



California
AEOE

Association for Environmental & Outdoor Education

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Dear Environmental and Outdoor
Education Community,

Looking back over the past year, it's hard not to feel overcome with emotion. Hardly anything was what it used to be. We missed coming together in person to learn and play together. We mourned the loss of programs that were shuttered, or went into hibernation due to the pandemic. We raged, seeing our democracy attacked and the continued threats directed towards Black and brown people. We grieved over losses large and small.

Despite the hardship and frustration, the anxiety and the grief, we've also experienced profound joy. We (re)connected with the outdoors in full force. We demonstrated resilience, flexibility, adaptability, compassion. We leaned on our neighbors and friends,



deepening old relationships and discovering new ones. And while so much has changed, some things remain the same. The work that you do matters. Hearing stories of educators sharing their love for the natural world with their students, sparking curiosity and wonder even through the limitations of a screen, and then seeing the sparks and the joy as in-person learning and play resumed, it's been so inspiring. It has made us so proud to do this meaningful work alongside you.

Going into this next year, we are feeling hopeful. And even more important than that, we are feeling purposeful*. Environmental education and outdoor learning are more important than ever, and with our federal leadership giving climate change the attention it so desperately needs, along with the

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Environmental and Outdoor Education
(AEOE)**

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT, CONT.

momentum around outdoor learning and investments in green school infrastructure, we feel ready to take on the opportunities and challenges to come and galvanized to take collective action towards our vision, of every young person living in a healthy community with access to meaningful learning experiences outdoors. On our leadership team, we have been asking important questions about our role as a convener and how we can better represent and serve the rich diversity of programs and practitioners across the state. We're exploring new program offerings, and building on the momentum from a successful pilot year

of the Environmental Educator Certification Program, an effort that we believe will elevate the professionalism of our field while helping to advance the careers of program participants. Above all, we are committed to using environmental and outdoor education as a tool to create lasting environmental change. We are so glad we are in this work together.

In community,
Estrella Risinger
AEOE Executive Director

**Many thanks to AEOE's Howard Bell Award winner Miho Aida for reminding us of this important distinction. If you missed the award ceremony last spring, you can still learn about her inspiring work at aeoe.org/news*



Estrella Risinger

*Executive Director, California Association
for Environmental and Outdoor Education*



BOARD PRESIDENT AND CHAIR'S STATEMENT

Dear AEOE members and EE community,

For nine years it was my great honor to be the President and Board Chair of AEOE. With gratitude and pride for all our team has accomplished, I am now stepping back from the leadership team.

My gratitude begins with the founders of AEOE back in 1954. From the foundation that previous board members laid, we have been able to accomplish so much. During my tenure, I served with countless board members, some who dedicated multiple terms to advance our mission. To all of you, thank you for your dedication in supporting EE in California. Together we accomplished so much, from broadening and strengthening our mission, launching a certification program, hosting dozens of amazing conferences and professional development seasons, reviving and expanding the program leaders group, and of course hiring AEOE's first ever executive director--the incredibly talented and thoughtful Estrella Risinger.

Two outdoor education programs supported me during my volunteer tenure at AEOE, and without their support I wouldn't have been able to commit these last nine years to AEOE.

Sierra Outdoor School in Sonora took a big chance on a dreadlocked 25 year-old to run their internship program, and allowed me many hours of work time to dedicate to AEOE. NatureBridge, an incredible leader in the field, allowed me to expand my network and build a bigger vision of EE in California. Finally, my deepest gratitude and respect go to Tracey Weiss, AEOE's Vice-president. She was my confidant, coconspirator, thought partner, and biggest champion of advancing EE in California that I have ever had the pleasure to work with.

A big warm welcome to Ryan Mayeda, our new Board President and Chair. Ryan is a veteran of EE and has been a dedicated and thoughtful AEOE member and volunteer for nearly 10 years (the last four as a board member). I am thrilled to see him at the helm of such a great board, and look forward to seeing where the vision and leadership of Estrella and Ryan will take AEOE next. With much love and appreciation for all of you out there doing wonderful things in EE.

