



Leadership Clinics Revolutionize Environmental Education Conference Design

by Michele Archie

Photo provided by NEEAP



Y. Armando Nieto gathers information for his California team during a session at the 2003 National Leadership Clinic.

“The only real training for leadership is leadership.”
— Anthony Jay

Did you feel rejuvenated after the last conference you attended? Full of ideas, commitments, and practical ways of accomplishing them? Enriched by new and deepened relationships that you will draw on far into the future?

No? Then that event probably was not a Leadership Clinic.

Leadership Clinics evolved from a practical need to bring environmental education leaders together to learn about new developments in the field, share ideas with each other, strengthen state-level teams, and create action plans. That need was met with the considerable creativity of a core group of environmental educators committed to breaking the “meeting mold” and crafting a fresh approach to conference design.

Origins and Underpinnings

“When what you are doing isn’t working, you tend to do more of the same and with greater intensity.”

— Dr. Bill Maynard

In 1995, the National Environmental Education Advancement Project (NEEAP) began a program called EE 2000 to build state capacity for comprehensive environmental education programs—the essential infrastructure for developing an environmentally literate public. Abby Ruskey, former NEEAP co-director, reflected, “Early on, we realized we needed to bring state and national ‘change agents’ together as teams to build state capacity. Leadership Clinics were designed as multiple-day, gatherings that provided a

Facilitator Nan Buckardt literally walks through the wall-sized agenda during the 2005 Leadership Clinic Design Workshop.



It Doesn't Take Long to Notice

When you walk into the room for the introductory session of a Leadership Clinic you may be caught off guard. There are colorfully decorated tables with placards listing team names. There are goodies on the table, some of which you know what to do with and others you aren't sure about. You notice one whole wall is covered by a graphically displayed agenda that lists the time and names of sessions. Some sessions you are familiar with; sessions called Heads Together, Open Space and Share Fair pique your curiosity.

As you move through the clinic you discover quickly that a Leadership Clinic is not your run-of-the-mill conference. Conferences are about individuals. Clinics focus on teams of people gathered for a common purpose, a shared goal. Throughout the clinic teams work together, attending sessions specially designed to help them move forward on a project—a project that helps to build the capacity to strengthen environmental education back home.

Clinics don't happen by accident. The planning team involves participants right from the start. After being selected through an application process, teams give input several times. The final agenda is a mix of interactivity, playfulness, serious discussion, reflection, and action planning based on the needs of the participating teams.

During the final session you realize that you've been through an amazing experience. You feel satisfied, energized, and exhausted all at once. But most of all, you know that this experience will help you make a difference back home.

highly supportive environment for planning, networking and professional development.”

In 1996, 110 participants from the United States and Canada gathered in Tomahawk, Wisconsin, for the first Leadership Clinic, launched by NEEAP, the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE), and other partners participating in the Environmental Education and Training Partnership (EETAP).¹ “The energy of the conference spilled over into the hallways and foyers, and we knew we were on to something,” Ruskey observed. “The approach has been evolving ever since. In 2001, we published a manual for designing and planning Leadership Clinics, but the truth is that every group that has planned a clinic has come up with a twist on the model or added something entirely new. Over the years, the result has been a truly innovative approach to conference design.”

Kathleen MacKinnon, the U.S. EPA Project Officer who oversees the EETAP Program which funded the Leadership Clinics, calls the clinics a “phenomenal

¹ EETAP is a consortium of organizations that deliver environmental education training and support to education professionals. EETAP is based at the UW-Stevens Point College of Natural Resources. It is funded by U.S. EPA's Office of Environmental Education. For more information about EETAP visit www.eetap.org.

success.” MacKinnon attended the first four National Clinics and helped plan three of them. She, too, has seen the clinics evolve: “The first clinic was a more traditional sit-and-listen approach with break-out sessions and team planning time. By the third clinic, the model had evolved into something truly revolutionary. That clinic was completely participant-driven, team- and results-oriented, and built around the concept that everyone had something to give and something to learn from one another. People couldn’t wait to get home to apply what they had learned.”

Abby Ruskey explained that the clinic model is, first and foremost, transformative, designed to change how participants see themselves and act as leaders: “But this isn’t leadership theory 101. It’s applied leadership. Ultimately, we’re focused on the development of the skills, tools, plans, support, and commitment needed to bring about environmental literacy.”

