

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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AEOE, Ten Strands, and the California Environmental Literacy Initiative Announce Friends of the Los Angeles River as the 2023 Organization of the Year

(Berkeley, Calif) [April 27, 2023] – California’s [Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education](#) (AEOE), [Ten Strands](#), and the [California Environmental Literacy Initiative](#) (CAELI) are pleased to award Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR) as the 2023 Environmental Education Organization of the Year. FoLAR’s mission is to build capacity for communities, students, and future leaders to advocate for nature, climate, and equity on the Los Angeles River. FoLAR’s innovative and culturally responsive approach to river restoration and community engagement has made it a national leader in supporting urban river revitalization, and a powerful force for positive change in the Los Angeles region and beyond. Additionally, members of their staff have contributed to numerous statewide initiatives such as the development of California’s *Blueprint for Environmental Literacy*, serving as past [California Regional Environmental Education Community \(CREEC\) Network Coordinator](#) for Region 11, contributing as a [CAELI Leadership Council](#) member, and serving as mentors for the [Environmental Educator Certification Program](#). FoLAR will be recognized at AEOE’s statewide conference in May.

AEOE’s executive director Estrella Risinger shared, “Friends of the Los Angeles River does incredible work in their community, the region, and across the state. The Organization of the Year Award recognizes an outstanding organization advancing the impact of environmental and outdoor education in California in a meaningful way by offering innovative programs, following research-based best practices, and promoting equitable access to environmental learning. FoLAR’s mission and programs embody these principles fully.”

“We’re thrilled to honor FoLAR with the Organization of the Year Award,” said Ten Strands CEO Karen Cowe. “FoLAR’s commitment to educating young learners about climate change and environmental justice through a deep understanding of the L.A. River gives us hope that the future of our world is in good hands.”

“We value FoLAR’s unique approach to teaching students about the L.A. river—from highlighting its Indigenous history to elevating the rich diversity of its surrounding communities,” said CAELI project director Andra Yeghoian. “FoLAR’s ability to bring multiple systems together—community, education, and workforce—catalyzes the impact they are having on the environmental education of students and families across Los Angeles.”

FoLAR connects Angelenos of all ages and all backgrounds to the fifty one-mile river that runs through the city’s many diverse communities. Their K–12 environmental education programs, year-round volunteering opportunities, cultural community events, and advocacy create opportunities to learn about, interact with, and co-create a climate-resilient future for the river. They advocate for nature and science-based solutions on the river that center equity and the collective well-being of L.A. communities.

One of FoLAR's key strengths is its commitment to engaging with diverse communities throughout the region in meaningful and culturally responsive ways. For example, the organization's river events and outreach programs are often co-designed with community members and partners to be inclusive and welcoming to individuals and groups from all backgrounds.

FoLAR education programs provide life-changing educational experiences that inspire curiosity for the L.A. River, a lifelong connection to the natural world, and environmental and civic action for the health and well-being of people and the planet. Their programs primarily serve students who meet the California Department of Education's LCAP metrics to identify schools of high need. Over 90 percent of their student base in 2022 had access to free or reduced lunch—an indicator for students living below the poverty line.

FoLAR currently offers a wide array of educational offerings. One of the many programs FoLAR hosts is their Fellows Program, designed to serve youth from communities underrepresented in STEM and Conservation in workforce development and youth development programming. In a year-long fellowship, thirty high school students are exposed to different careers in the environmental field by learning about the L.A. River, speaking with professionals, and partaking in the National Network for Ocean and Climate Change Interpretation Communication Training. Fellows also engage with nature through kayaking and camping and then complete a semester-long project-based learning experience. At the end of the fellowship, students present their findings to the public. All fellows receive a monetary stipend for their year of hard work.

FoLAR has also developed a number of innovative programs and initiatives that reflect a deep understanding of the unique cultural and historical significance of the L.A. River to the communities that live along its banks. These include programs that focus on the river's rich Indigenous history and the role of the river in shaping the cultural identity of the region's diverse communities. This type of work is made possible through their long-standing partnerships with Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples, The Tongva, Gabrielleno, and Chumash.

"FoLAR is truly honored to be recognized with this award," stated FoLAR's CEO Candice Dickens-Russell. "Environmental education is a critical part of our mission, and we are proud to be able to connect thousands of K-12 students in L.A. to the L.A. River. Many of the students that our education team serves do not have many other opportunities to connect with nature. We believe that making that connection creates meaningful changes in students' well-being, while also offering them the tools they'll need as future decision-makers on the river and leaders in our city."

Learn more about FoLAR's work at <https://folar.org>. Please join us in congratulating them as the 2023 Environmental Education Organization of the Year!

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About the Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (AEOE)

AEOE's mission is to advance the impact of environmental and outdoor education in California. For more than six decades, AEOE has served as the professional association for environmental and outdoor educators throughout the state. AEOE's work aims to convene program providers to build a diverse, equitable, and inclusive network of skilled practitioners; provide learning opportunities that are aligned with best practices and content relevant to our field; promote high-quality environmental education among the varied programs across the state; and advocate for all young people to experience meaningful learning opportunities outdoors. For more information, visit <http://aeoe.org>.

About Ten Strands

Ten Strands is a California-based nonprofit established in 2012. Their mission is to strengthen the partnerships and strategies that will bring climate and environmental literacy to all of California's TK-12 students. They operate with a small, diverse, and nimble staff and strategic partners throughout the state. Ten Strands utilizes the largest and most diverse institution in California—the public school system—to impact 58 county offices of education, more than 1,000 school districts, approximately 10,000 individual schools, over 300,000 teachers, and 5.8 million children. For more information, visit <http://tenstrands.org>.

About CAELI

The California Environmental Literacy Initiative (CAELI), led by Ten Strands, works statewide with guidance from a leadership council to create systems change in support of environmental literacy with a focus on access, equity, and cultural relevance for all students. For more information, visit <http://ca-eli.org>.



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