compensation options also yield societal benefits. According to the landmark report, *Race and the Work of the Future*: “Workforce equity and shared prosperity are essential to a strong, resilient economy—and as the population becomes more diverse, this economic imperative will only escalate.”¹²

This is particularly true in environmental education. Results of a 2021 study found that 59% of informal science educators surveyed were considering changing their job or academic focus because of institutional policies that “perpetuate overwork and underpay and that have contributed to the marginalization of educators who have been historically excluded from working in the field”.¹³

⁸ Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). [Managing for Employee Retention](#).

⁹ Glassdoor.com (2019). [How to Calculate Cost Per Hire](#).

¹⁰ Agovino, T. (2019). [To Have and to Hold](#). SHRM.

¹¹ McFelly, S. and Wiggert, B. (2019). [This Fixable Problem Costs U.S. Businesses \\$1 Trillion](#). Gallup.

¹² Langston, A., Scoggins, J. and Walsh, M. (2020). [Race and the Work of the Future](#).

¹³ Rende, K., Fromson, K., Jones, M.G. & Ennes, M. (2021). The Privilege of Low Pay: Informal Educators’ Perspectives on Workforce Equity and Diversity. *Journal of Museum Education*, 46:4, 430-440, DOI: 10.1080/10598650.2021.1975484

Wage & Salary in Environmental Education

“Alarminglly, 70% of respondents said they would be unable to sustain their career in informal education without additional [financial] support.”

– The Privilege of Low Pay: Informal Educators’ Perspectives on Workforce Equity and Diversity

One of the central barriers to becoming an environmental educator has historically been the pay. For instance, in the book *The National Parks: America’s Best Idea*, Duncan and Burns describe some of the first staff of the National Park Service.¹⁴ They detail how many of the National Park Service’s first employees were not only financially privileged to be able to accept unpaid or underpaid positions, but many of them also were so affluent that they donated sizable amounts of their own fortunes to fund park improvements. In recent years, many environmental education positions have continued to be unpaid or underpaid, often compensating staff with food and housing in lieu of salary for on-site positions. Internships too often go unpaid. Unfortunately, this sets a precedent that only those who can afford to forgo a livable wage have the privilege of accepting such a role.

The 2020 SEEA Landscape Analysis found that the average entry-level salary for environmental educators is 15-25% lower than for forestry, tourism, and schools. And pay across the board is lower in occupations where women dominate. There’s also a societal bias that devalues educators over other similarly credentialed colleagues. One study found that art museum curators earned 20% more than educators of a similar rank.¹⁵ The wage gap makes positions outside of environmental education more appealing to new and early-career environmental educators. Higher pay is associated with higher productivity because employees experience stronger mental and physical health.¹⁶ Paying environmental educators higher than the minimum wage is essential for ensuring the financial well-being of employees in this field, attracting and retaining talent, and maintaining a high quality of education. Thus making the environmental education field an attractive and sustainable career choice for educators.

Researchers behind The Privilege of Low Pay study asked informal educators at science institutions (most of whom identified as entry to mid-level employees with some supervisory duties) about their pay. The results show that fewer than one-quarter (22%) of educators reported being moderately, very, or extremely satisfied with their compensation. And less than half (43%) said their jobs pay them enough to support themselves and their families.¹⁷ Noted one participant in the Privilege of Low Pay study: “The informal science field is undervalued. Positions require a college degree, but they are not willing to pay compensation for that college degree. I have a master’s degree and I am still not making 40K (after 6 years).”

Confronting these issues requires employers to take a fresh look at wage and salary levels to ensure they are equitable, sustainable, and reflect the requirements of the positions offered.

¹⁴ Duncan, D., & Burns, K. (2010). *The National Parks: America’s Best Idea: An Illustrated History*.

¹⁵ Callihan, E. & Feldman, K. (2018) Presence and Power: Beyond Feminism in Museums. *Journal of Museum Education*, 43:3, 179-192, DOI: 10.1080/10598650.2018.1486138

¹⁶ The U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce. [Fact Sheet: Raising the Minimum Wage](#).

¹⁷ Rende, K., Fromson, K., Jones, M.G. & Ennes, M. (2021) The Privilege of Low Pay: Informal Educators’ Perspectives on Workforce Equity and Diversity. *Journal of Museum Education*, 46:4, 430-440, DOI: 10.1080/10598650.2021.1975484

Spotlight on Internships

Environmental education is powered by internships, many of which are unpaid. This approach is neither equitable nor sustainable, and we must move the field toward paid internships. After all, interns are excellent candidates for paid positions, so we should consider internships as professional development for future employees, not “free labor.” In addition to pay, you can cover the cost of housing, meals, transportation, and professional development during the internship.

Pay Disparities

Many organizations in our sector don't have the insights and tools to understand and address pay equity and the factors that contribute to it. This lack of data is a blind spot that masks and potentially perpetuates disparities. However, benchmarking pay against like organizations in a sector that is known for underpaying people is an unspoken agreement that the practice is acceptable.¹⁸ This is a thorny problem that warrants deeper consideration. Providing the full context necessary to confront this issue is beyond the scope of this report. However, it is a first step at building a foundation for further exploration.

Let's take a closer look at pay disparities through specific lenses. Since many people identify with more than one of these categories, the harmful effects of pay disparities are amplified.

Gender pay inequity is a critical issue in our field, which employs mostly female-identifying people. This pay gap is a holdover from the dominant culture that casts positions in education as “women's work” and – consequently – systematically underpaid. The American Association of University Women¹⁹ analyzed Census data from 2021 to illustrate the disparities between the wages of non-Hispanic (i.e., white men) and women. The Census data used in this analysis had no category for Indigenous women.

| | Percent of white men's wages |
|----------------|------------------------------|
| White women | 75% |
| Black women | 64% |
| Hispanic women | 57% |

These wage gaps make it hard for women to cover expenses and hurt near-term financial stability and economic opportunity. And since they earn less over time, their Social Security and other retirement benefits are lower. Thus, a woman's retirement income is 70% of a non-Hispanic man's. This disparity is likely far higher for women of color, especially Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic employees.

Racial income inequity in employment and wages disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic employees. For example, white employees with a high school diploma and no college out-earn Black employees with an associate's degree, \$19/hour versus \$18/hour. These disparities make wealth accumulation difficult and amplify challenges like student loan debt, food and housing insecurity, and access to healthcare. Income equity would boost pay for people of color by an average of more than \$18,000 a year. The increases would be significant.²⁰

¹⁸ American Alliance of Museums (2022). [Museums and the Living Wage](#).

¹⁹ American Association of University Women (2021). *The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap: 2021 Update*.

