

# National Environmental Education Act

## EPA's Office of Environmental Education

### 1990-2004

## Introduction

In 1990, the U.S. Congress, at the request of President George H.W. Bush and William K. Reilly, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), passed the **National Environmental Education Act** (the Act). The intent of the legislation is to support the advancement of scientifically sound environmental education and training in the United States. The purpose of the Act is accomplished by:

- (1) **Seed grants:** providing teachers and NGOs small seed grants that assist schools explore model programs for environmental learning;
- (2) **Professional Standards:** raising the level of professionalism of environmental educators through long-term teacher empowerment, knowledge improvement and skill development;
- (3) **Environmental Professionals:** advancing environmental careers; and
- (4) **Partnerships:** developing innovative partnerships among businesses, NGOs and government agencies through the auspices of a congressionally chartered non-profit foundation.

In the past 14 years, Congress has appropriated approximately \$98 million to the Program. Funds are allocated under the Act to the EPA's Office of Environmental Education, the Teacher Awards Program, the Environmental Education & Training Partnership (EETAP) teacher-training program, and the National Environmental Education & Training Foundation (NEETF)<sup>1</sup>. This federal program is authorized at \$14 million, but has leveled out at \$9 million annually.

## A Commitment to Rigor

From 1994 through 2004 the EPA EE program has supported improved rigor and educational discipline for environmental education practitioners and trainers. This is manifest in the program providing the single largest support for the **National Guidelines for Excellence** that contain guidance on fairness and accuracy, educational depth and skill building. The guidelines have been endorsed by the North American Association for Environmental Education and have been adopted by several thousand state regional and local organizations that deliver environmental education and training to students and instructors.

## EPA EE Grants Program

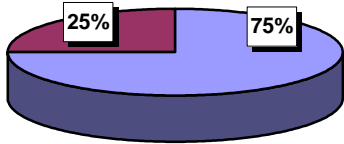
The \$98 million federal investment in the Program has garnered measurable results. EPA has reviewed and approved nearly 3,000 small grants to schools, universities, museums, zoos,

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<sup>1</sup> 20 USC 5510[b] (distributing funds: 38% to the Office of Environmental Education Grants; 25% to the Teacher Training Program; 25% to the Office of Environmental Education Federal Collaborations, Fellowships, Conferences and Operating Expenses; 10% to NEETF; 2% to the Council on Environmental Quality Teacher Awards).

**EPA Environmental Education Grants**

<b>Matching Grant Funds</b> \$9,000,000	<b>Federal Grant Funds</b> \$27,000,000
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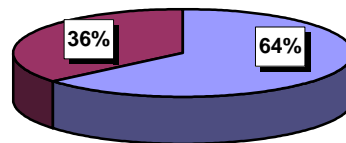
aquariums, and local governments. This grants program is so competitive that the Office of Environmental Education is only able to fund 5% of the proposals received for grants of \$25,000 or larger. The grants promote educational rigor and grantees are barred from using funds for advocacy and/or political activities<sup>2</sup>. Through the grants program, EPA has awarded \$27 million in federal dollars, matched by \$9 million (25%) in contributions, totaling **\$36 million in leveraged grant dollars**.

**Teacher Training Grant**

The teacher-training program is a large grant awarded by the Office of Environmental Education (25% of the Act's total allocation) through a highly competitive grant process. EETAP, the current teacher training program grantee, has leveraged its \$14.2 million federal contribution<sup>3</sup> into a total of **\$22.2 million**, with \$8 million (30%) in partner contributions.

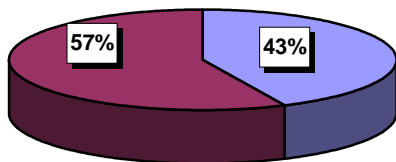
**EETAP Teacher-Training Funds**

<b>Partner Contribution Funds</b> \$8,000,000	<b>Federal Grant Funds</b> \$14,200,000
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**NEETF's EE Challenge Grants**

<b>Matching Grant Funds</b> \$6,200,000	<b>Federal Grant Funds</b> \$4,700,000
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**NEETF Challenge Grants**

The National Environmental Education & Training Foundation (NEETF), the EPA's public/private partner, has issued over 247 grants. NEETF's grants program has awarded \$4.7 million in federal funds, matched with \$6.2 million (57%) in contributions, totaling **\$10.9 million in leveraged grant dollars**.