Reed Schneider

Outgoing Board President & Chair

Our Mission: To advance the impact of environmental and outdoor education in California.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Executive Officers

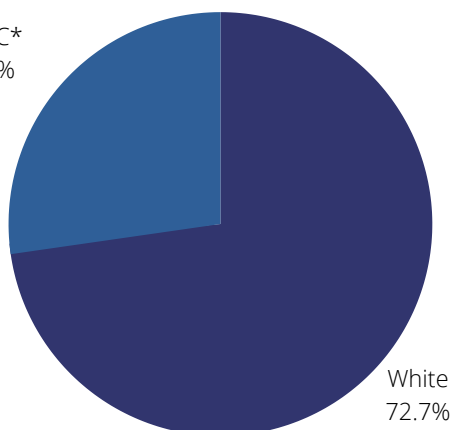
President & Chair
Reed Schneider

Vice-President
Tracey Weiss

Secretary
Katie Andersen

Treasurer
Andrew Boyd-Goodrich

BIPOC*
27.3%



White
72.7%

Board Members

Awards Chair
Kat Montgomery

Conferences Chair
Angie Kemsley

Membership & Outreach Chair
Sarah Foglesong

Professional Development Co-Chairs
Katie Andersen
Ryan Mayeda

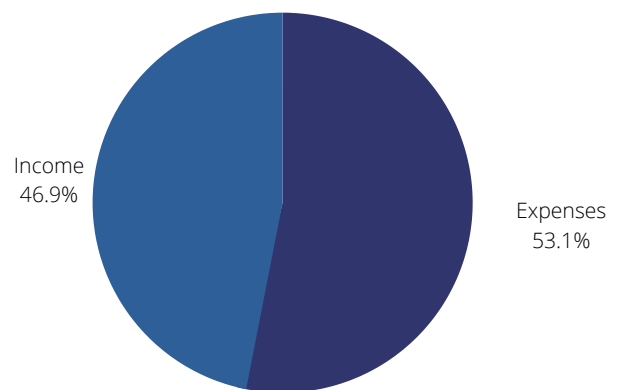
Members-At-Large
Blanca Hernández
Kelly Prendiville
Kimi Waite
Kori Donley

*BIPOC=Black, Indigenous, and/or Person of Color

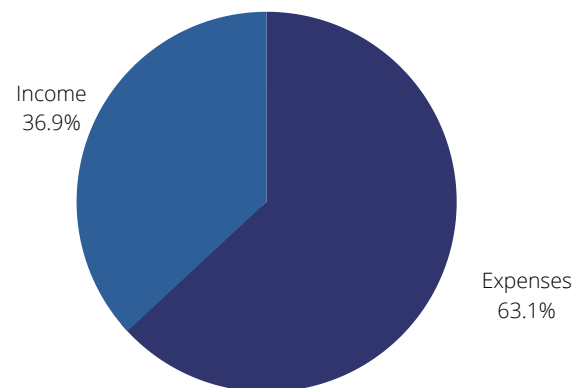


FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

In the midst of a full year of pandemic restrictions, the organization has been able to stay fiscally sound. Our long-term plan has been to intentionally reinvest our financial reserves to broaden the organization's strength, by budgeting deficits as we grow and expand. And it has worked! Our community stepped up to support us, as donations and grants grew. And the great success of the EECF program ensured that our mission-driven services remained financially viable. Our finances are not the measure of AEOE's success, and certainly not a measure of its reach and its impact. Yet healthy finances enable the organization to continue and even expand its impact, ensuring that more and more people have equitable access to our programs.