²⁰ Langston, A., Scoggins, J. and Walsh, M. (2020). [Race and the Work of the Future](#).

| | Percent of wage increase |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Black employees | 62% |
| Hispanic employees | 67% |
| Indigenous employees | 80% |

Ability wage inequity has similar immediate and future financial impacts. According to the U.S. Census, “In nearly every occupation, workers with a disability are less likely to work full-time, year-round. So, including all workers regardless of work schedules or occupation increases the overall earnings gap, where workers with a disability earn 66 cents for every dollar those with no disability earn.”²¹

LGBTQ+ earning inequity produces a 10 percent drop in earnings versus cisgender, straight employees, according to an analysis by the Human Rights Campaign. Transgender women and men and non-binary individuals earn even less. This situation exacerbates food and housing insecurity, which LGBTQ+ adults already experience more than heterosexual people who identify as the sex they are born.²²

A separate but related issue is the Environmental Education industry requirements for specific experiences/degrees and duties that aren’t compensated adequately compared to positions requiring comparable experience and involving similar levels of responsibility/duties performed. The average starting salary for environmental education reported in the original SEEA landscape analysis survey was \$29,515 for a full-time position compared to \$34,900 for education, \$39,100 for forestry, and \$37,800 for hospitality and tourism.²³ Data comparing a variety of sectors in California does not yet exist but is crucial to understand existing systemic inequities. Awareness and advocacy of inequitable pay and working conditions already exists as we have heard stories of educators’ unsuccessful advocacy for higher compensation. Addressing these inequities requires a multifaceted approach involving buy-in and commitment from decision-making roles in the field such as executive directors, donors and other funders, and policymakers. Action is necessary from those who source the money and allocate it within an organization and its programs. Solutions or support for more equitable pay from these roles can look like diversification of funding sources to secure longer-term compensation; grant writing and fundraising training to be able to secure more funding; collaboration with other fields within the nonprofit or environmental sectors whose employees are being compensated more fairly to share resources and actionable plans; and inclusion and prioritization of BIPOC individuals and experiences at all levels of the decision making process. Existing data and anecdotes highlight the obvious discrepancies among demographics yet these disparities continue to be seen in how employees are paid.

Living Wage

Many environmental educators do not earn a living wage. This is particularly true for hourly and seasonal employees, who may earn federal minimum wage. The Economic Policy Institute announced that the current rate of \$7.25 per hour is worth the least since 1956, when the required wage was 75 cents/hour or \$7.19 in June 2022 dollars.²⁴ The AEOE survey found that 96% of programs offer a starting hourly rate at or above California’s Minimum Wage of \$16.00 per hour (note that in some cities and counties such as San Francisco, where the cost of living is higher than surrounding counties, the minimum wage is \$18.07 per hour). Even in locations where the minimum wage is higher than the federal minimum wage due to adjustments reflecting the increased cost of living, educators rarely earn enough to make a living wage.

²¹ Day, J.C. & Taylor, D. (2019). [Do People With Disabilities Earn Equal Pay?](#) United States Census Bureau.

²² Human Rights Campaign. [The Wage Gap Among LGBTQ Workers in the United States.](#)

²³ Southeastern Environmental Education Alliance (2022). [SEEA Landscape Analysis Stakeholder Report.](#)

²⁴ Cooper, D., Martinez Hickey, S., & Zipperer, B. (2022). [The Value of the Federal Minimum Wage is at its Lowest Point in 66 Years.](#) The Economic Policy Institute.

CAUTION: Studies in the retail sector show that wage hikes for hourly workers can produce lower total compensation because businesses sometimes reduce the number of hours each person works. To avoid that consequence, wage increases should be coupled with policies that support consistent schedules without reducing hours/employees.²⁵

The Fight for 15 and other living wage initiatives are advocating for higher minimums. At present, many people working in fast food or retail earn more than many environmental education positions, making recruitment and retention even harder, and forcing many environmental education professionals to work extra jobs. Many states and municipalities have adopted wage requirements to decrease poverty and increase financial stability.

We recommend that environmental education employers pay at least a living wage and set a goal for reaching a thriving wage shortly.

[Calculate the living wage for your area](#)

[Calculate the living wage for your household](#)

The concept of a thriving wage is based on the fact that no one can thrive working multiple jobs to make ends meet. The thriving wage is the amount attainable and earnable in *one job's normal working hours* to cover:

- Daily food, clothing, shelter, and transportation expenses
- Recreation and leisure activities
- Contribute to a retirement account and qualify for an employer match
- Fund an emergency account of at least \$1000
- Save for large purchases like a home

This means that the pay rate for each position should factor in employees' *realistic* opportunity to get another job. For example, your 30-hour-a-week job with a varying schedule, including nights and weekends, makes it hard for employees to work a second job. This means you may need to pay more to get and keep the talent you need. Conversely, a 1-5 pm M-F job enables employees to take a second job if necessary, so you could pay the local living wage.

Spotlight on Room & Board

If you provide room and board to your employees, you still need to pay a living wage. Examples of "room and board" in environmental education include providing housing and meals offered at no cost to employees or deducting costs for on-site food and/or lodging from employee paychecks. Based on good financial practices, housing expenses should be less than 30% of an individual's pre-tax income, and the combined total of housing and food costs should be less than 50% of pre-tax income.²⁶ Thus if you provide lodging support as part of your compensation package, your employees' final take-home pay rate should be at least 70% of the local living wage. If you provide both housing and food, your pay rate should be at least 50% of the local living wage. Be sure to factor in dietary requirements to your pay calculations. For instance, if one of your team is vegan or has a food allergy and your on-site food service has limited options, these employees must still buy their own food. Whenever possible, aim higher than these minimums. (For more on housing assistance, see below.)

²⁵ Yu, Q., Mankad, S., & Shunko, M. (2021). [Research: When a Higher Minimum Wage Leads to Lower Compensation](#). Harvard Business Review.

²⁶ Smith, K.A. (2022). [Budget Calculator \(50/30/20\)](#). Forbes.

Pay Transparency

In recent years, employees and labor leaders have advocated for transparency to increase accountability and drive pay equity. Pay transparency policies require organizations to volunteer pay-related information to current and prospective employees, including how pay is determined and the actual pay levels or ranges for each position. This systemic change requires organizational leadership to get comfortable with giving up the old view that wage and salary data should not be discussed or published.

CAUTION: Policies prohibiting employees from discussing wages and salary are prohibited by federal law for most organizations. Most organizations must comply with this law, but there are exceptions. Learn more here: [National Labor Relations Board | Jurisdictional Standards](#).

Survey data from PayScale.com show that employees' understanding of the "how and why" of pay has five times more influence on satisfaction versus their actual pay rate. "When employees have all the information, they feel valued and respected by their organization," the report's authors noted.²⁷ This boosts loyalty, reduces current employee turnover, and instills trust in prospects.

CAUTION: Many stipend rates are calculated for 30 to 40 hours per week. In truth, however, many people earning stipends work far more than that or are required to be on-call or on-site during "off" hours. *Paying a flat stipend to someone working 50 hours per week through the summer is not equitable.*

Benefits & Perks

Environmental education employers can offer additional coverage to better support their staff beyond the benefits that organizations are required to offer via federal and state law (Social Security, Medicare, unemployment, workers' compensation, and Family & Medical Leave Act requirements).

Beyond what is legally required, eligibility for voluntary benefits is at your discretion as an employer. Traditionally, benefits have been offered only to full-time employees who have worked for the organization for a certain amount of time. Recently, however, the benefits game has changed, prompting employers to offer more benefits to more types of employees, including seasonal and part-time workers. For some organizations, the evolution reflects changing views and values; for others, the change is viewed as a necessary step to remaining competitive for talent.

CAUTION: State and local laws regarding part-time benefits vary widely. Consult an HR expert or labor lawyer in your area to know the specific requirements that apply to you.

There's another factor pressuring employers to change their perspective on benefits: five generations in the workplace.²⁸

- Traditionalists—born 1925 to 1945
- Baby Boomers—born 1946 to 1964

²⁷ PayScale.com. [How Your Pay Raise Practices Affect Employee Turnover](#).

²⁸ Purdue University. [Generational Differences in the Workplace \[Infographic\]](#).

