



Midwest EE Conference Evaluation
Report without Appendices

This document is part of the full evaluation report from the 2005 Midwest Environmental Education Conference. The full document is available from www.iowaee.org or the Iowa Conservation Education Council. The full report (73 pages) is available in three sections - the primary report (26 pages), the appendices (47 pages), and Appendix 6 Outcomes - Personal and Professional (7 pages).

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Iowa Department
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REAP Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP): Invest in Iowa, our outdoors, our heritage, our people. REAP is supported by the state of Iowa, providing funding to public and private partners for natural and cultural resource projects, including water quality, wildlife habitat, soil conservation, parks, trails, historic preservation and more."



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Executive Summary

Educators were highly inspired to take stewardship actions and were stimulated to think critically about information presented at a multi-state environmental education conference. 86% of participants responding to an outcomes evaluation six months after the conference named how they had incorporated new information into educational activities and made personal changes for themselves and their families. *Educational enhancement outcomes* included 1) tangible stewardship activities, 2) enhanced teaching methods and 3) improved resource networking. *Personal action outcomes* were 1) increased dedication and renewal 2) tangible stewardship activities and 3) expanded upon topics from the conference. Educators valued the inspiration and renewal time provided at the conference – it re-energized them to continue their individual and sometimes isolated environmental education efforts in classrooms and nature centers. Key components of the conference experience identified with professional networking were field trips and meals.

Program Context

The Midwest Environmental Education Conference (MEEC) is a multi-state conference of long-standing tradition between Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois and Iowa. The conference was held annually on a rotating basis between the state environmental education associations and has been marketed to, and attracted up to 250 teachers and naturalists during conferences in the late 1970's and late 1980's. The conference provides workshop learning sessions and keynote speakers of regional importance to environmental educators. Factors that are not well understood and are mostly speculative have changed the attendance patterns and interest in the conference and there was a short gap in years hosting. The conference in 2005 restarted the conference after a 2002 needs assessment renewed the commitment by the member states to recruit and promote it again if Iowa would serve as host. An advisory group with representatives from the four states was formed.

The Iowa Conservation Education Council (ICEC) agreed to undertake fiscal responsibility and host the conference. The ICEC Executive Director wrote three successful competitive proposals securing funding from the Iowa Department of Transportation for the conference field trips and conference expenses, the REAP Conservation Education Program for scholarships to Iowa participants and other conference expenses, and from Region 7 Environmental Protection Agency, (EPA) to produce conference planning guide templates and complete multi-tier evaluation for multi-state conferences. *Central to these funding proposals was evaluation, with a promise of devising and testing evaluation methods that looked at the outcomes or ways that participants use the information gained at an environmental education (EE) conference.*

The Iowa Conservation Education Council contracted with E Resources Group, Inc., a private educational evaluation firm with extensive experience in EE. Their scope of work was to carry out a variety of surveys and evaluations for the MEEC. Evaluation goals included determining the extent to which the conference helped educators continue teaching EE. Planners hoped educators would:

- be inspired and stimulated in critical thinking,
- adopt new curricula or methods that fit their teaching needs,
- incorporate information that is new to them,
- examine their personal knowledge of issues for accuracy and balance.

Conference planners invited compelling speakers with expertise and information about health and the environment, citizen stewardship, and they provided in-depth field training experiences for participants during the three-day conference.

Baseline measures of success from the EPA program logic model hinged on the outcomes reported from the six month survey. The criteria was from the responses received – 60% will have used conference-based information or activities in their educational efforts and 40% will have made a personal environmental or cultural change related to healthy communities and ecosystems. EPA required a particular logic model format presented in **Appendix 1**.

Conference Participation and Evaluation Strategy

The total conference registration was 193. There were 129 participants from Iowa, 14 from Minnesota, 7 from Wisconsin, 29 from Illinois, and 14 from other states. An unknown number of these registrations included presenters who did not stay for the full conference.

The evaluation strategy included finding logical points for gathering data from participants, as well as gathering different types of data other than the traditional MEEC forms which measured participants' approval of presenters, meals, and facilities. A combination of qualitative and quantitative measures was used at each data collection point for each survey, including certain demographic data. Methods were intended to be inexpensive and uncomplicated so future conference planners could implement similar techniques. Not all evaluation methods were intended to be used each year in the future unless another multi-tier evaluation was desired. Each instrument was delivered to the appropriate participants with the goal of sampling the full population of participants. Opportunities for data collection included:

Registration Survey – this was sent by mail with registration confirmation materials and returned by mail or at the conference by participants. This form asked for participants' personal and professional goals for the conference and contained demographic information and identifiers.