EPA matches \$3 to every \$1 contributed by the grantee allowing communities to start-up environmental education programs with a minimal grantee investment. NEETF matches \$2 for every \$3 contributed by the grantee. Between the Office of Environmental Education, EETAP

<sup>2</sup> The Office of Environmental Education Grant Solicitation Notice specifically states that grantees are prohibited from using federal funds for lobbying and/or political activities.

<sup>3</sup> From FY'95 to FY'00, EPA entered a cooperative agreement with the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) to administer the teacher-training program and it was funded at \$9 million. From FY'01 to FY'03, EPA entered a cooperative agreement with the University at Wisconsin Steven's Point to administer the teacher-training program and it was funded at \$5.2 million.

and NEETF, a total of **\$68.2 million** has been invested in environmental education grants. Of this total over **\$25 million has been contributed by non-federal sources.**

**Guidelines for Excellence - Quality Standards:** The grants awarded have created high-quality curriculum and teaching materials. One significant set of grants supported the development of the *Guidelines for Excellence*<sup>4</sup>, which set quality standards for teaching and materials. The *Guidelines for Excellence* provide educators the tools to evaluate the wide array of available materials, standards to strive for in developing new materials, and a method of judging the relative merit of different competing materials. The *Guidelines for Excellence* have been adopted by some 3,000 environmental education organizations, and are utilized by at least nine states in developing their education standards and guiding teachers on how to use environmental education materials to accomplish state education goals<sup>5</sup>.

**Demonstrated Value:** Environmental Education grants continue to invest federal dollars in projects that have a national impact and demonstrate academic, social, and career development value. Examples include:

- *The Windows on the Wild Project* expanded pre-K and elementary environmental education curriculum into middle school curriculum to promote academic achievement in environmental sciences and increase environmental literacy.
- *The Parks as Classrooms Project* evaluated the effectiveness of formal and nonformal curricula in linking environmental education to state-mandated standards for academic performance.
- *The Business Environment Learning & Leadership Project* trained 25 MBA programs on how to incorporate strategic environmental management courses in to the standard curriculum.
- *The Train-the-Trainer Project* developed curriculum for 400 health care providers to diagnosis and address childhood exposure to environmental hazards.

## Career Development & Fellowships

The Office of Environmental Education is also dedicated to career development through the National Network for Environmental Management Studies (NNEMS) Fellowship Program<sup>6</sup>. This competitive student selection process is designed to provide undergraduate and graduate students with research opportunities at EPA offices nationwide. Typically, 30% of the applications received are selected as Fellows. From FY'87 to FY'02 approximately 1250 fellowships have been awarded, totaling over \$8.5 million in stipends to students.

## Teacher Training and Skills Development

The Environmental Education & Training Partnership (EETAP) works to improve the way teachers educate the next generation of the American public and workforce. Since its inception,

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<sup>4</sup> North American Association for Environmental Education, *Environmental Education Materials: Guidelines for Excellence*, Nov. 1996.

<sup>5</sup> AZ, HI, IL, KY, MN, OH, VA, WA, WV, have used the *Guidelines for Excellence* to develop educational standards or instruct teachers how to use EE to achieve educational goals.

<sup>6</sup> NNEMS Fellowship Program commenced in EPA's Office of Cooperative Environmental Management in 1987 and was transferred in 1992 with the opening of the Office of Environmental Education.

EETAP has provided training to over 101,000 educators, who each in turn reach anywhere from 20 to several hundred students annually in schools, museums, zoos, and nature centers. Teacher training conferences develop teaching skills that emphasize higher-order thinking over memorization and repetition, helping teachers link the outside world to their classrooms while providing instruction in traditional disciplines. EETAP also supports pre-service training for teachers, on-line courses, EE model schools, best practices, and has supported the professional certification of nonformal educators. EETAP also builds capacity for EE through EE-Link, the primary Internet access point to EE programs, curriculum, and educator resources<sup>7</sup>. EETAP has exhibited a strong commitment to improving the delivery method for environmental education throughout America.

## **NEETF Partnership Programs and Fund Leveraging**

In addition to providing challenge grants, NEETF also serves as a private non-profit organization to bring together partners with common interests in understanding and addressing environmental literacy. The Foundation bases each of its programs on research findings and recommendations in order to maintain rigor in program design and delivery.