- Generation X—born 1965 to 1980
- Millennials—born 1981 to 2000
- Generation Z—born 2001 to 2020

With employees in dramatically different life stages, organizations that want to recruit and retain employees need to be more open-minded and flexible when designing their benefits program, so it meets the workforce's diverse needs.²⁹

Survey data from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)³⁰, Robert Half³¹, and others reveal the most in-demand benefits:

- Healthcare Coverage
- Paid Leave
- Housing Assistance
- Mileage Reimbursement
- Education Assistance
- Retirement

Healthcare Coverage

Health insurance is by far the most-valued benefit. According to SHRM research, 46% of current employees said health insurance was *an influencing* or *the deciding* factor in taking the job, and 56% said satisfaction with health benefits was a key reason for staying with their current employers.³² Some environmental education employers reported that offering healthcare to seasonal employees would significantly influence their staff's willingness to stay for multiple seasons.

But simply offering it isn't enough. More employees are looking for flexibility and additional types of coverage, such as telehealth, chronic disease management, dental and vision coverage, prescription drug, mental/behavioral health coverage, and screenings/preventive care. If your organization can't afford to fully cover the cost of health coverage, consider monthly healthcare stipends to help cover the costs of premiums for independent policies, high-deductible health plans, or flexible spending accounts. You can also work with a healthcare navigator to assist employees in getting benefits via [healthcare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov).

CAUTION: ACA regulations require employers with 50 or more full-time or full-time equivalent workers to assess seasonal employees for eligibility for employer-sponsored health insurance. If these temporary employees are hired full-time (30 hours a week or 130 hours a month), they must be offered health coverage by the first of the fourth month of their employment. Organizations employing fewer than 50 full-time workers are not required. This BenefitsPro article has more details: [ACA Responsibilities for Companies Employing Seasonal Workers](#).

Paid Leave

Almost all employers offer paid vacation and sick leave. More are beginning to offer paid time off for family responsibilities and personal time/mental health days. Some even pay employees for volunteering in the community. Environmental education employers should plan programming and operations schedules intentionally so employees can take advantage of their paid leave when they need it, not only when it works for their employer.

²⁹ Sammer, J. (2020). [Provide Security with Personalized Employee Benefits](#). SHRM.

³⁰ SHRM (2022). [SHRM Releases 2022 Employee Benefits Survey](#).

³¹ Robert Half (2022). [12 Employee Benefits and Perks for Your Hiring and Retention Plan](#).

³² Miller, S. (2018). [Employees Are More Likely to Stay If They Like Their Health Plan](#). SHRM.

Spotlight on Emotional Wellbeing

Several academic studies have established that, when left unchecked, employee mental health issues raise absenteeism and turnover, lower productivity, and increase health benefit costs. Left untreated, depression costs employers an estimated \$44 billion each year in lost productivity.³³

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death for all Americans. Rates are highest among non-Hispanic American Indian and Alaska Native people (23.9 per 100,000) and non-Hispanic white people (16.9 per 100,000); rates among non-Hispanic Black people are rising. Research indicates that LGBTQ+ people have higher rates of suicide attempts compared to straight and cisgender people.³⁴ Because of this high risk across the board, medical professionals recommend universal suicide screenings. Organizations should also evaluate how workplace culture, policies, and practices may impact employees' emotional health and well-being.

Attention to emotional well-being is particularly important for employees in under-represented groups. Researchers at Washington University in St. Louis verified that Black Americans report poor mental health during periods with two or more incidents of anti-Black violence, particularly when national interest was higher.³⁵ LGBTQ+ people experience more bullying, harassment, and violence than their straight colleagues. For these reasons, experts recommend additional support for these employees, including but not limited to Employee Assistance Programs, screenings, Employee Resource Groups, and paid leave for mental and emotional wellness.

Housing Assistance

Some employers now offer housing assistance. This may include on-premises no- or low-cost on-site accommodations (popular for seasonal employees, in particular) or financial assistance to lower the cost of owning or renting, such as down payment grants or rent subsidies.

Mileage Reimbursement

Fluctuations in gas prices can take a toll on employees who must use their vehicles for work-related travel. If you don't presently allow employees to expense the cost of gas – at a minimum – it's time to consider doing so. In addition to [mileage reimbursement](#), you might also offer a stipend to lower or cover the cost of regular maintenance like oil changes and tire rotations. You might also think about making transit assistance a benefit via options like [TransitChek](#).

Education Assistance

Continuing education, re/credentialing, and other professional development improve your employees' abilities to deliver services and programs and keep your organization running smoothly. These opportunities also keep employees engaged, which can positively influence retention. More than simply encouraging educational attainment, you can help employees pay for these pursuits. This could include tuition support for current enrollments, paid registrations for classes and conferences (including travel costs), paid staff time during professional development, and even assistance with student loan payments.

Retirement

Retirement benefits are crucial for employees of all ages. The IRS estimates that retirement can last for 30 years or more. With an average monthly Social Security benefit of \$1,200, living comfortably after retirement

³³ American Psychiatric Association. [Depression: A Costly Condition for Business](#). Center for Workplace Mental Health.

³⁴ CDC (2022). [Disparities in Suicide](#).

³⁵ Savat, S. (2021). [How racial violence affects Black Americans' mental health](#). Washington University in St. Louis.

may require up to 80% of our current annual salary. Nearer term, investing in retirement can provide helpful tax savings.³⁶

Sadly, a recent Willis Tower Watson survey³⁷ of 9,600 employees across all sectors found many workers face uncertain retirements. Just over one-third are under-saving for life after work, especially those making less than \$50,000. This is why retirement benefits are important in deciding to join, stay or leave an organization. The survey found that almost half (44%) of respondents indicated retirement benefits were the second-most important consideration after pay. Among them, 62% prefer guaranteed retirement benefits, 58% want more generous retirement benefits, and 53% are interested in retiree medical benefits.

SHRM data³⁸ shows that employers are responding, with more now offering either 401(k) or Roth plans than in the past five years. To sweeten the deal, most offer some financial contributions like matching, and 51% automatically enroll new hires in retirement savings programs.

Establishing and extending retirement benefits more broadly across the organization to more categories of employees creates a competitive advantage that aids in recruitment and retention. To that end, Willis Tower Watson offered this advice:

- Get and stay updated on retirement design strategies that motivate and support saving to help employees be better prepared and more resilient.
- Encourage the use of financial apps. Employees who use these tools are more engaged in their retirement planning.
- Identify how to help employees struggling with day-to-day finances by offering payroll deductions for savings and investment activities, providing debt management and financial advisory services, and allowing flexible and informed uses of retirement contributions for other purposes.

Perks

Benefits are generally considered to be must-haves – whether by law or demand. Perks have long been considered nice-to-have add-ons that sweeten the deal. Their value to employees and prospects may be increasing, however.

Possible perks include:

- Tuition assistance for staff children participating in your organization's programs
- Childcare saving funds or contributions.
- Free or low-cost on-site meals and groceries from the local grocery, food pantry, or CSA
- Discounted transportation passes or tickets from local public and private transit organizations
- Scooters and bikes for commuting
- Stipends for employees whose work requires regular use of their personal technology
- Reimbursement or coverage for head-to-toe uniform costs
- Free on-site or outsourced laundry service
- Service-based cash or cash-equivalent awards
- Discounts from local retailers and restaurants
- Opportunity to work from home
- Flexible scheduling for part-time work, so that the working hours can be arranged around other commitments.
- Communications or technology stipends

³⁶ Internal Revenue Service. [Benefits of Setting Up a Retirement Plan](#).

³⁷ Willis Towers Watson (2022). [Half of U.S. Employees Face Retirement Risks](#).

³⁸ Society for Human Resource Management. [Helping Workers Prepare for the Future](#).