Field Trip Survey – seven field trips were held, the forms were distributed by trip leaders. This form was anonymous and asked for feedback specific to the execution of the field trip. Participants could choose only one field trip.

After Conference Survey – this was included in conference packets and periodic reminders were given to notice that this form was different than they'd experienced and to follow directions carefully. It was anonymous and did not capture demographic information. This form included critical incident information about features of the conference, measures for the keynote speakers and concurrent session presenters, food, and facilities and picked up overall written comments.

Phone Survey, 6 month follow-up – Iowa scholarship recipients were put into this group because they had agreed to participate in the follow-up evaluation as part of their requirement for receiving the scholarship. Leaders from other states were offered the set of survey questions in order to survey their participants as part of the multi-state conference agreement.

E-mail Survey, 6 month follow-up – the remaining Iowa participants were surveyed using Survey Monkey’s free service on the Internet. Leaders from other states were offered the set of survey questions with some assistance in using Survey Monkey if needed.

Metaevaluation – this is a checklist adapted and used by the contracted evaluator and provided to ICEC as an evaluation of the evaluation.

SURVEY RESULTS

Registration Survey

76 forms completed – unknown number sent as it was possible for people to register as walk-ins and not receive a form.

Field Trip Surveys

71 registered and 62 forms returned (87%) included:

	registered participants	returned forms
Canoeing	(16)	10
Biking	(3)	5
Nature centers	(11)	10
Wild Edible plants	(25)	25
Alternative energy	(8)	6
Landfill/Lehigh Cement	(4)	3
Fossils	(4)	3

After Conference Survey

89 forms returned (46% of total registration)

50 correctly filled out the keynote and concurrent session portions (26% of total registration, 56% of returned forms)

89 either correctly filled out the food and facilities question or left it blank.

Phone Survey

52 calls were completed out of 75 with a reasonable number of attempts to call back and locate or correct phone numbers. (69%)

E-mail Survey

21 responses out of 36 sent, 11 addresses bounced and could not be corrected reducing the effective number reached to 25. (84%)

Baseline Measure of Success for EPA

We reached 73 respondents out of 100 lowans in the surveys conducted six months after the conference. The time frame reflects the fact that outcomes of an event can take time to develop. Twenty-nine lowans were omitted from the lists due to our knowledge of their status as presenters or vendors who did not participate in the full conference, or for whom we lacked accurate contact information. The other state conference planning committee members were contacted to conduct six

month surveys of their participants but none were able to complete the surveys during the time we requested.

86.3% of the respondents noted activities they have incorporated into their educational efforts and personal lives that they attributed to their participation in the conference. Participants who did not mention any changes included 5 vendors who did not attend sessions, 2 people who skipped the question on the e-mail survey and 3 participants who had 5 or more years of experience and are active in EE but could not think of anything new they have added because of the conference though they were favorable towards the conference overall. Most interesting is that there was no difference in the number of responses regarding personal changes versus changes to educational efforts. The people who teach environmental education also participate in stewardship activities with their families, extended community, and in their own lives.

Pre- and Post - Conference Activities

Scores from 1-10 with 1 meaning "didn't reach me" and 10 = "best I've EVER heard"

Activity	(returns)	Measure	Average
Project WET	(2)	critical thinking	7.50
		stimulate action	7.50
Monarchs	(5)	thinking	8.20
		action	8.80
Lewis & Clark	(2)	thinking	9.00
		action	9.00
Alt. Energy	(4)	thinking	8.75
		action	8.75
River Cleanup	(2)	thinking	9.50
		action	9.00
Project Globe	(2)	thinking	9.00
		action	9.00

Evaluation returns for pre- and post- conference activities depended on correct completion of the After Conference survey and were very low numbers on which to base judgment about the activities. Nine respondents indicated they had attended a pre- or post-event but no conclusions about their intentions in marking could be made. Whatever they were thinking, their marks were mostly between 8 and 9 or towards the positive. Written comments from the after conference survey are included in **Appendix 2**.