Ask participants about the value of the event, and you are not likely to hear a lot of talk about leadership development. Instead, you will probably hear about the ability to make intense progress on a practical project; focused and helpful input from people who have “been there before”; and relationships that will last long after the conference is over.

Photo provided by NEEAP



Teams and resource people share their “gives” and “gains” with each other during the 2005 National Leadership Clinic Share Fair.

A Tough Task

Briefly describing a Leadership Clinic is a tough task. But the following dictionary definition just might do it. Process: “a designed sequence of operations or events, using expertise and other resources, which produces some outcome.”

Each clinic agenda is carefully designed to include processes that build teams, offer interaction among participants, and even provide space for individual reflection. Each clinic has its unique combination of sessions—like Share Fair, Heads Together, and Open Space—that promote open thinking and growth.

Share Fair, just as the name suggests, gives teams the chance to share their successes and challenges. Collaboratively designed posters help spark conversations about shared experiences and questions, which may lead to a new way of approaching an issue.

Heads Together is a powerful problem-solving strategy that pairs teams to review particular challenges. Issues are dissected and looked at from new perspectives to help the teams move forward in their action planning.

At any clinic there are unanswered questions and discussions that need to happen. An **Open Space** session gives participants an opportunity to put their individual questions “out there” for discussion.

No matter which processes are used in a Leadership Clinic, the results are powerful. Teams work through a participant-designed agenda and leave with an action plan to implement at home. Now that’s some process!

AGENDA AT A GLANCE
2005 EETAP Leadership Clinic



Time	Fri, June 17	Sat, June 18	Sun, June 19	Mon, June 20	Tues, June 21
6:30-8 am	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
8 am	Team Liaison Check-In	Team Liaison Check-In	Team Liaison Check-In	Team Liaison Check-In	Shuttles to Dulles Leave at 6 am and 8 am Remember to sign up for your shuttle! T R A V E L H O M E
Morning Sessions	8:30-10 am Orientation 10 am Break 10:30 am-Noon Team Planning I	8:30 am-Noon Making a Commitment to Diverse Members 10 am Break	8:30-10:30 am PD Workshops 10:30 am Break 11 am-Noon Team Planning IV	8:30-10 am Heads Together 10 am Break 10:30 am-Noon Team Planning VI	
Noon	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	
Afternoon Sessions	1-3:30 pm Resource Fair 2:30 pm Break 3:30-5:30 pm Team Planning II	1-2:30 pm Making a Commitment to Diverse Members (cont) 2:30 pm Break 3-4 pm Team Planning III 4 pm-on R ³	1-3 pm PD Workshops 3 pm Break 3:30-5 pm Team Planning V 5:30-8 pm National Leaders Appreciation Reception and Dinner	1-2:30 pm Team Planning VI (cont) 2:30 pm Break 3-5 pm Closing Dinner	
6:00 pm	Dinner	Dinner		Dinner	
Evening	ee Harmony	R ³	R ³	R ³	



Day One
Friday, June 17

- 6:30 - 8:30 am BREAKFAST (Dining Room)
- 8:00 - 8:25 am **Team Liaison Check-In** (205 Instructional East – (IE))
- 8:30 - 10:00 am **Whole Group Orientation** (201 IE)
- Join Clinic organizers as you start connecting your paths in EE. Learn more about the Leadership Clinic, discover the tools and materials needed as you explore your team goals and objectives, while searching for your own connections.
- 10:00 am BREAK (Level One IE)
- 10:30 am - Noon **Team Planning Session I** (Breakout Rooms: 201 IE, 205 IE, 109 IE, 118 IE, 141IE, Common Areas throughout the campus)
- Team Planning Sessions will provide your team with time for self-guided learning and self-organized planning. Equipped with flipcharts, markers and lots of great spaces to meet, your team can create and revise an Action Plan, debrief from and prepare for clinic sessions, and meet with Resource People and other teams.
- Noon LUNCH (Dining Room)
- 1:00 - 3:30 pm **Resource Fair** (201 IE) (BREAK included)
- The Resource Fair will give you insights to the programs being implemented in the eight EETAP States for the last five years and give your team a chance to express its needs and strengths in an imaginative way. The Leadership Clinic principle "Everyone has something to give. Everyone has something to gain." truly applies to this session.
- 3:30 - 5:30 pm **Team Planning Session II** (Breakout Rooms)
- 5:30 - 7:00 pm DINNER (Dining Room) – don't eat dessert...see ee|Harmony
- 7:30 - 8:30 pm **ee|Harmony** (Roosevelt Room)
- A Leadership Clinic provides many opportunities to network on a professional level, but did you ever want to find out who your colleagues really are? This relaxed evening will give us all a chance to get to know each other in a fun and different way. There will be dessert...and the Lounge is only a few steps away.