2020-2021 Fiscal Year Income to Expenses

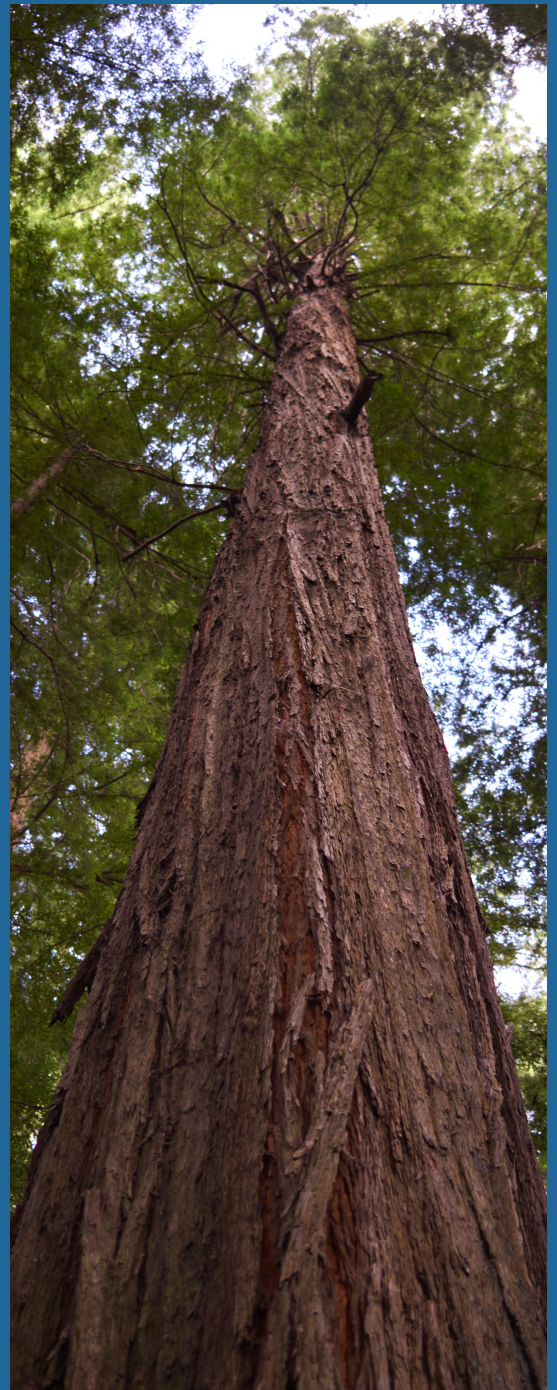


2019-2020 Fiscal Year Income to Expenses

PROFIT & LOSS STATEMENT

AEOE's fiscal year runs July 1 - June 30

	TOTAL	
	FY21	FY20
Income		
Contributions	\$42,102	\$19,054
Membership	\$9,795	\$11,119
Merchandise	\$0	\$70
Job Postings	\$2,175	\$2,400
Program Services	\$20,465	\$15,129
Square Income	\$0	\$903
Total Income	\$74,537	\$48,674
Expenses		
Admin	\$13,288	\$14,207
Cash Out	\$0	\$140
Insurance	\$2,364	\$3,046
Marketing	\$118	\$1,290
Newsletter	\$0	\$30
Payroll Expenses	\$66,160	\$50,027
Prof Networking	\$0	\$708
Professional Development	\$187	\$0
Program Expenses	\$2,032	\$11,583
Purchases	\$0	\$37
Taxes	\$25	\$0
Uncategorized Expense	\$135	\$120
Webmaster	\$0	\$1,975
Total Expenses	\$84,308	\$83,164
Net Operating Income	-\$9,771	-\$34,490



When AEOE made the decision to transition from an all volunteer-run organization to a staffed organization with a part-time Executive Director in 2019, the Board of Directors agreed to draw down reserve funds, with the likelihood that this would result in a negative variance in the budget for several years. As of June 30, 2021 the organization had an account balance of \$94,052; assuming other costs remain stable, this reserve will allow for a staffed position for 1-2 more years as the Executive Director collaborates with the Board of Directors to build the organization's capacity and explore alternative sources of revenue.