Keynote Speakers

Scores from 1-10 with 1 meaning "didn't reach me" and 10 = "best I've EVER heard"

Activity	(returns)	Measure	Average
Dr. Pete Myers, "Our Stolen Future"	(41)	stimulate thinking	8.02
		inspired action	7.24
Kivirist and Ivanko "Living the Good Life"	(45)	thinking	6.69
		action	6.07
Tim Palmer "Lifelines: Case for River Conservation"	(33)	thinking	7.30
		action	6.78
John Wallace	(27)	thinking	7.10

<u>"John Muir"</u>		action	6.30
Chad Pregracke	(25)	thinking	9.16
<u>"Living Lands and Waters"</u>		action	8.56

Keynote speakers worked in different presentation media, reflecting diverse interests and serving audiences at different times of day. Written comments are presented in **Appendix 2**.

Concurrent Sessions

All concurrent session results are presented in **Appendix 3**. Highlights of the concurrent session scores are presented below. Highest scores for "Stimulated Critical Thinking" are presented first, with the highest scores and high returns near the top. Highest scores for "Inspired Action" also are presented with the highest scores with high returns near the top.

Stimulating Critical Thinking

Scores from 1-10 with 1 meaning "didn't reach me" and 10 = "best I've EVER heard"

<u>Activity</u>	<u>(returns)</u>	<u>Average</u>
Hawk Identification	(13)	8.62
Tracking	(11)	8.18
Looking Back (history)	(11)	7.55
Mountain Lions	(11)	7.45
Citizen Science	(10)	7.20

Inspiring Action

Scores from 1-10 with 1 meaning "didn't reach me" and 10 = "best I've EVER heard"

<u>Activity</u>	<u>(returns)</u>	<u>Average</u>
Hawk Identification	(13)	8.54
Tracking	(11)	8.45
Looking Back (history)	(11)	7.64
Mountain Lions	(11)	7.45
Citizen Science	(10)	7.10

Field Trips

Field trips were scored using a familiar ranking of Low, Medium, High, and Very High (converted to 1-4 numeric values for processing). Full questions are found in **Conference Forms** at the end of the report. Abbreviated selected questions are presented here along with the number of returned forms and average scores achieved on each question. Written comments are presented in **Appendix 4**.

Nature Centers

<u>Question</u>	<u>(10 returns)</u>	<u>Average</u>
Provide new information		3.10
Able to hear		3.70
Able to see things		3.60
Information related to your EE work		3.10
Degree of endorsement this topic again		3.50

Alternative Energy

<u>Question</u>	<u>(6 returns)</u>	<u>Average</u>
Provide new information		3.17
Able to hear		3.83
Able to see things		3.50
Information related to your EE work		2.83
Degree of endorsement this topic again		3.83

Fossils

<u>Question</u>	<u>(3 returns)</u>	<u>Average</u>
Provide new information		3.33
Able to hear		4.00
Able to see things		3.67
Information related to your EE work		3.00
Degree of endorsement this topic again		4.00

Biking

<u>Question</u>	<u>(5 returns)</u>	<u>Average</u>
Provide new information		2.40
Able to hear		3.50
Able to see things		3.25
Information related to your EE work		3.00
Degree of endorsement this topic again		3.00

Canoeing

<u>Question</u>	<u>(10 returns)</u>	<u>Average</u>
Provide new information		2.70
Able to hear		2.62
Able to see things		3.80
Information related to your EE work		3.00
Degree of endorsement this topic again		4.00

Landfills

<u>Question</u>	<u>(3 returns)</u>	<u>Average</u>
Provide new information		3.67
Able to hear		3.33
Able to see things		3.33
Information related to your EE work		3.00
Degree of endorsement this topic again		3.67

Wild Edible Plants

<u>Question</u>	<u>(25 returns)</u>	<u>Average</u>
Provide new information		3.80
Able to hear		3.52

Able to see things	3.68
Information related to your EE work	3.52
Degree of endorsement this topic again	4.00

Field Safety

Survey data showed that a few participants were concerned about field safety, but they also presented suggested solutions for their concerns. Their concerns included:

- Poison ivy
- Wearing PFDs during canoe trip
- Gear needed for field trip
- How to dress for field trip
- Heat
- Transportation safety equipment not working

Consultants' Recommendations

1. *Consider allowing people to bring their personal safety gear such as bike helmets, PFD's etc., but also provide the option to request the gear. If participants were allowed to bring their own equipment would increase participant comfort.*
2. *Canoeists may dislike wearing PFD's but it is important that all participants understand why it is required when taking part in a canoe trip as part of a conference.*
3. *If a motor coach company is not used to transport participants, people providing the vehicles have liability risks if safety equipment is not working in the vehicle. (Seat belts were not working in one of the vehicles used on one of the field trips.)*
4. *If special clothing or footwear is needed, communicate with participants prior to coming to the conference.*
5. *Consider requiring all participants to sign a liability waiver before attending a field trip.*