Pay and Benefits Summary

| Minimum Standards | Target Standards |
|--|---|
| Pay a living wage for entry-level positions based on a single individual household. Adjust wages for new and current employees accordingly as living wage changes. | Pay a living wage based on a single-parent household as a minimum, building toward a thriving wage for all positions. Provide higher pay levels for part-time positions that are not designed to allow additional employment. Benchmark positions to others in your region outside of the nonprofit/government sectors. |
| Eliminate unpaid internships . | Offer well-paying entry-level positions to those new to the field, including high school and college students, with the potential for internal advancement. |
| Support employees beyond financial compensation by offering additional benefits and perks . | Provide high-quality, tangible benefits such as quality healthcare coverage, paid leave, and retirement for all staff positions, including entry-level, seasonal, and part-time staff. |
| If provided, ensure that room and board are less than 50% of the total compensation package. | Eliminate stipend-based positions so that all staff are adequately compensated for hours worked, including “on-call” time. |

Designing Positions

Another important consideration on the path to equitable pay in environmental education organizations is how positions are designed. The following are important considerations for position design:

- What should and should not be included in a job description?
- Desired qualifications vs. preferred qualifications.
 - How much formal education is truly needed to perform the essential duties, and how much can come from on-the-job training or life experience?
 - How much experience is necessary for the person holding this position?
 - Does the compensation provided adequately reflect the requested education and experience?
- What are your long-term expectations for the position?

Writing the Job Description: Dos and Don'ts

Writing job descriptions can seem like a difficult task, and if you are doing so for the first time or doing so for the first time since you've made a commitment to equity, you may be wondering what you should or shouldn't include. Below are some best practices to include or not include in your job description and how to determine what to state.

1. **DO list the salary range in the job description.** If there is an allowable pay range with a higher upper limit than the anticipated hiring range, then list the hiring range separately. You may even wish to inform candidates about the intention behind providing this information by stating somewhere on your job board or HR home page something along the lines of “As a matter of best practice, we’re moving toward complete pay transparency.”
2. **DO use inclusive language.** Use gender-neutral language and review postings for gender-coded, ableist, and other harmful language.³⁹ Include explicit statements that name [equity considerations](#) and invite people to apply.
3. **DO make job announcements available in accessible** formats such as braille or audio.

Position-Specific Considerations

The roles and responsibilities outlined in job descriptions should clearly describe the work the employee will perform. While these specifics are custom to each position, the following are some best practices related to different position types.

Internships

Internships offer an opportunity for someone new to environmental education to gain knowledge and experience to grow their career. Internships must focus much more on candidate development rather than fulfilling a need of an environmental education provider. Good internships include frequent contact and support from a supervisor. Appropriate roles for interns include but are not limited to learning to facilitate a program with mentor support, shadowing other staff, and working on small skill-building projects. It is never appropriate to ask interns to coordinate or manage full programs on their own, build relationships with specific audiences on behalf of your organization, or work on projects that aren’t relevant to your goals that will be “shelved” as soon as the intern leaves. Work that the intern performs should be able to be included in a portfolio of achievements that the intern can share with prospective future employers.

Seasonal Staff

Many environmental education employers hire part-time or term-limited staff to meet needs related to shifting seasonal demand. Because many employers do not provide benefits to part-time or seasonal staff, the roles and responsibilities for these positions must be tailored to the specific time-bound nature of the role versus routine operations. Potential examples include delivering seasonal programming independently (ex: leading summer camp or field trip programming), operations support (ex: additional staffing for the ticket booth during peak times, facility maintenance during heavy-use seasons), or a time-bound project with a specific, limited scope (ex: grant project coordination/implementation, curriculum design, facilities project, etc.).

CAUTION: Anecdotally, we know the majority of currently employed environmental educators started as part-time/seasonal workers, often working in these roles for years before either landing permanent positions or leaving the field. This is not sustainable. If your organization needs someone to complete similar work year-round, make that a permanent position rather than requiring an employee to move from one seasonal position to another within your organization to maintain their paycheck.

Do not ask seasonal staff to build relationships on behalf of your organization, especially with historically excluded communities. Relationship building takes time that often exceeds the limited terms of these positions and connects individuals, so even if your seasonal staff successfully builds a relationship, once their

³⁹ Kurter, H.L. (2021). [Hiring Managers, Here are 4 Useful Tips to Create More Inclusive Job Descriptions](#). Forbes.
Ward, M. (2021). [The words and phrases you should stop using in job descriptions if you want to attract applicants from diverse backgrounds](#). Insider.

term is up, that relationship will leave with your employee. Your *organization* must build trust with new communities you wish to work with authentically; offering an ever-rotating face of your organization only undermines that relationship. Consult the [Community Engagement: Guidelines for Excellence](#) for additional information and guidance on relationship building.

Permanent Positions

Permanent positions with benefits are what environmental education employers should strive to offer as many employees as possible. While there is little research on this topic related specifically to environmental education, we know anecdotally there is much less turnover in permanent positions, which generally leads to a more skilled and experienced staff team.

Rather than lumping all the potential roles and responsibilities that your department needs into a single job description, separate the roles into distinct positions whenever possible. While many environmental educators are often tasked with “wearing many hats,” combining roles such as registration, teaching, animal care, facility management, management, etc. into a standard job description filled by multiple staff within a single organization is not recommended. Employers are potentially missing out on people with unique skills and interests related to one of those roles who will not apply because of the other duties.

CAUTION: Requiring educators to fulfill many duties within a single position might not fully support educators staying in the field long-term. During listening sessions for this project, educators expressed their frustration in being required to take on tasks outside of teaching to secure permanent positions. They reported that increased responsibility was often not correlated with increased pay and insisted that teaching should not be framed as a temporary/seasonal role. We acknowledge that small organizations often lack the capacity to segregate these types of duties, but whenever possible, intentionally build job descriptions for permanent positions to make it possible for people to continue in the work they love.

Determining Qualifications

A recent [viral post](#) on LinkedIn and Twitter showed a user opining about a recent job description he saw asking for applicants to have four years of experience with a particular software. The author of the post found this particularly amusing, considering he had only created the software one and a half years ago. The post was a humorous but startling example of how job announcements often have unreasonable or even unattainable expectations when it comes to qualifications. Below are some best practices for determining qualifications.

Required Qualifications

Required qualifications are those that are necessary to perform the basic duties of the role. These are things that one must have to achieve the success of the program or complete crucial position deliverables. Do not become trapped in the idea of the perfect unicorn employee; instead, focus on meeting the basic needs of the position. Ask yourself:

1. Does this position really require a college degree or will previous experience or on-the-job training suffice?
 - a. Often, education requirements are included in job descriptions simply because of norms and traditions in environmental education. Given the discrimination in terms of who has access to college and the discrepancy between those in privileged and marginalized identities enrolled/receiving degrees, organizations should consider if a degree is actually required to do the job.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ National Center for Education Statistics (2019). [Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups](#).

2. If a college degree is truly necessary, what types of training might prepare someone for this role? Be open to degrees and training outside of the traditional environmental sciences or education.
3. At what educational level (high school, associate's, bachelor's, master's, or doctorate) would candidates be provided with the necessary skills or knowledge to perform the basic duties of the role? Are these levels of education truly required to fulfill the function of the position?
4. What skills and experiences are the most important for new hires to come in with? What skills and experiences do we have the internal capacity to support training someone with less experience in becoming prepared for the basic requirements of the role?

Desired Qualifications

Desired or preferred qualifications are those that are not necessary to perform the basic duties of the role, but that, if held, would enhance the performance of the person in the position. Things that fall into the desired qualifications category are those that will not be used to weed candidates out of consideration for an interview but that can potentially be used as tiebreaker items if multiple finalists for the position are very closely matched on required qualifications. Ask yourself:

1. What qualities would take a potential candidate to another level?
2. Compared to other companies or organizations with the same or similar position, do the qualifications we're asking for reflect common or far-reaching expectations in the field?
3. Are we prepared to pay the appropriate salary for the preferred qualifications we've requested?