DONORS & FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTORS

We have so much gratitude for the many individuals, businesses, agencies, and organizations that contributed to AEOE's success this past year. We are grateful to have received COVID relief funding through the California Small Business COVID-19 Relief Grant and two rounds of federal PPP funds. Additional generous contributors include:

Businesses, agencies, and organizations:

Acorn Naturalists

Bay Area Lyme Foundation

Homelight

Ten Strands

The North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE)

Individuals (those listed donated \$50+):

Amy Brakeman

Andrew Boyd-Goodrich

Andrew Mayeda

Angela Kemsley

Blanca Hernández

Bobbie Mayer

Christel Chesney

Claudia Warkaske

David McDonald

Estrella Risinger

Jenny & Marty Rigby

Kat Montgomery

Katie Andersen

Kelly Prendiville

Kimi Waite

Kori Donley

Lee Tempkin

Michael Charnofsky

Micki Miller

Mike Richards

Patricia Simoni

Penny Miller

Reed Schneider

Ryan Mayeda

Sarah Foglesong

Tracey Weiss

We also want to acknowledge and appreciate the community members who supported us through smaller donations and via Amazon Smile, Farm Fresh to You, and Ralph's Community Rewards Program.

COMMITTEE REPORTS



AWARDS

We had a hugely successful launch of the Organization of the Year Award! We had more nominations than we could have ever hoped, and we gave the inaugural award to a very deserving organization, Youth Outside, now Justice Outside, at our Spring 2021 virtual statewide conference. Ten Strands and CAELI both partnered with us to launch this inaugural award.



Howard Bell Winner Miho Aida

The Howard Bell Award was bestowed upon Miho Aida at our Spring 2021 virtual statewide conference, recognizing her lifetime achievement and contributions to our field. She gave moving remarks about her journey into the profession and the importance of leading with purpose.

Everything Miho touches has helped people to connect with the natural world, champion the voices of members of marginalized communities, and pushed to hold leaders accountable for building a more just and inclusive movement. [Read more here.](#)



We awarded two Environmental Educator of the Year Awards in the fall of 2020. Our Northern California recipient was the incredible Rebekah "Redwood" Jones. In Southern California, the amazing Jeni Barajas earned recognition for her work.

All of this year's awards were given virtually. Our three awards ceremonies, all carried the gravity of our gratitude for the important work taking place to enhance environmental and outdoor education for all.





CONFERENCES

The Conferences Committee got creative this year by offering virtual experiences to bring our community together. While we missed seeing everyone in person, these virtual events provided the opportunity for people from throughout the state to get involved more often than if they had to travel in person. The Conferences Committee collaborated with the Professional Development Committee to offer virtual community open spaces, breakout sessions, and a virtual happy hour campfire with entertainment and community-building activities in the fall.

In lieu of an in-person statewide conference, the Conferences Committee put on a two-day virtual conference around the theme ***“Broadening our Perspectives to Strengthen Environmental Learning.”*** The conference featured a keynote address titled “Tamaayawut pi’ Tuukumit. Earth and Sky,” with a great conversation between Ami Admire and Dr. Stan Rodriguez as they shared their Indigenous knowledge and experiences.

Additional statewide conference highlights included roundtable presentations by the Environmental Educator Certification Program participants on their final action projects and a youth panel of environmental champions. The conference also included numerous workshops including:

- Tick Talk - Tips for Outdoor Educators to Teach Tick Bite and Lyme Disease Prevention
- Teaching Environmental Justice
- What Happens To Our Dirty Water After It Goes Down The Drain? Exploring environmental literacy using our wastewater system
- Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain
- Community Based Partner Network Toolkit
- Climate Solvers – Empowering students through a solutions-focused lens
- Cultivating Mindfulness in Education
- Thinking in Systems: Making Sense of the World with Cross-cutting Concepts from NGSS
- Lichen Explorations

Thank you to our conference sponsors for making the event possible!