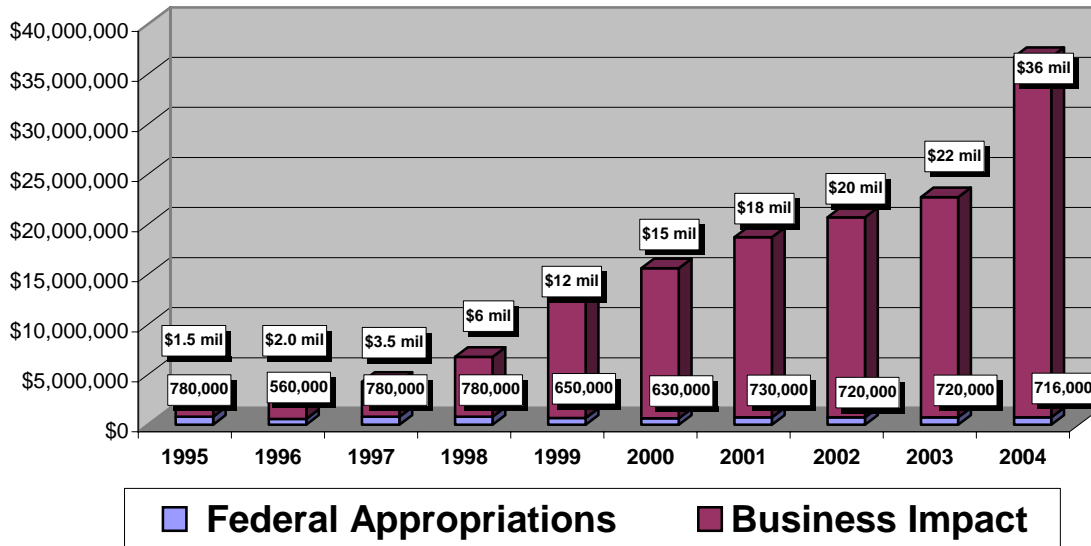
**K-12 to Professional Training:** NEETF's K-12 Environmental Education program features a high school mentoring program that matches students from under-resourced communities with environmental professionals to conduct science experiments and develop academic skills and college placements. NEETF's professional training programs feature a partnership with the American Meteorological Society to educate weathercasters on environmental science and issues, a Health Program designed to bring basic environmental competencies to doctors and nurses, a Business Program which delivers environmental information and strategies to business leaders and a volunteer outdoor education and conservation day.

**Reaching a Broad Audience:** More specifically, the TV Weather program has Broadcast Meteorologists providing on-air environmental information during the weather forecast. The Health Program educates frontline healthcare professionals on environmental history taking. GreenBiz.Com provides information to small and medium businesses on environmentally friendly business practices that can greatly increase their profit margins. NEETF's coordination of National Public Lands Day brings together nine federal agency partners and corporate sponsors to bring much needed improvements to public lands--\$11 million worth of volunteer work was completed on public lands in 2004. When considering the partnership building, volunteer efforts, and financial seed-planting of larger projects, NEETF has realized approximately a \$136 million "business impact" since FY'95.

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<sup>7</sup> EE-Link currently gets 180,000 visitors per month.

## NEETF Business Impact



### Considerations Regarding the Program's Future

**Non-Regulatory Alternative to Environmental Protection:** The Environmental Education program within EPA's Office of Environmental Education provides a non-regulatory alternative to environmental protection. The program's goal is to produce an environmentally literate and trained workforce capable of analyzing complex threats to our quality of life and economic vitality. Environmental education does not require a certain outcome (pro-environment vs. pro-business) to be successful.

**Public Support for Environmental Education:** Environmental Education continues to enjoy popularity in the United States--95% of adult Americans believe environmental education should be taught in schools<sup>8</sup>. Termination of the EPA Program would end direct services to schools, teachers, students and community groups, undoing the accomplishments of the last 14 years. Without this Program environmental education would continue in a manner that turned away from educational rigor, teacher-training and balanced perspectives. On the other hand, an increase in federal funds would result in an even more robust impact for the overall Program and continued education rigor as incorporated into state achievement standards.

<sup>8</sup> Roper Starch Worldwide, *Lessons From the Environment*, p. 1-2, May 2001.