TIP: If a particular quality will be given strong favor or is non-negotiable for candidates, be sure to mention that in the position description. For instance, if 60% of the students you're serving are Spanish-speakers and you would not consider applicants who are not fluent in Spanish, be sure to say that.

TIP: Consider performing a survey or holding interviews with individuals who currently sit in the same or similar position as the one you'll be hiring for. Ask them what skills, qualities, or knowledge they hold that they believe would be crucial or just nice to have for someone in the role. If you can, compensate people for their time participating in such a study.

Equity Considerations

- Did you know that in 2021 people with disabilities had a 10.1% unemployment rate, a rate almost double that of those without disabilities?⁴¹ When designing position descriptions, consider including language that shows people with disabilities that they will be welcome in your organization. For instance, one might say, "We encourage neurodivergent applicants or people with disabilities, for whom a reasonable accommodation can be provided, to apply for this role." One might also exclude a requirement that applicants be able to lift 50+ pounds if such a need will be rare, as this has the potential to weed out qualified candidates with disabilities.
- According to the 2014 Green 2.0 Report,⁴² women make up more than half of the people in leadership positions at environmental organizations, a figure that has been growing over time. If your organization lacks women in leadership positions, consider highlighting aspects of your organization that may attract women candidates as a part of the section that gives candidates information about your organization and its working environments. Examples of such statements include "We pride ourselves on encouraging the advancement of women into leadership positions" or "We understand that people

⁴¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022). [Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics Summary](#).

⁴² Taylor, D.E. (2014). [The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations](#). Green 2.0.

with the capacity for birth may have unique needs and thus we have a generous parental leave policy, a dedicated lactation space, and x other benefits”

- In 2014, many environmental organizations had a visible absence of BIPOC people in top positions of their organizations.⁴³ Consider including a line in your job descriptions that “people from racially or ethnically minoritized groups are especially encouraged to apply” if that is true for your organization.
- According to the National LGBTQ Task Force, transgender people have about a 14% unemployment rate, and more than 4 in 10 people who are transgender are underemployed.⁴⁴ The 2014 Green 2.0 Report also concluded that “the dominant culture of the organizations is alienating to ethnic minorities, the poor, the LGBTQ community, and others outside the mainstream.” To combat this, consider allowing preferred names to be used in lieu of birth/legal names and share your pronouns so that transgender people are not singled out when sharing theirs. Share this policy in your job announcements. Further, try to avoid heterosexist assumptions such as asking about someone’s “husband” or “wife” instead of the gender-neutral “partner” or “spouse.”
- Gaining employment can be particularly difficult for formerly-incarcerated individuals. Is a clean criminal history required for the position at hand, or will some low-level past offenses be acceptable while more serious or violent crimes may not be?
- Do you need to have an address on your job application? In *The Address Book: What street addresses reveal about identity, race, wealth, and power*, Mask details how many people without housing cannot apply and compete for jobs because many applications require a current address.⁴⁵ This inadvertently excludes those struggling with homelessness.

TIP: You may wish to borrow from the below list of inclusive language examples for job postings:

- “We strongly encourage applications from Black and Indigenous people and other people of color, people from working-class backgrounds, women, LGBTQ+ people, and other people of historically excluded identities. Data shows that women and BIPOC candidates more frequently do not apply to a job because they don’t feel that they meet all of the qualifications listed.”
- “Our job descriptions are general overviews, not a mandatory comprehensive list. We are committed to nurturing diverse leadership within a diverse network, so if you feel passionate about our efforts and believe that you have the skills to accomplish the job, we want to hear from you!”
- “The successful candidate will likely have some, but not all, of the following: [list of things you want]”

Long-term Planning and Expectations

In some cases, environmental education employers may have an urgent need to fill a position. With that or other circumstances in mind, there may be instances in which our short-term needs for a position differ from our long-term needs. Ask yourself:

- Are there certifications that will become crucial for this role in the future but won’t be necessary for the short term? Is a willingness to obtain the certification later appropriate, after the person has been onboarded?
- Can this position be covered by a temporary consultant to give us time to fundraise for the long-term appropriate pay rate for a permanent employee to take on this role? If so, keep in mind that consultant pay rates should be high enough to take into account their higher tax rate.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ National LGBTQ Task Force. [Transgender Workers at Great Risk for Unemployment and Poverty.](#)

⁴⁵ Mask, Deirdre (2020). *The Address Book: What Street Addresses Reveal About Identity, Race, Wealth, and Power.*

CAUTION: Organizations should adequately fundraise to hire positions before deciding to fill a position. Fundraising for one’s own salary or benefits package should not be included in a position description, nor should it be expected as a part of “other duties as assigned” for new staff to continue holding their own job. This kind of expectation may compromise an organization’s ability to meet payroll if they bring on new staff without sufficient financial reserves, can cause employees to feel burned out or unsupported, and may result in not meeting performance goals because staff are so focused on making sure there is funding to maintain their positions. Long-term, this can result in more transactional fundraising instead of deep relationship building to advance your organization’s work. There is a growing movement for more equitable fundraising models, such as [Community-Centric Fundraising](#), that provide resources and training around this.

Designing Positions Summary

| Minimum Standards | Target Standards |
|--|--|
| List salary/hiring ranges in all job postings. | Provide clear, equitable, and transparent compensation frameworks for all positions within your organization. |
| Write job descriptions that use inclusive language, are available in accessible formats (ex: braille, audio), and emphasize the knowledge, skills, qualities, and abilities needed to do the job. Clearly list required and desired qualifications . | Build internal capacity to support staff with less experience to become prepared for the role’s basic requirements to eliminate barriers to entry related to experience and education. |
| Assign roles, responsibilities, and pay bands to interns, seasonal staff, and permanent positions appropriate to the length of their term and expected level of independence/expertise. | Increase the percentage of your team in permanent positions and reduce the percentage of seasonal positions. Increase specialization on your team, including offering permanent positions focused on implementing educational programming. |

Recruitment

While it might not be immediately apparent what recruitment has to do with pay equity, it must be central as we consider creating more equitable pay within our environmental education organizations. The following are key recruitment and pay equity areas to explore:

- How do your pay bands influence which people can afford to work at your organization?
- How easy is it to transition from volunteer or intern positions into permanent paid positions?
- In what ways can pay and benefit transparency help broaden your recruitment pool?
- Do the people being recruited into leadership positions, fundraising positions, or human resources roles favor equitable pay regimes?

- What recruitment strategies are you employing?
- Are you considering or currently tracking the diversity of your applicants?

CAUTION: While it is essential to understand the diversity of your applicant pool, avoid “diversity quotas” in your recruitment. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, “Selecting a candidate (and excluding others) based on the candidate's sex, race, disability or other protected class can result in illegal discrimination. Employers should always seek to hire the most qualified candidate and choosing a less qualified individual over another simply to meet a diversity goal is problematic.”⁴⁶ In addition, recruiting to fill “diversity” roles may undermine employees’ sense of competence.⁴⁷

Make intentional decisions about internal versus external recruiting.⁴⁸ While many organizations insist on always doing external recruitment to appear unbiased, the reality is that when organizations already have a predetermined internal candidate, going through an external hiring process is a waste of any external candidates’ time. An external recruitment process may be more appropriate if your organization is not committed to promoting a specific individual from within, even if you have internal candidates. Be sure to reflect on potential biases in comparing internal versus external candidates.

