



# DWR's Virginia Naturally Schools Application Directions and Requirements

## The Application

The application is an online form. We suggest you compose your answers to each question in a savable document and then cut and paste your answers into the online form to prevent you from losing your work.

## Ensuring an Accurate Recognition Year

Be sure to check the VAN Schools spreadsheet on the VAN website to ensure you are applying for your school's correct recognition year.

## The Criteria

Schools will need to be prepared to **submit two narratives, a letter of support from the principal, and a document of supporting evidence of your efforts** (photos, student work, letter from a partner organization, etc.).

- **Narrative One** will describe the authentic hands-on, real-world learning taking place in the classroom at your school. This classroom learning must emphasize environmental and/or sustainable education and includes civic engagement and/or STEM connections.
- **Narrative Two** will describe how your school is expanding beyond the classroom setting. This learning (often referred to as meaningful field experiences) can take place in the schoolyard, through community partners, on field trips, etc. and should connect back to what students are learning in the classroom. It is our hope that schools see the overlap between criteria's one and two and that schools see the value in incorporating opportunities beyond the classroom (criteria 2) to *support* the hands-on, real-world environmental education in their day-to-day classrooms (criteria 1).
- In **each narrative** schools should discuss their successes, challenges, and what they hope to improve upon in the future. See the next page of this document for ideas for each narrative!

**Each additional year a school applies for VAN recognition, their narrative must show how their classroom and meaningful field experiences/programs have improved, expanded, and/or progressed from the previous recognition application.** It is important to note that schools do not have to apply consecutively! A school may apply this year, then take the next year to run the same program again (not applying for VAN) before expanding the program the following year and applying for VAN again. Schools may also apply when they take on new topics and opportunities that support environmental literacy.

**Recognition Requirements:** Each application year, schools **must show progress** in the areas of both narrative criteria 1 AND narrative criteria 2 explained below. Schools may choose to expand upon something from a previous application year or, especially if previous criteria have been fully integrated, schools may report on new topics and opportunities. It is our hope that schools see the overlap between criteria's one and two and that schools see the value in incorporating opportunities beyond the classroom (criteria 2) to *support* the hands-on, real-world environmental education in their day-to-day classrooms (criteria 1).

<b>Criteria 1: Authentic Classroom Learning</b>	<b>Criteria 2: Expanding beyond the Classroom</b>
<p><b>Description:</b> Effective, hands-on, real world learning that emphasizes environmental and/or sustainable education and includes civic engagement and/or STEM connections.</p> <p>Possible topics* can include, but not limited to:</p>	<p><b>Description:</b> Schools have provided one or more meaningful field experiences to their students and/or staff. This experience can also be a training program. These experiences should be tied to the authentic classroom learning criteria and rooted in best practices for field trips, <a href="#">MWEEs</a>, etc.</p> <p>Possible opportunities can include but are not limited to:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Habitat change- fragmentation, loss, conversion, sedimentation, erosion, succession, habitat restoration</li> <li>• Schoolyard habitat analysis</li> <li>• Green career pathways</li> <li>• Energy conservation and efficiency</li> <li>• Carbon Footprint/Ecological Footprint</li> <li>• Climate Change</li> <li>• Improved water quality, efficiency, and conservation</li> <li>• Watersheds, wetlands, or oceans</li> <li>• Reduced waste production, improved recycling and composting programs</li> <li>• Use of alternative transportation to, during and from school</li> <li>• Key relationships between dynamic environmental, energy and human systems</li> <li>• Biodiversity concepts: Virginia threatened and endangered species, native and nonnative species, endemic species and keystone species</li> <li>• Natural Resources conservation</li> <li>• The relationship between the environment, society, and economics</li> <li>• How actions taken within the community affect people and the environment locally and globally</li> <li>• Conservation policies</li> <li>• Mitigation</li> <li>• Food production</li> <li>• Life cycles</li> </ul>	<p><u>DWR State-wide Programs:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NASP Program</li> <li>• Hunter Education courses</li> <li>• Boating safety courses</li> <li>• Integrated Project WILD curricula</li> <li>• Angling in the classroom- Backyard Bass, Angling Education</li> </ul> <p><u>Environmental Literacy Programs supported by DOE:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed the Environmental Literacy Indicator Tool (ELIT) survey- ask your science supervisor, this survey is only available every other year (2024, 2026, etc). Please include a screenshot or other documentation when submitting.</li> <li>• Completed a Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience (in or outside of Chesapeake Bay watershed)</li> <li>• Environmental Literacy professional development for majority of staff, not just science teachers</li> </ul> <p><u>Additional Opportunities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in Citizen Science programs</li> <li>• Partnerships with community environmental/sustainable organizations. May include a letter of support by partners.</li> <li>• Creation/maintenance of a schoolyard habitat (outdoor classroom, native plant pollinator garden, natural play areas, rain garden, wildlife observation areas). This could also include identifying and labeling trees/plants in the school grounds.</li> <li>• Field trip to one of DWR's Birding and Wildlife Viewing Trails site or Wildlife Management Areas</li> <li>• Other Meaningful Field Experiences (hikes, field trips, etc that support authentic learning about Virginia's environment)</li> <li>• Other state agency run programs: Adopt-A-Highway, Project Learning Tree, Project WET, AG in the Classroom</li> </ul>

\*many topics taken from the [VDOE Foundational Concepts for Environmental Literacy, Responsible Citizenship, and Career Readiness K-12](#) document