Field Trip Coordination

Survey data suggested the following:

- Give overview of the field trip at the beginning of the field trip
- Increase communication with field trip participants prior to coming to the conference
- Don't over plan the field trips and try to squeeze in too much
- Too much time was spent traveling
- Field trip leaders need to understand large group logistics and handling

Consultants' Recommendations

1. *Once a field trip has been selected by the participant, communicate with them on what to expect and how to prepare for the field trip. A checklist of what to bring should be included. (Example - Some participants wore the wrong footwear for the field trip.)*
2. **Field Trip Leader Quality Control** - *Before selecting field trip leaders, explain to them what is expected of them as a field trip leader. (Just because they want to do it does not mean that*

they will be a good leader. Get a commitment from them that they will attend an orientation and spend time preparing for the field trip.

3. Require all selected for field trip leaders to attend a field trip leader's orientation. This orientation should include:

- Risk management and first aid situations
- How to organize for the field trip
- What not to do while traveling (Example – only talking to the people in front and not communicating with the entire group)
- Prepare a field trip leader's check list

Example – 1. Give overview of day; 2. Be prepared to describe and discuss what is being seen from the vehicle (Example – roadside prairie reconstruction, geological landforms, conservation farming practices etc.) 3. Make sure everyone fills out an evaluation and/or survey form and turn in before leaving the field trip. 4. If there are specific funder requirements for the field trip, make sure those requirements are covered. (Example – The Iowa Department of Transportation included packets for all fieldtrips and also wanted the field trip leaders to discuss prairie roadside projects and the Roadside Enhancement Project Grants that are available.)

- Plan travel activities for the group if traveling long distances between field sites. Relate the activities to the field trip theme.

Overall Consultants' Observations

- Conference participants like having a recreational component in a field trip
- Field trip handouts are important! Distribute them when participants can hang onto them easily!
- Leader communication with participants is important
- Organized field trip leaders are important

Food and Facilities (from 89 After Conference Survey returns)

The emphasis on local foods was scored by 79 participants as being valued at an average of 8.86. They were asked to respond by marking a gradient from "I'd rather starve" to "Perfect conference food" which was converted to a scale of 1-10.

The value of the facilities to participants' conference experience was scored by 86 at an average of 8.17. The gradient was marked from "Interfered with my learning" to "Ideal conference facility" and was converted to a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest.

Many written comments about the food are presented in **Appendix 5**.

Significant Moments for Professional Networking

The after conference survey asked participants about the value of the conference for professional networking and asked for specific points when participants felt engaged in networking and when they did not. The written responses were evaluated for recurring themes. Six respondents left this section blank. People told us the moments they felt most welcomed and connected to the other participants. These comments give us insights into conference features and conditions that are important to creating an atmosphere conducive to networking. People also identified moments during the

conference when they chose to network with someone new to them. If future conference planners wish to enhance networking opportunities these comments regarding the flow and details of the conference may be valuable.

Felt most welcomed

Many, many participants named Carol Schutte who was at the registration area as helping them feel welcomed right away – she met them with a hug, a greeting, a smile, and helped them find their way. A typical comment was, “When Carol Schutte came up to me following the Pre-Conference workshop and asked ‘do you know where to go next?’”

Presenter names which recurred as being welcoming were Susan Fowler, Mark Edwards, and Pat Higby. Field trips were mentioned as being most welcoming moments. Many respondents considered the entire conference welcoming or wrote there wasn’t any time they didn’t feel welcomed.

CONSULTANTS’ RECOMMENDATIONS

Registration is a key moment in a conference and these results highlight it is clearly more than just accurate nametags and speedy processing though both of those are very important. This is the moment of orientation and transition from traveling and way-finding in a vehicle to way-finding on foot and personal communication in a more relaxed atmosphere. We didn’t suggest the registration event to survey participants – they named it as the very moment when they felt most welcomed.

