Data in Action: Applying Industry Survey Data to Influence Decision Making

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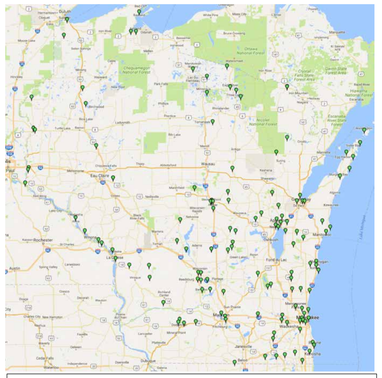
Introduction

Environmental Education (EE) organizations need solid data to inform decision making and programming. The closer that data reflects the local context of the industry, the more educators can effectively respond to current trends. Two state-wide surveys of EE related organizations in Wisconsin inform the broader EE field about the status and needs of organizations to understand available resources and gaps in programmatic capacity. Answers to these questions allow us to fill such gaps, take advantage of available resources and increase our collective impact.

Goals:

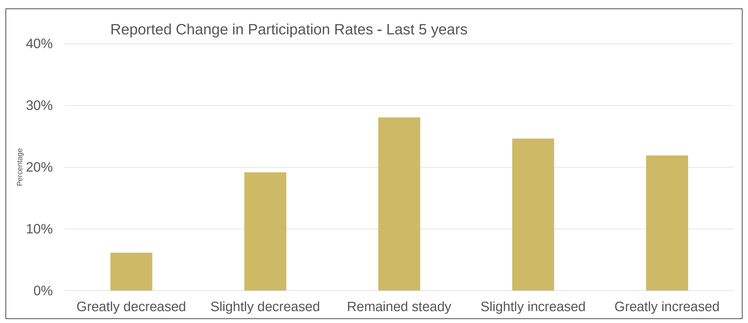
- Investigate the current status of Environmental Education (EE) throughout Wisconsin
- Identify the different needs of these organizations in various focus areas
- Assess gaps in programmatic capacity



160 organizations responded to the 2014 survey and 161 organizations responded to the 2015 survey.

Participation Rates

In general, five year participation rates at these organizations stayed steady or increased. University Programs experienced the greatest increase, with 40% greatly increasing their participation. State, City or County run programs experienced decreases in participation. The self reported rationales are laid out below. This snapshot of the industry is useful for program comparison as well as performance.



Factors encouraging increased participation

- Increased awareness, marketing and outreach
- Increased grant funding
- Increase in targeting intentional partnerships/relationships

Factors affecting decreased participation:

- Change in school focus and budgets
- Increased costs
- Reduced budgets and staffing capacity

Residential Informal Science Education (ISE)

Economic Impact

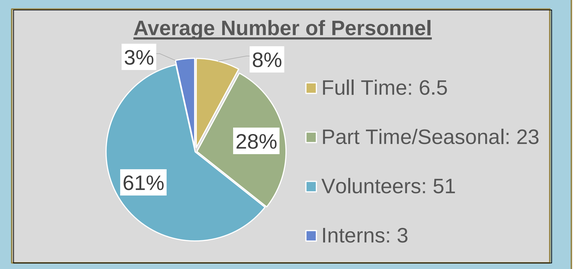
Total Annual Operating Budget	%
$0 - $100,000	20.6%
$100,000 - $250,000	5.9%
$250,000 - $500,000	26.5%
$500,000 - $1,000,000	23.5%
$1,000,000 - $1,225,000	11.8%
$1,225,000 - $1,500,000	2.9%
$1,500,000 or more	8.8%

N=34 Organizations

42,047
Average number of Annual General Visitors

4,776
Average number of Annual PK – 12 Participation Days

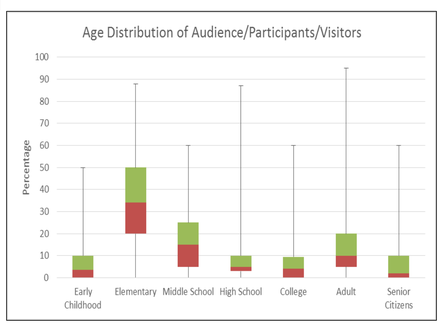
Of the 160 EE organizations in the state, 34 can be considered informal science education centers with residential capacity. This class of EE organization deliver day, overnight and outreach programming while generally maintaining program equipment, staff and facilities. These organizations are also hybrids of what a traditional nature center would offer while also having capacities similar to a camp. These organizations draw participants locally, but also regionally to impact youth, adults, and community organizations.