MEMBERSHIP & OUTREACH

In our effort to be more inclusive and adopt equitable practices within our organization, we overhauled our organizational membership approach and implemented a tiered system. Previously AEOE offered a “one-size-fits-all” membership with one rate regardless of size or budget. This was changed and replaced with the categories small, medium, and large. The assumption was that there would likely be a correlation between an organization’s budget and the number of program or education staff that it employs. We recognize that this isn’t a perfect system, but attempts to address the range of resources available to differently sized organizations as well as the extent to which an organization or agency might take advantage of some of the benefits of membership. At the same time, we implemented a pandemic rate to acknowledge the hardships experienced

by many of our member organizations over the past year. The pandemic rate is far lower than the standard organizational member rates. We made the decision to offer this rate as an effort to keep our valued members within our community. The pandemic membership level will likely be phased out in early 2022. Additionally, we replaced the “Student/Intern” rate with “Assisted” in recognition of the financial impact of the pandemic on professionals in our field along with acknowledgement of systemic disadvantages that have impacted some more than others (in particular, individuals who identify as members of historically marginalized communities), regardless of job title. As with the pandemic rate, membership levels for individuals are self-selected based on a system of trust.



MEMBERSHIP & OUTREACH CONT.

Alongside the overhaul of AEOE's membership rates, we began exploring partnerships to expand member benefits, both limited and long-term. These included:

- Pro-deals through ExpertVoice – coming soon
- Film festival discount offered for limited period
- Three free spots to SF Presidio climate change course – limited time offering
- Viristar discount for adventure risk management courses

We continue to explore other incentives and benefits we can offer our members, in addition to discounts to professional development and events offered by AEOE, and unlimited job postings, which are available to organizational members. Current membership benefits can be found at <https://aeoe.org/Member-benefits> (*note: you must be logged in as a member to access this page*).

While we greatly value our members as the core of our community, we have expanded our communications efforts to better engage with those outside our existing network.

Ultimately, we know we can do a better job representing and serving the vast diversity of environmental and outdoor educational programs and providers across the state.

We expanded email communications to include nonmembers in an effort to increase event attendance and to bring new voices and perspectives into our larger community. Additionally, our social media communications were much more frequent and focused on amplifying a range of voices, perspectives, identities, and opportunities relevant to our field.





PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Professional Development Committee pivoted quickly, in collaboration with the Conferences Committee during the fall, to plan and facilitate virtual workshops on a variety of topics. PD events historically catered to the Program Leaders Group (formerly Environmental & Outdoor School Managers), but these workshops attracted individuals from a variety of work settings and roles. These virtual events had basically no environmental impact, reduced costs and participant fees, and helped us connect with our membership more frequently throughout the year.

In addition to targeted learning through virtual workshops, we offered regular opportunities for our community to come together across the state for connection, networking, and sharing of best practices.

In collaboration with the Executive Director and Conferences Committee, we planned virtual community open spaces, breakout sessions, and a virtual happy hour campfire with entertainment and community-building activities. 2020-2021 Virtual Workshops & Convenings included:

- SEL Training for Practitioners
- Mental Health - Pandemic Trauma Training
- Early Childhood Education in the Outdoors
- Inspiring Green Behavior Change w/ Remote Learning Activities
- Open Space & Virtual Campfire
- Winter Open Space Conversations
- Teaching to Outcomes
- Outdoor Learning Panel
- Assessing Connection to Nature (offered in collaboration with NAAEE)



EQUITY, INCLUSION, & DIVERSITY

This past year, AEOE recommitted to centering equity and inclusion in our work by formalizing this focus area in our current strategic plan. As part of our strategic objective to reach a wider audience to better represent and serve the diversity of programs and practitioners across the state, we will: **Develop and implement practices and policies in support of our commitment to equity and inclusion in AEOE's programs, outreach efforts, leadership, and organizational culture.** To prioritize and advance this effort, we established a working group comprised of staff, board, and valued community member Kris Pamintuan.

We started with establishing common language because having a shared understanding of terms makes it easier to define the values that will drive our organization's decisions around equity, inclusion, and diversity.

INCLUSION - Creating a sense of belonging through celebrating, honoring, and amplifying diverse perspectives, voices, values, and needs, especially from those who experience systemic barriers or disadvantages based on their identities.

EQUITY - Redistributing access and opportunity by disrupting systemic barriers and privileges that create disparities.

DIVERSITY - Valuing the differences among us, upon which we experience systemic advantages or encounter systemic barriers in access to opportunities and resources.