Respondents named Carol’s behaviors that helped them feel welcome. Perhaps more predictably they also listed “seeing old friends” and the group dynamics from “being with like-minded folks” as moments of welcoming. Establishing a hospitality committee could provide one key to a successful conference. Conference planners would be well served by posting one or several of their most outgoing members who know the answers to the important conference questions with the sole charge of greeting participants as they arrive. People who feel welcome are more likely to enjoy themselves, reach out to others, be forgiving of minor inconveniences, and help create a positive conference atmosphere.

Felt Most Connected

People felt most connected to other participants during the field trips. While perhaps every other moment during the conference was mentioned once (vendor times, between sessions, breaks, keynotes, etc.) the predominant answers were during the field trips whether riding on the bus, eating lunch, engaging in the hands-on activities during the field trips or just being together with the same group of people all day. One participant attributed this to people having a common interest for having chosen that field trip.

Next most frequently mentioned connecting moments were the concurrent sessions in general and some specific sessions and presenters were repeatedly named. Susan Fowler and Mark Edwards or their sessions and subsequent discussions were named as helping participants feel connected to each other. “Hearing people reinforce the belief I thought only I had.” The musical events provided a venue that resonated with some and helped them feel they had goals in common with others at the conference.

CONSULTANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the proportion of people choosing and attending field trips relative to the total conference registration, the costs and benefits to future conference planners will have to be weighed carefully. If the value of the conference is to help environmental educators feel they are among people who care about the same things so that they are not alone in their efforts to improve the world – then field trips provide a feature that can do that better than most. Based on the comments about field trips within the three positive networking moments, the time spent was of a quality that fostered sharing of professional experiences and stories more than any other feature of the conference. It should be noted that no single field trip was mentioned so frequently that it stood out from the rest.

Informal Moments with Someone New

Meals and walking transitions were identified as the times for conversations with people new to the respondents. Meals were listed in general but the Thursday evening meal was identified by several as a single time they conversed with someone they didn't know.

Walking between sessions, to dormitories, and breaks were commonly mentioned times when people initiated or responded to a professional conversation with someone they didn't already know.

Various concurrent sessions seemed to foster conversation but none stood out for this item. The field trips were often listed as well.

CONSULTANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS

This conference gave special attention to meals though the value of meals, in general, to provide opportunities for conversations with new people is perhaps more significant than obvious.

Conference planners hoping to foster networking should weigh carefully any benefits from having a mealtime speaker that might limit the amount of time for conversations between participants.

Moments of Disconnection

Written comments in three areas of potential negative aspects of the conference for networking did not converge on one or two points. Most respondents left it blank, put in N/A for not applicable, or wrote that there was no time at which they felt distanced, felt little connection to other participants, or chose not to visit with conservation educators they didn't know. The most frequently mentioned obstacles were:

- fatigue by evening (note that the majority of conference attendees have 15 and more years of service in EE)
- staying at some place other than the dormitories so they couldn't share their days experiences with others
- aspects of registration (mostly finding it, and one lost registration happily resolved)
- choosing to talk to old friends rather than meeting new
- lack of signage and way-finding problems arriving and during the conference
- moments of pre-conference when they couldn't find someone to help them

CONSULTANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS

The registration as an initial point of transition into the conference atmosphere appears to be tricky for participants even when the registration is well done as it was for this conference. Consider having a hospitality committee. Providing enough hosts or greeters at the registration who can attend to each

guest arriving to help them find their way to dorms, perhaps even walking with them to find rooms and where the first session will be is an inexpensive enhancement option.

OUTCOMES

A phone survey of Iowa participants was conducted during mid-March 2006 by two interviewers who had not attended the conference. Phone survey participants were scholarship recipients and those for whom e-mail addresses were not listed. Surveyors asked eight questions of participants and were instructed to probe for activities of any kind that could be attributed to their attendance at the conference. Two respondents identified themselves as formal K-12 educators.

The e-mail survey of Iowa participants was conducted during mid-March 2006. The e-mail survey mirrored the phone survey questions in asking participants to reflect upon any stewardship activities that they engaged in professionally or personally that they could attribute to information or encouragement they received at the conference. Ten respondents identified themselves as formal K-12 educators. Several of the bounced addresses appeared to be to schools that perhaps would not let the survey address in and we were not able to help teachers override that to participate in the survey. There were 17 formal educators in the registration listing. **(See Appendix 6)**

Improved Educational Efforts Outcomes were:

- 1) Tangible – hands on restoration, working with monarchs, finding play space for kids, trail rehabilitation, prairie rescue, work in parks.
- 2) Enhanced teaching methods – incorporating storytelling, trying the M&M activity, including information on plastics, purchased books, puppets and other resources, sharing teaching resources with other educators, showed Lost Landscapes prairie video to class, included local foods and global issues in courses at middle school and community college.
- 3) Increased networking – connecting after conference with resource people from booths, inspired to speak more to others, encouraged to keep doing what they're doing because it makes a difference, new teacher inspired by the examples of others.