Shown here are the 2005 Leadership Clinic Agenda At-A-Glance and the narrative agenda of the first full day of that clinic.

Ali Goulstone Sweeney, executive director of the Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education, attended the 2005 national Leadership Clinic in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. “Personally and professionally,” she noted, “I found value in developing relationships with so many different people in just a week. I have called on those connections many times since the clinic. Being able to bring a team to work solely on a strategic plan for the Alliance was incredibly valuable. There was no e-mail or phone to answer, and we were able to concentrate for many days on this large project. It was uplifting, just being around other people who have worked on—or are working on—similar problems and projects.”



Team members from Colorado discuss what they've gained from other teams and resource people during the Share Fair at the 2005 National Leadership Clinic.

Clinics in Practice

“Leadership is practiced not so much in words as in attitudes and actions.”

— Harold Geneen

Since the first clinic in 1996, there have been eight more national Leadership Clinics, a handful of regional clinics, over a dozen state clinics, and a few held at the local level. In 2006, the Canadian Network for Environmental Education and Communication will hold its first national Leadership Clinic. In addition, participants have applied their experience to other meetings and events. Examples include an Arizona statewide summit on environmental literacy with an emphasis on cultural diversity, a youth environmental Leadership Clinic in California, and a series of local-level clinics throughout Washington that was piloted this spring.

Although each one is a unique event, Leadership Clinics share an emphasis on four essential components that reinforce each other:

- 1) Networking and building relationships;
- 2) Professional development and training;
- 3) Developing action plans; and
- 4) Evaluating progress.

In addition, four fundamentals, which are summarized from the clinic’s principles and characteristics (see next page), define the clinic approach and distinguish the clinic model from traditional conference design. They are:

The clinics began with a conviction that conferences and meetings could be designed to fully meet the needs of the people who take part in them.

Leadership Clinic Principles

Everyone has something to give. Everyone has something to gain.

Self-managing teams can chart their own learning.

Model the process in order to widen the circle.

Play and art promote learning and productivity.

There is enough expertise in the room to change the world.

Event design is itself a collective, community building process.

1

Participant-driven

“I start with the premise that the function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers.”

— Ralph Nader

The clinics began with a conviction that conferences and meetings could be designed to fully meet the needs of the people who take part in them. That conviction remains central. Clinic planning committees include participants, and results from participant surveys are used to drive agenda design. In many Leadership

Clinics, participants are invited to submit workshop proposals, as well as to select which workshops will be presented.

In Brenda Metcalf’s experience of workshops and conferences, “you spend most of your time listening to what other people want to tell you.” In contrast, Metcalf, who directs the Environmental Education Council of Ohio, said planners for Ohio’s statewide Leadership Clinic “involved our twelve regional directors from the beginning. We sent out questionnaires to all the teams to gauge their knowledge, interests, and ideas about the future of environmental education in their region. Our clinic was very much driven by the attendees and what they thought was important.”

“I was asked to co-lead a professional development session. I’m young, but by doing good work at that session, people saw me as a leader, and then I did too.”

- Leadership Clinic participant

Leadership Clinic Characteristics

A clinic’s four-fold purpose is to provide opportunities for networking, professional development, action planning and evaluation.

Large and small group processes are interwoven throughout each clinic.

A clinic is designed primarily to serve teams of participants.

Each team that participates in a clinic produces and commits to implementing its own action plan.

No two teams experience the clinic alike.

No two clinics are alike.

Clinics are also designed with what Abby Ruskey calls a “supportive structure” that allows plenty of flexibility for attendees to tailor each day’s agenda to meet their needs. “Everything about a clinic says to participants, ‘Who you are and what you do is very important, and we are here to support your mission.’”