Where to Post Jobs for More Diverse Candidate Pools

To recruit more diverse candidate pools, environmental education employers must look beyond the “usual places” to post job descriptions. In addition to state and national environmental education-focused job boards, organizations should actively seek job-posting services and list-serves that target specific audiences, such as those listed below.

1. Post on the [Conservationists of Color](#) email list
2. Post on [Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences Job Board](#)
3. Email Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), or Tribal Universities with programs with relevant degree fields to ask them to share jobs with students and recent grads.
4. Go to community meetings in diverse communities and ask if you can share job announcements with attendees.
5. Attend networking events with diverse attendance and share jobs via word of mouth.

When possible, your organization should build relationships with guidance counselors, career coaches, and other community leaders well in advance of your recruitment so that you build trust before making an ask to share a job. This trust may also result in additional word-of-mouth recruitment for your position if your partners feel more confident in recommending you as an employer to others in their community.

Recruitment Summary

| Minimum Standards | Target Standards |
|-------------------|------------------|
|-------------------|------------------|

⁴⁶ SHRM. [Can we set hiring quotas to meet diversity goals?](#)

⁴⁷ Zheng, L. (2022). [To Avoid DEI Backlash, Focus on Changing Systems - Not People](#). Harvard Business Review.

⁴⁸ Krell, E. (2015). [Weighing Internal Vs. External Hires](#). SHRM.

| | |
|---|---|
| Be intentional about where positions are posted , making a concerted effort to advertise the position to audiences that may not see your position in “traditional” places. Make intentional decisions about internal and external recruiting. | Build relationships with HBCUs, MSIs, and community organizers in diverse communities so they know you and your organization and feel more confident in recommending you as an employer to specific candidates. |
|---|---|

Hiring Processes and Practices

Employers must carefully design hiring processes to reduce assumptions from candidates, balance power, and provide an equitable experience for all candidates. Hiring processes and practices significantly influence who is able to navigate those systems and how bias shows up in that process, and thus needs to be evaluated to understand those impacts. Plus, impressions made during the hiring process can greatly impact whether candidates will even want to work for you. Be sure to focus on the systems and processes you have in place for hiring instead of emphasizing a specific individual, identity, or group.⁴⁹

Reducing Assumptions

Many hiring practices greatly favor people who understand the assumptions of the system. Intentionally work to reduce the amount of guesswork a candidate has to do. If you do not make your expectations clear and explicit, you unintentionally favor people who are better at navigating your system versus the people who are best for your job.

| Instead of this... | Do this! |
|--|---|
| “Submit your resume and cover letter” | Provide specific recommendations about the information you want candidates to submit. Do you want applicants to share why they are passionate about the field, describe their skills related to the specific job qualifications, or something else? Being more explicit about what you are looking for levels the field for candidates from varying backgrounds and provides employers with a more representative sample to compare candidates. |
| “Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis.” (no further details) | Share anticipated dates for the review process and start dates for the position. Suppose you know already that it’s going to be a 6-month process. In that case, if you share this in advance, candidates looking for work as soon as possible can focus their efforts on other opportunities, saving both employer and candidate time. |
| Sharing “next steps” for the interview process only in response to a candidate’s questions at the end of an interview. | Be clear about how many rounds of interviews you anticipate, your timeline for interviews, and logistical details, such as format (online vs. in-person) and length, as early as possible in the process. Share this before or at the beginning of an interview to help candidates gauge how much to share in an interview and prioritize their questions - because those may look very different if this is a one-shot interview versus a multiple-step experience. If possible, include this information in your job posting. |

⁴⁹ Zheng, L. (2022). [To Avoid DEI Backlash, Focus on Changing Systems - Not People](#). Harvard Business Review.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Providing only minimal guidance about the interview logistics.</p> | <p>Share clear, detailed directions on when and where the interview will take place. For in-person interviews, provide instructions for where to park and where exactly to meet. When selecting and communicating your interview location, consider accessibility for those who use public transportation or have mobility challenges. Will your interview take place indoors or outside? If it's raining, will you still go outside? For online interviews, provide an overview of the platform at the beginning of each interview. Utilize the chat and captioning options.</p> <p>Be transparent about how you expect candidates to show up in terms of apparel. For example, in environmental education, you might ask potential field instructors to wear casual apparel they would wear for a working day outdoors. Be aware of bias related to "professional appearance."⁵⁰</p> <p>Inform candidates about your hiring committee in advance of interviews. At minimum, provide information about the number and titles of the interviewers. When possible, share bios.⁵¹</p> |
| <p>Offering minimal times for interviews.</p> | <p>As much as possible, offer candidates a mix of day, evening, and weekend interview options. If you have a limited schedule and cannot offer those immediately to all candidates, invite them to request off-time interviews if needed. Offer the option for virtual interviews for additional flexibility. A candidate's availability to show up to work needs to be confirmed explicitly during an interview, not implicitly by whether they can rearrange all other commitments to attend the interview in the first place.</p> |
| <p>Providing no contact information.</p> | <p>Provide contact information for prospective candidates to reach out to if they have questions about your application process or the position description.</p> |

Hiring Committees

Equitable employers create hiring committees to review applications, screen candidates, conduct interviews, and ultimately select the final candidates. Build your committee to be as heterogeneous as possible, including three individuals at a minimum. During the interview process, intentionally work to counteract affinity bias, or the tendency to prefer people who are just like you.⁵² To do this, build your hiring team to include a diversity of perspectives, including individual demographics, lived experiences, professional experience, personality, and other factors. If that diversity of perspective is unavailable within your immediate education team, invite people from other departments or outside your organization to serve in this capacity. Work toward having external representatives from groups most impacted by your work on your hiring team, and provide financial compensation for any external advisors.

Once you have confirmed your hiring committee, actively support them in addressing individual biases. Provide training or materials about bias for your hiring committee prior to reviewing any candidate materials, such as [this toolkit from the Washington Association of School Administrators](#); if possible, secure facilitated training or

⁵⁰ Gray, A. (2019). [The Bias of 'Professionalism' Standards](#). Stanford Social Innovation Review.

⁵¹ Basas, C. (2022). [How to Make Your Interviews More Inclusive and Less Painful](#). Fakequity.

⁵² Adler, L. (2020). [10 Ways to Reduce Interviewer Bias](#). LinkedIn.com.

coaching for your hiring committees as part of your organization's systemic change work. Consider organizing a "blind" initial screening of applicants prior to the interview stage, so that the hiring committee reviews applications with redacted names and education dates and places. Throughout your process, ensure the committee actively listens to the perspectives of all its members, not just the loudest voices or those with the most power within your organization.

Addressing Power in the Hiring Process

During the hiring process, employers hold all the power and often do not consider how their requests or requirements impact candidates.⁵³ The following strategies shift some of the inherent power employers hold to make the hiring process a bit more balanced.