Personal Action Outcomes were:

- 1) Increased dedication – renewal and rededication, increased actions, taking time to renew and observe things, greater appreciation for sustainability, and more conscious choice-making for self and family, increased volunteer service.
- 2) Tangible – changed home light bulbs for energy efficiency, reducing use of plastics, buying organic foods, picking up trash, planting for wildlife.
- 3) Expanding knowledge – increased personal or family outdoor recreation linked to conference topics, initiated discussions with friends, informed friends and family about plastics and local foods and recreation, took part in learning events related to conference topics as a result of conference.

Iowa Department of Transportation

Questions specific to the role of the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT) in their support of roadside plantings and environmental education efforts which includes the Living Roadways Trust Fund (LRTF) were asked during the six month surveys. Of the 27 respondents who had attended a field trip, 23 specifically remembered their tour guides having pointed out roadside plantings or mentioned the role of LRTF in projects or plantings being observed. One of those whose guide did

not mention the LRTF during travel commented that they had car pooled and only met their guide at the site.

Awareness of LRTF was high going into the conference, but many qualified their comments to reflect they were not fully aware of all they learned at the conference prior to visiting the booth or learning of the NatureMapping of road kill which was funded with a LRTF grant. Additionally, many comments throughout the full conference surveys mentioned the role of LRTF in the conference and in Iowa. There were individuals who were not aware of LRTF prior to the conference. 94% indicated they were already aware of LRTF prior to the conference.

Responses as to whether participants have noticed any IDOT environmental or conservation projects around Iowa since the conference were slightly less clear. In the phone surveys the questions were worded to ask for “new” projects. Therefore the “no” answers can’t be assumed to mean the participants are not looking, just that they have not traveled into areas during the fall and winter where they could have observed “new” projects or they may not have been looking. In the e-mail survey respondents could only check yes, no, or don’t know and the question did not use the word “new”. Overall, the vast majority of respondents had observed IDOT efforts in the time since the conference and many named “plantings” or “wildflowers.” The phone responses mirrored the e-mail responses sufficiently well on other survey items to assume that the rate of “yes” answers would be around 70% for noticing IDOT environmental or conservation efforts around Iowa from roughly August through March.

Written e-mail survey responses about IDOT or LRTF are presented in **Appendix 7**.

Six-Month Memories of Conference Highlights

Slightly different than outcomes are the things that people remembered about the conference after they’d returned to their busy lives. *Inspiring speakers were most often mentioned by participants who said what was still important to them after a period of time.* People they met and times spent with friends were also on the minds of respondents. The general proportions of comments made during the phone interviews did not significantly differ from the small sample of responses in the e-mail survey – the responses were more detailed and served as a reminder prompt for them to respond to the questions which followed relating to outcomes. The table and seven open-ended responses to that e-mail survey question are presented here as an example of the data. There were very few strongly negative comments and they were dissimilar from each other. (see **Appendix 8**)

“What parts of the conference stand out in your mind, now 6 months later?”

Field trip	28%
Memorable meals	23%
Inspiring speaker	68%
Disappointing speaker	4%
Person(s) I met	38%
Time spent with friends	38%
Other (listed below)	33%

1. speaking

2. Assistance & leadership of chair. Help from Lime Creek Nature Center staff where our session was held.
3. Dynamic personality and enthusiasm from co-presenter. Music by Carter & Connelley. campus layout
4. How expensive it was for me to present to about 3 people!
5. in session discussions
6. material that I can use in the classroom.
7. enthusiastic audience at my session

Registration Survey Goals and Outcomes

People who filled out the registration survey gave identifiers that made it possible to compare a number of outcome responses from the phone surveys to see if people received what they hoped to gain from the conference. People were not prompted or reminded of their pre-conference goals when asked what they remembered or what they had done since the conference. While the number of registration surveys matched with outcome data (18) is not large and includes only lowans, the purpose of the registration survey was to test the value of such a survey to substitute for a pre- and post-test design which is more commonly used to gauge knowledge gains.