2 Team-focused

“In organizations, real power and energy is generated through relationships. The patterns of relationships and the capacities to form them are more important than tasks, functions, roles, and positions.”

— Margaret Wheatley,
Leadership and the New Science

A team focus distinguishes Leadership Clinics from most other conferences. Gus Medina, project manager for the EETAP, explained: “Participants come to clinics as part of a team, typically three to six individuals from the same geographic area. The team approach broadens leadership back home. Because the responsibility does not all ride on one person, the team approach improves the likelihood of follow-through on the plans that were made at the clinic.”

Each team comes prepared with a project or task that will focus their work over the course of the two-to-four day gathering. Much of the clinic is devoted to team planning sessions. During these sessions, teams can draw on a variety of types of support, including the assistance of facilitators to guide their work, resource people to share expertise, and the experience of teams from other areas. Each team leaves the clinic having produced, and being committed to implementing, its own action plan.

Brenda Metcalf noted that some teams may have worked together for a long time, while others may have just formed. “Building relationships among team members is a huge benefit of the clinics. It’s fun to be part of the evolving chemistry. Some teams struggle as they learn how to work together well, and draw on clinic resource people and facilitators as much to help them do that as to consult on the content of their plans.”

Jesús Garcia, part of the Arizona team that attended the 2005 national Leadership Clinic, believes one of the clinic’s strongest features is that “each team uses the time to suit its own needs and its own situation.”

Photo provided by NEEAP



The California team made some incredible strides in communication and planning at the 2003 National Leadership Clinic.

Creative expression is woven throughout, up to the end when “creative report-outs” bring collective laughter and amazement at the teams’ progress.

3 Varied formats for interaction and expression

“I used to think that running an organization was equivalent to conducting a symphony orchestra. But I don’t think that’s quite it; it’s more like jazz. There is more improvisation.”

—Warren Bennis

Although the clinics emphasize team planning, participants also come together in large-group sessions, one-on-one, and in multi-team meetings. These interactions provide fuel for each team’s work and offer opportunities for participants to gather, generate, and reflect on new ideas.

Leadership Clinics rely on activities that appeal to a range of learning styles. Hands-on activities follow audio-visual presentations. Workshop leaders use skits to orient participants to clinic tools and processes. Colorful, wall-sized murals depict the conference agenda and daily team progress. Creative expression is woven throughout, up to the end when “creative report-outs” bring collective laughter and amazement at the teams’ progress.

Photo provided by NEEAP



A national team representing Canada uses silent creative expression to visually describe their journey as a team at the 2005 National Leadership Clinic.



Participants from Ohio, California, New Mexico and Oklahoma discuss diversity strategies at the 2003 National Leadership Clinic.

4 Building a shared learning community among leaders

Abby Ruskey believes that one of the defining characteristics of the Leadership Clinics is that they “engage people long before the clinic starts, and keep them engaged long after. People who attend are leaders, becoming part of a team that commits to work together on a shared project or goal. These teams stick together during the course of the clinic and most members keep working and learning together after they go home.”

In some clinics, participants create a list of follow-up steps they commit to taking once they return home. Three months after a regional clinic in Nebraska, organizers mailed copies of these lists to participants as a reminder of the commitments they had made to themselves and their teams.

Ruskey noted that clinic planners are a central part of the learning community that Leadership Clinics inspire. Reflecting on a recent experience designing a community clinic, she observed, “The people who put on that event built their own leadership skills and capacity, not to mention pride in what they helped accomplish. Almost every person on that planning group is now talking with their employers about supporting their continued involvement in making the community’s vision and plans a reality.”

Clinics have been instrumental in a range of initiatives that have built increased capacity for implementing comprehensive environmental education programs.

Echoing a sentiment common among clinic participants, Rosetta Fackler noted that the interactive, engaging, results-focused clinics provide a unique environment “that honors our need and desire to work together creatively while accomplishing our organizational goals.”

Leadership in Action

“Unless commitment is made, there are only promises and hopes...no plans.”

— Peter Drucker

“**A**t our Ohio Leadership Clinic,” Brenda Metcalf recalled, “a couple of team members were moved to tears because of how much they were able to accomplish in just two days.”