Additional efforts included implementing a procedure of collecting **board member demographics** on an annual basis, restructuring **organizational membership** with an equitable lens, and incorporating the **allocation of program scholarships** into our budgeting process.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

After several years of planning with support from a steering committee composed of environmental educational leaders across the state, AEOE launched a pilot of the Environmental Educator Certification Program (EECP). Certification is a public declaration that an individual meets a stringent level of requirements and has a specific set of skills, and enhances the legitimacy of the EE profession by building a uniform foundation in effectively teaching about the environment. Additionally, through participation in the certification program, educators increase their knowledge and skills, expand their professional network, enhance their resume, and make important connections across the state. The steering committee primarily

consulted the NAAEE's Guidelines for Excellence, along with state affiliate leaders with certification programs in other states, to develop the program.

After careful consideration due to the pandemic, AEOE leadership decided to launch the 2020-2021 program with the recognition that it might have low registration and that some requirements (such as active employment) might need to be adjusted. The inaugural year included 35 enrolled participants – far exceeding our expectations – and 7 program mentors, one of whom had to step down early in the program. Of the 35 participants that enrolled in the program, it is expected that between 28-31 (80-89%) will ultimately complete the requirements and achieve certification from the pilot year.

Program Testimonial: “While enrolled in AEOE’s Environmental Educator Certification Program, our staff developed the skills, experience, and self-confidence needed to use their own voice and creative ideas to help us reach new audiences and bring fresh perspectives to our curriculum. As a small organization this has been an incredibly helpful and cost-effective way to train our staff in contemporary and relevant naturalist techniques and pedagogy.”

– EECP Participant Supervisor

PARTNER REPORTS



FEATURED PARTNERS

North American Association for Environmental Education

AEOE staff and board continued to partner closely with the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) for a more just and sustainable future for all. As California's affiliate, AEOE operates as an independent organization with our own nonprofit status, but we benefit greatly by being part of a network of other state and regional organizations working to support environmental education in our respective areas. Over the past year, AEOE collaborated with this community to develop strategies to support our members impacted by COVID-19, including the co-generation of eeGuidance for Reopening Schools, a document intended to highlight environmental and outdoor education as key to equitably reopening schools. We also participated in monthly calls on relevant topics like fund development; advocacy; and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

AEOE also gained direct support from NAAEE to redo our website and communication platform, and launch the pilot of our Environmental Educator Certification Program. AEOE was also the recipient of COVID relief funds that were made available through NAAEE's partnership with the EPA and Pisces Foundation. We are grateful for our ongoing partnership and look forward to strengthening the network through continued participation and collaboration.



California Environmental Literacy Initiative

The California Environmental Literacy Initiative (CAELI), led by Ten Strands, works statewide with guidance from a leadership council to advance environmental literacy with a focus on access, equity, and cultural relevance for all of California's K–12 students. AEOE's Executive Director joined CAELI's leadership council, bringing the needs, priorities, and perspectives of our community to this important statewide effort. In addition to attending monthly meetings with leaders from a variety of settings with the shared commitment of advancing environmental literacy, AEOE contributed to the formation, and subsequent implementation, of a new leadership structure for the initiative. The intention is to engage a broader range of individuals with a diversity of both lived and professional experiences, better integrate equity and principles of designing to the margins throughout all strategic efforts, and to spread leadership opportunities throughout.

In addition to this work on the council, Ten Strands and CAELI partnered with AEOE to launch the Organization of the Year award, an effort to recognize, celebrate, and champion the amazing work being done to advance environmental literacy across the state by outstanding organizations. We appreciate their partnership and support!





SOCIAL MEDIA

AEOE made a concerted effort to engage with our community through social media as a means to foster connection, lift up the voices of our partners, educate our community on important issues related to our field, encourage enrollment in professional learning, and raise awareness of our brand. If you are active on social media, we hope you will follow and engage with us too!

See our top performing posts at right:



@caeoe **2.6K likes**



@caeoe **498 followers**



@association-for-environmental-and-outdoor-education-aeoe/