Originally it was proposed that the conference registration form include space and questions about goals but there wasn't sufficient room to do so and the registration form was designed and mailed. Because the goals for the conference were not simply knowledge gains, the nature of the registration and 6 month survey responses made it possible to consider if the conference promised and delivered what the participants hoped for and received – was it a good match? For the most part people appeared to have found what they wanted – among these 18 participants there were no strongly negative statements that expectations were not met. **Appendix 9** contains the full listing of written responses from the registration survey.

Goals for attending were networking, learning trends and issues in EE, and learning teaching techniques and ideas. The following table contains the pre-conference goals paired with the same individual's responses in the phone survey conducted six months later.

Pre-conference Survey Match to Six-Month Outcomes

Agency	Goals	What stands out in your mind 6 mo. later	Stewardship Activity since conf.	Incorporated into your personal life
State Agency	I want to reach others about water quality monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of Nalgene bottles • Organic Farm tour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program set so cannot add. • Have presented water monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't drink out of Nalgene bottles anymore • Extreme cleanup
Student	Want to expand my network of people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop with Mark Edwards • Workshop with Susan Fowler 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connections with other like minded people • Being supported by others in this part of the county 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mark Edward's philosophy – finding wildness in myself • Participating in local food group • Joined Discussion Group on car coop, eco village, network with local farmers • In the works – Center for Sustainable Arts for Kids
Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain insight about field of EE • Learn about positions in field 	Mike Havlik – Raptor ID	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opened up my job search • Expansion of knowledge and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More active in REAP meetings • Organized regional REAP meetings in our area
CCB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn new ideas and trends in EE • See old friends and meet new ones and have fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real good conversations – networking is one of the best things that happened. • General discussion of future of EE • Bike trip was good. • Inn Serendipity B&B 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inn Serendipity B&B – shared with my board members • Wife used books for her 1st grade class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We plan to ride the bike trail again • Learned new songs

Agency	Goals	What stands out in your mind 6 mo. later	Stewardship Activity since conf.	Incorporated into your personal life
City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look forward to learning from Midwest peers Expand my knowledge in EE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use of local foods Variety of sessions Enjoyed the couple that had the Inn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contacted some of the folks that had additional material (lesson plans) 	No, nothing that I wasn't doing already
City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New ideas to implement in nonformal setting Ideas for Middle school curriculum Committee that I am on Networking & partnering 	Chad Pregracke and his session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Networking Setup cleanup for Dubuque but due to hurricane in the south – went down there instead. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal knowledge in general Took part in Chad's cleanup
AEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Latest trends and goals in EE Resources to share with others networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Networking with teachers in my area (fabulous) Lewis & Clark session Speaker from CDC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bracelet activity-sharing the nation's water Shared vendor info with teachers 	Helped to reestablish a mind set that I have for an appreciation for the environment.
Post Secondary	Latest info. On teaching tech. (hands-on & lab/field)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Really liked the Rockford fossil park Met interesting people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food topic conf. incorporated into my curriculum on food issues Fossil boxes River clean-up 	Inspired to volunteer a day or two a week
Post Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn relevant info. From other EEers Make additional teacher contacts Rejuvenation 	John Muir presentation Use of local foods	My intent is to open up a regional dialog to talk about wildlife monitoring and citizen science	Would love to have a wind turbine at my place Personal renewal

Agency	Goals	What stands out in your mind 6 mo. later	Stewardship Activity since conf.	Incorporated into your personal life
Post Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain new and updated info on EE • Contacts with other colleges with EE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversations with small group • Nature Deficient Disorder person • One of the best conf. attended in my 32 years • Energy field trip one of the best! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use info. learned about the Nature Deficit disorder • Brought students to Mason City to visit with architect (from the energy fieldtrip) 	Incorporated energy efficient stuff in my home
CCB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspired and renewed at conference • Gain new ideas • Meet teachers doing great things 	Field trip – wild edibles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We invited one of the speakers to do a program at SCCB • Wild Edibles • Chemical in the body • Health impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use less plastic • More conscious of heating things in the microwave • I have mentioned the Nalgene water bottle to others
CCB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network with peers • Teach others about monarchs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking • Entertainment –Carter & Connelly • Campus setting was beautiful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made changes in the way that I present monarchs • When we did the fall prairie workshop, we looked specifically at service learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchased a C&C CD to use in my car • A lot more monarch larvae monitoring
CCB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EE issues • Learn new methods • Get creative side going again • New friends 	Pre-workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monarch in the Classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monarchs • Park Packs • Nursing home residents – do monarchs with them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose more organic stuff • Encourage my family to bring canvas bags to the store