Progress made during Leadership Clinics has translated into significant steps forward for state- and community-level environmental education. Nan Buckardt, who attended the first Leadership Clinics as an Illinois team participant, has seen that forward motion firsthand as her involvement expanded to include planning and facilitating National Clinics. “It is absolutely amazing to see the projects that have evolved out of Leadership Clinics. Teams have taken their ideas and plans back to their states and made huge strides in building standards and professionalism in the field, and providing the training and information that help translate that work into better environmental education.”

Clinics have been instrumental in a range of initiatives that have built increased capacity for implementing comprehensive environmental education programs. These initiatives include the adoption of environmental education learner and materials guidelines, assessments, pre-service teacher training, comprehensive state environmental education plans, searchable resource databases,

Photo provided by NEEAP



Participants at the 2003 National Leadership Clinic share and discuss issues during Open Space.

The Future of the Clinics

From 1995 to 2005, NEEAP spearheaded the development and implementation of Leadership Clinics with support from EETAP, which is funded by the U.S. EPA's Office of Environmental Education. Partially because of changed funding priorities for EETAP, NEEAP closed its doors at the end of 2005.

In a 50-state survey, Leadership Clinics were overwhelmingly identified—by respondents from 22 states—as the most instrumental tool in building capacity for comprehensive environmental education programs. Abby Ruskey noted, “These results underscore the value of the clinics, and to me, make it even more important that we move the clinics forward.”

To that end Abby Ruskey plans to create a new institute that would provide continued training, consulting, and advice. “Leadership Clinics have been great for environmental education, and it’s important that they continue to be used to serve the field and other professions,” Ruskey observed. “Every time I talk with someone new about the clinic model I’m struck by how broadly applicable this could be beyond the field of EE.”

True to the Leadership Clinic principle, “Model the process to widen the circle,” you are invited to participate.

environmental educator certification programs, regional training networks, and programs aimed at increasing cultural and professional diversity in the field.

A central principle of the clinics is that modeling the participant-driven process will help teams expand the circle of individuals and groups involved in turning teams’ plans into reality. Participants seem to have gotten this message, incorporating clinic principles into meetings back home, planning their own clinics, and thinking differently about who needs to be involved, and when and how.

An example: At the 2005 National Clinic, the Arizona team project was to plan what Jesús Garcia calls, “our biggest project ever, the Arizona Crossroads Summit.” Bringing together leaders from business, education, government, industry, and other sectors, the Summit’s aim was to find innovative approaches for advancing environmental literacy and addressing specific economic, environmental, and educational challenges.

“The summit’s format mirrored the Leadership Clinic,” Garcia explained, “drawing on the insights and abilities of an incredibly diverse group of entities throughout our state. We could not have pulled together the Summit without all the advice we got from other environmental education organizations and without our own experience at the National Leadership Clinic.”

Every group that has planned a clinic has come up with a twist on the model or added something entirely new. Over the years, the result has been a truly innovative approach to conference design.

- Abby Ruskey

Rosetta Fackler, who was part of the Kentucky team at the 2005 national Leadership Clinic, believes making clinics available to more environmental educators would result in “an incredible leap forward for the field.” Echoing a sentiment common among clinic participants, she noted that the interactive, engaging, results-focused clinics provide a unique environment “that honors our need and desire to work together creatively while accomplishing our organizational goals.” That’s no ordinary conference.

Learning More about Leadership Clinics



For information about Leadership Clinics, Leadership Clinic design workshops, support in planning a clinic, or to participate in crafting the next steps for the Leadership Clinics contact:



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Links

To learn more about Leadership Clinics visit the following links:

Leadership Clinics: <http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/neeap/programs/LC/index.htm>

The 2005 EETAP Leadership Clinic Intranet Site: <http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/neeap/Intranet/LC2005/index.htm>

2005 Leadership Clinic Design Workshop: <http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/neeap/programs/LCDW/index.html>

Publication

Following is a resource for designing Leadership Clinics. It is available through participating in a Leadership Clinic Design Workshop. It is also available to teams that are planning a Leadership Clinic. Please contact EETAP for details and application.

Kowalski, A., Ruskey, A., & Wade, K. (2001). *The Leadership Clinic Manual: Tools for Transforming Conference Design*. Stevens Point, WI: National Environmental Education Advancement Project.