Recording ethnicity and age demographic information of visitors not only informs each Environmental Education organization about their own outreach efforts; when applied statewide can provide a data set used to better understand parity with census data in the state. This data can be further isolated by region or zip code(s).

Ethnicity	Average Percentage (±SD)
African American/Black	10.5% (±15.7)
Asian/Pacific Islander	3.0% (±5.0)
Hispanic/Latino	7.2% (±7.9)
Native American/First Nations	2.6% (±4.4)
White/Non-Hispanic	73.3% (±23.8)
Other	1.4% (±5.5)
Unknown	1.9% (±4.1)

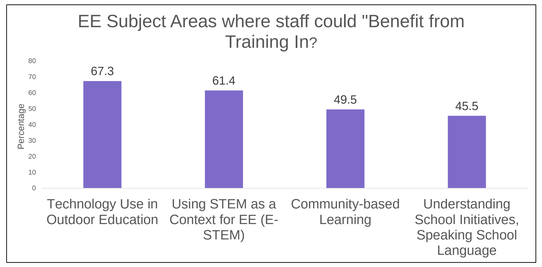
Certainly, more could be done to increase the diversity of participation through focused intentional partnerships with other organizations, garnering community support, and expanding programs to include multi-generational concepts.

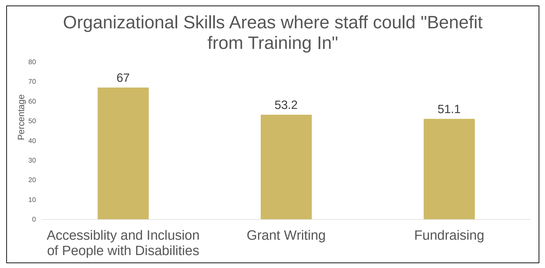


Professional Development Needs

To increase collective impact, and to initiate responses to current trends, professional development of staff is paramount. Adequately trained staff are able to respond more effectively to participant needs and wants, which allows for expansion of programs and participant demographics.

In addition to identifying professional development and staffing needs, organizations also identified those training areas they would be able to lead. This analysis allows for the development of connections and partnerships; ensuring a statewide environmental education network advancing the field as a whole.

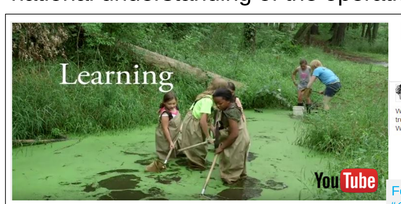




Gaps were identified between areas where staff could “benefit from training in” and “staff could lead training in”. Major subject areas that responders could lead trainings include natural history, water quality and plant ecology. Organizational skills where respondents could lead trainings include participant management, interpretive skills and program development.

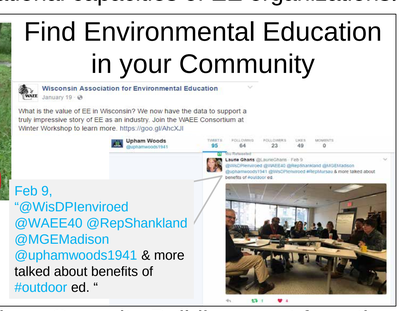
Implications

Survey results have helped identify EE organizations in WI as a statewide industry, raising awareness of the large number of jobs and economic impact the EE centers influence. The information that was collected in the surveys is being used to facilitate communication, collaboration, professional development, and outreach services and to increase the quality and quantity of EE in Wisconsin. Results from the surveys are already having positive impacts for WI EE organizations and can be applied to other organizations, states, and regions. The survey questions can also be used in additional studies in other regions to expand the national understanding of the operational capacities of EE organizations.



Scan this code to view a video about Environmental Education efforts throughout Wisconsin. Or search using the short link here: https://goo.gl/SGgMYI

Find Environmental Education in your Community



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http://fyi.uwex.edu/environmentaleducation/ or http://www.waee.dreamhosters.com/