At a minimum:

- Reflect on the amount of time the process requires both for candidates and hiring committees. While you may need more touchpoints to select an executive director than your summer seasonal staff, lengthy interview processes are costly for candidates, requiring them to take time off of work, pay for additional travel or child care, etc.
- Develop a uniform set of questions and rubric that you use with all candidates.⁵⁴ Focus your questions to provide specific insights about why you should hire a particular person. Eliminate application or interview questions that are not necessary or are only included because of previous use.
- Never ask candidates to create and submit custom work for you before they are hired unless you intend to pay them well for that time. Allow candidates to submit previously developed work if you request work samples.
- Never ask about previous salary history. This perpetuates pay disparities, particularly for women and people of color.⁵⁵ In some states and situations, this is also illegal.⁵⁶ Requesting this information puts candidates at a disadvantage in terms of negotiations and seeks only to pay them based on their most recent salary rather than the scope of work. Employers have a budget for what they will pay, so be sure to offer that pay to anyone with comparable qualifications and experience.
- Intentionally schedule interviews to provide substantive breaks for your review team so that each candidate is assessed with the same level of attention and energy rather than being the 6th candidate they've interviewed that day.⁵⁷
- Ensure sufficient time for candidates to ask questions throughout the process. While employers use interviews to identify the best candidate, it is important to remember that candidates need to use interviews to evaluate the position and employer.⁵⁸ If that time must be cut short, offer additional opportunities for follow-up.
- Contact every applicant and let them know the status of their application. Provide feedback to the interview candidates you do not select. Be sure this feedback is constructive and provides advice and recommendations for the candidate in future interviews.

⁵³ Das, A. (2020). [The power imbalance in hiring](#). LinkedIn.com.

⁵⁴ Marquette University (2020). [Diversity Recruitment Resources for Search Committees](#). SHRM. [Interviewing Candidates for Employment](#).

⁵⁵ Bessen, J., Denk, E., and Kossuth, J. (2020). [Stop Asking Job Candidates for Their Salary History](#). Harvard Business Review.

⁵⁶ HR Dive (2022). [Salary history bans](#).

⁵⁷ Cecchi-Dimeglio, P. (2022). [6 Behavioral Nudges to Reduce Bias in Hiring and Promotions](#). Harvard Business Review.

⁵⁸ Maurer, R. (2018). [Recruiters Need to Be Ready to Answer These Candidate Questions](#). SHRM.

Further steps:

- Invest in the candidates and coach them through your application process (Ex: [The Bridge Project](#)). Avoid the sense of urgency of looking for someone to “hit the ground running.”⁵⁹
- Share interview questions or general topics you’ll be asking about in advance with candidates.⁶⁰This allows candidates to organize thoughts and provide quality answers to your questions. In particular, share plans for any performance or skills-based assessments in advance. For example, if you want candidates to teach a 5-minute lesson, tell them beforehand. As educators, while we often respond in the moment to the “teachable moments” that occur, we don’t generally just “wing it” when we lead a structured activity, so it is not an accurate assessment to expect someone to do that during an interview.
- Use skills assessments in final interviews to review how candidates will perform in the position’s roles versus theoretical walk-throughs/explanations.⁶¹
- Provide compensation for candidates who invest significant time interviewing for your position.⁶²This may look like mileage or transportation reimbursement, a stipend based on the estimated number of hours, or hourly pay, including travel time.
- Make reference checks a two-way relationship. While it is common for employers to ask candidates for professional references, most candidates’ opportunities to learn about the organization are limited to websites, public-facing communications, and the “Q&A” during an interview. Offer final candidates internal references, such as other employees or volunteers, whom they are encouraged to contact to learn more about your organizational culture and work environment before making their decision.

Evaluating the Hiring Process

While it may feel the work is complete once an offer is made and the candidate accepts your position, employers must reflect on and evaluate the process to help guide and inform future hiring. Consider the following questions:

- How diverse was the candidate pool? Did you recruit a wide pool of applicants? Why or why not?
- Where did candidates learn about your position? What recruitment strategies were most effective?
- Were any position expectations, application or interview questions, or steps in the recruitment or hiring process prohibitive for certain groups of people? What could have been done to make your process accessible for people to participate fully? Consider asking candidates for direct feedback about your process.
- How did bias show up in the hiring process? What steps did you take to reduce bias? What steps will you take in the future?
- Did you find someone amazing for your position the first time? If not, why not? Review your position description, recruitment plan, and hiring practices to determine the cause.

Demographics and Hiring

To accurately evaluate how equitable your hiring process is, employers must collect demographic information. First, review [federal requirements](#) for what you are legally permitted to ask about in job applications and interviews. Then consult your HR team and additional tools such as “[Tracking Diversity](#)” from Green 2.0 to help frame your questions and process.

⁵⁹ McNamee, K. (2021). [What Does a Truly Equitable Recruiting Process Look Like?](#) American Alliance of Museums.

⁶⁰ Rinderknecht, K. (2021). [It’s time to start sharing interview questions before the interview.](#) LinkedIn.com.

⁶¹ Maurer, R. (2022). [Using Skills Assessments of Education, Experience Requirements.](#) SHRM.

⁶² Kelly, J. (2022). [It’s Time For Job Seekers To Get Paid For Interviewing.](#) Forbes.

Beyond This Hire

Once the hiring process is complete, employers must continue to ensure they provide equitable employment for their staff to retain a quality team. Gather benchmark salary information for all positions to identify inequities between current staff class/categories and what you currently offer based on when you hired the position versus now. Conduct exit and [stay interviews](#) to identify potential issues with workplace culture and organizational practices. Make recommendations and develop plans to address any inequities or organizational challenges. If you have completed a full pay equity analysis, analyzed your data, and taken corrective actions, take the [Green 2.0 Pay Equity Pledge](#).

Hiring Processes and Practices Summary

| Minimum Standards | Target Standards |
|---|---|
| <p>Collect specific information from candidates during the application phase (not just “resume and cover letter”). Be transparent about your intended interview timeframe, process, requirements, and expectations. Provide clear directions and guidance to help candidates prepare for interviews. Offer a range of interview times. Provide contact information on job postings.</p> | <p>Include information about the hiring process in your publicly posted job description. Offer a range of interview times, including weekdays, evenings, and weekends. Routinely offer both in-person and virtual interview options. Share interviewer bios in advance.</p> |
| <p>Build a hiring committee for every hire. Provide training and resources for this team around bias. Ensure all voices on the hiring team are considered throughout the process.</p> | <p>Offer facilitated training on bias for all interviewers. Include external advisors on your hiring teams, ideally those most impacted by the work. Provide financial compensation for external advisors.</p> |
| <p>Develop a uniform set of questions and rubric for all candidates. Ensure interviews are scheduled so all candidates can be assessed with the same attention and energy level. Ensure sufficient time for candidates to ask questions. Never ask about previous salary history.</p> | <p>Share interview topics or questions in advance. Use skills assessments instead of theoretical interview questions. Make reference checks a two-way relationship, identifying employees or volunteers that final candidates can contact.</p> |
| <p>Restructure hiring processes to be mindful of the time required for candidates and hiring committees. Do not ask candidates to create custom work for your organization without pay. Provide constructive feedback to candidates who were not selected.</p> | <p>Invest in candidates and coach them through your application process. Provide compensation for interview candidates.</p> |
| <p>Evaluate every hiring process and continue to modify job postings, recruitment strategies, and hiring strategies to reduce barriers to full participation from a wide range of candidates.</p> | <p>Conduct exit and stay interviews to understand workplace culture and organizational practices better. Identify and implement actions and strategies to address what you learn.</p> |

Conclusion

This document provides concrete tools and suggestions for designing and posting positions, serves as a tool for individuals and organizations to advocate for increasing environmental education salaries, and helps establish industry standards for pay and hiring. We recognize that environmental education organizations come from a wide range of starting points regarding equitable hiring and that some of the recommendations in this document will be easier to implement than others. Make the changes you can. Advocate for decision-makers to make changes beyond your scope. Seek advice from other organizations and experts. If something works for your organization, share it with others in your network. Just keep going and together, we can improve employee retention, attract, and sustain more diverse talent, establish our field as a viable profession, and ultimately make environmental education more equitable.

Next Steps

Learn More. Getting to equitable hiring is a journey. Continue this journey by learning more. Read the resources and links shared throughout this document to dig deeper into these topics.

Endorse this document if you are a network, coalition, or job board. This document has been approved and endorsed by the Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education. A full list of endorsing organizations is posted at <http://www.southeastee.com/eeGuidance.html>. If you are a statewide, regional, or national network that supports this eeGuidance and would like to be added to this list, please complete [this form](#) to submit your endorsement.

Identify posted positions that meet these recommendations. As an individual employer, help job seekers know that the position meets or exceeds the minimum standards outlined in this document by adding the following commitment statement at the bottom of job descriptions.

“This position meets or exceeds the recommendations as outlined in the [eeGuidance for Equitable Pay and Hiring](#). [Employer Name] is committed to advancing employee equity in the field of environmental education to better serve our staff, our organization, and our community.”

Be sure to review the standards listed throughout this document and ensure your position meets 100% of the minimum standards before using this language; these standards are also compiled in “[At A Glance](#)” format at the end of this document. The Southeastern Environmental Education Alliance and other endorsing partners will not review every position that is posted as meeting these standards, so we must trust that employers who post positions with this statement in job descriptions have done so with careful consideration.

Job boards and listing services, help promote positions from employers that meet the minimum standards outlined in this document. At minimum, require that all job descriptions you post include pay/salary information. Add the filter/tag “Committed to Pay Equity” to your search options to make it easier for current and future environmental educators to find more equitable employment.

Resources and Cited References

Resources

- SEEA Landscape Analysis - <http://www.southeastee.com/landscapeanalysis.html>
- Area Living Wage Calculator from MIT - <https://livingwage.mit.edu/>
- Household Living Wage Calculator from NEA - <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/how-calculate-your-living-wage>
- National Labor Relations Board Jurisdictional Standards - <https://www.nlr.gov/about-nlr/about-nlr-rights-we-protect/the-law/jurisdictional-standards>
- ACA Responsibilities for Companies Employing Seasonal Workers - <https://www.benefitspro.com/2022/07/06/aca-responsibilities-for-companies-employing-seasonal-workers/?sleturn=20220925122050>
- Federal IRS Mileage Rate - <https://www.irs.gov/tax-professionals/standard-mileage-rates>
- TransitChek - <https://www.wageworks.com/transitchek/commuters-benefit/spread-the-word/>
- Community Engagement Guidelines for Excellence - <https://eeepro.naaee.org/eeepro/resources/community-engagement-guidelines>
- Community-Centric Fundraising - <https://communitycentricfundraising.org/>
- Conservationists of Color - <https://conservationistsofcolor.wordpress.com/>
- Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences Job Board - <https://www.manrrs.org/post-a-job>
- Toolkit from the Washington Association of School Administrators - <https://wasa-oly.org/WASA/images/WASA/6.0%20Resources/Hanover/Inclusive%20Interviewing%20Self-Evaluation.pdf>
- The Bridge Project - https://twitter.com/bridge_project
- EOE Prohibited Employment Policies/Practices - <https://www.eeoc.gov/prohibited-employment-policiespractices>
- Tracking Diversity from Green 2.0 - <https://diversegreen.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/green-2-0-tracking-diversity-guide-03-21-22.pdf>
- Stay Interview Questions from the Society for Human Resource Management - <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/hr-forms/pages/stayinterviewquestions.aspx>
- Green 2.0 Pay Equity Pledge - <https://diversegreen.org/pay-equity-pledge/>
- SEEA eeGuidance - <http://www.southeastee.com/eeguidance.html>
- Form for networks, coalitions, and job boards to endorse this document - <https://forms.gle/K8vPaLHsDLBjcbS9>

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Guidance for Equitable Pay and Hiring Standards at a Glance

| Pay and Benefits | |
|--|---|
| Minimum Standards | Target Standards |
| Pay a living wage for entry-level positions based on a single individual household. Adjust wages for new and current employees accordingly as living wage changes. | Pay a living wage based on a single-parent household as a minimum, building toward a thriving wage for all positions. Provide higher pay levels for part-time positions that are not designed to allow additional employment. Benchmark positions to others in your region outside of the nonprofit/government sectors. |
| Eliminate unpaid internships . | Offer well-paying entry-level positions to those new to the field, including high school and college students, with the potential for internal advancement. |
| Support employees beyond financial compensation by offering additional benefits and perks . | Provide high-quality, tangible benefits such as quality healthcare coverage, paid leave, and retirement for all staff positions, including entry-level, seasonal, and part-time staff. |
| If provided, ensure that room and board are less than 50% of the total compensation package. | Eliminate stipend-based positions so that all staff are adequately compensated for hours worked, including “on-call” time. |

| Designing Positions | |
|--|--|
| Minimum Standards | Target Standards |
| List salary/hiring ranges in all job postings. | Provide clear, equitable, and transparent compensation frameworks for all positions within your organization. |
| Write job descriptions that use inclusive language, are available in accessible formats (ex: braille, audio), and emphasize the knowledge, skills, qualities, and abilities needed to do the job. Clearly list required and desired qualifications . | Build internal capacity to support staff with less experience to become prepared for the role's basic requirements to eliminate barriers to entry related to experience and education. |
| Assign roles, responsibilities, and pay bands to interns, seasonal staff, and permanent positions appropriate to the length of their term and expected level of independence/expertise. | Increase the percentage of your team in permanent positions and reduce the percentage of seasonal positions. Increase specialization on your team, including offering permanent positions focused on implementing educational programming. |

| Recruitment | |
|---|---|
| Minimum Standards | Target Standards |
| Be intentional about where positions are posted , making a concerted effort to advertise the position to audiences that may not see your position in “traditional” places. Make intentional decisions about internal and external recruiting. | Build relationships with HBCUs, MSIs, and community organizers in diverse communities so they know you and your organization and feel more confident in recommending you as an employer to specific candidates. |

Hiring Processes and Practices

| Minimum Standards | Target Standards |
|---|---|
| <p>Collect specific information from candidates during the application phase (not just “resume and cover letter”). Be transparent about your intended interview timeframe, process, requirements, and expectations. Provide clear directions and guidance to help candidates prepare for interviews. Offer a range of interview times. Provide contact information on job postings.</p> | <p>Include information about the hiring process in your publicly posted job description. Offer a range of interview times, including weekdays, evenings, and weekends. Routinely offer both in-person and virtual interview options. Share interviewer bios in advance.</p> |
| <p>Build a hiring committee for every hire. Provide training and resources for this team around bias. Ensure all voices on the hiring team are considered throughout the process.</p> | <p>Offer facilitated training on bias for all interviewers. Include external advisors on your hiring teams, ideally those most impacted by the work. Provide financial compensation for external advisors.</p> |
| <p>Develop a uniform set of questions and rubrics for all candidates. Ensure interviews are scheduled so all candidates can be assessed with the same attention and energy level. Ensure sufficient time for candidates to ask questions. Never ask about previous salary history.</p> | <p>Share interview topics or questions in advance. Use skills assessments instead of theoretical interview questions. Make reference checks a two-way relationship, identifying employees or volunteers that final candidates can contact.</p> |
| <p>Restructure hiring processes to be mindful of the time required for candidates and hiring committees. Do not ask candidates to create custom work for your organization without pay. Provide constructive feedback to candidates who were not selected.</p> | <p>Invest in candidates and coach them through your application process. Provide compensation for interview candidates.</p> |
| <p>Evaluate every hiring process and continue to modify job postings, recruitment strategies, and hiring strategies to reduce barriers to full participation from a wide range of candidates.</p> | <p>Conduct exit and stay interviews to understand workplace culture and organizational practices better. Identify and implement actions and strategies to address what you learn.</p> |