Agency	Goals	What stands out in your mind 6 mo. later	Stewardship Activity since conf.	Incorporated into your personal life
CCB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EE Trends • New ideas • Gather info for bus tour to this part of Iowa • Networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wild Edibles • Contacted to present my program at NAAEE conf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 wild edibles public programs • Ideas for prairie prog. • Keynote on plastics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using more glass products • Teaching family about edibles in yard • Told daughter about hazards about drinking from plastics
CCB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get new ideas • Get re-energized 	Wild Edibles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use wild edibles in summer camp • Susan Fowlers methods 	Wild edibles with family and pet rabbit too
CCB	Fun & innovative teaching tech. Vendor info.	Karen Koenig starting an after school club Keynote on molecular boil.	Haven't had a chance yet but want to start a cons. club	Buying organic
CCB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking • Need to improve my canoeing abilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking on the regional level • Fieldtrip was fantastic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspired by Chad Pregracke – have done more water testing than ever before 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking ahead to future farming practices on their own • Don't use anything but #1 & #2 plastics • Canoeing the Iowa was a dream come true
CCB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More networking • More knowledge on EE issues • Learn about sustainable practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Susan fowler's program • Great place to have a conf. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use more sign language in my programs. • Go to river and do clean-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taken a sign lang. class. • Simplifying my life – speaker has had impact • Info on plastic has impacted my life

Registration Survey Demographics and Marketing Data

76 pre-registered participants returned registration survey forms which was the only form that asked for demographic data. This captures information for less than half the attendees so readers should be cautious about conclusions regarding demographics of the full conference audience based off this survey. This data includes participants from all sponsoring states. The information reveals something about the people who came to the conference but does not tell us who would have liked to come but couldn't, or who in the EE community did not choose to attend and why. **Conference data show that less than 20 teachers attended the conference** (19 or 17 depending on how they marked surveys) so this survey captured all or nearly all K-12 teachers with one to 40 years of experience who participated in the conference.

K-12 teachers who attended this conference had EE experience (15 of 19) but it was not clear how or if EE conferences figure into their experiences. Nonformal educators attended more EE conferences (or claimed more environmental conferences as EE related) on a regular basis (41 of 60). This was also true for those who supervise or train others in EE.

Respondents indicated they need EE conferences to provide the latest developments and information about conservation issues. This was true for teachers of all experience levels and nonformal or post secondary educators with 10 or fewer years of experience.

Participants responded to conference promotional materials through direct mail, statewide EE newsletters, and e-mail.

Pre-registered respondents (5 skipped this question)

15 had not been to an EE conference in the last 5 years (20%)

10 had been to one EE conference in the last 5 years (13%)

23 had been to 2-4 EE conferences in the last 5 years (30%)

23 had been to 5-10 or more EE conferences in the last 5 years (30%)

Occupation Affiliations

- 19 identified themselves as teaching in the K-12 education system for an average 16 years (47% had 8 or fewer years). Of these, 15 listed a number of years they have incorporated EE in their work (average 11 years, 60% had 9 or fewer years)
- 60 nonformal EE or post-secondary educators gave the years EE has fit into their work (average 13 years, 48% had 9 or fewer years). Of these, 35 listed a number of years they have spent supervising or coaching EE staff (average 12 years, 62% had 10 or fewer years)

Attendance of EE conferences in the last 5 years

K-12 teachers included:

8 who had not attended an EE conference, and

7 who had attended 2-4 EE conferences.

K-12 teachers indicated they have spent some time incorporating EE in their work included:

7 who had not attended an EE conference, and

6 who had attended 2-4 EE conferences.

Nonformal and post secondary educators included:

23 who had attended 5-10 EE conferences,
18 who had attended 2-4 conferences, and
7 in each category of zero or 1 EE conference.

Nonformal or post secondary educators who supervise/train others in EE included:

16 who had attended 5-10 conferences,
9 had attended 2-4 EE conferences,
7 had attended 1 EE conference, and
4 who had not attended an EE conference.

Attendance of EE conferences in the last 5 years compared to years of experience

K-12 teachers who in the past 5 years had attended:

0 EE conferences had 1-32 years of experience
1 EE conference had 4-24 years of experience
2-4 EE conferences had 3-40 years of experience
5-10 EE conferences had 2 years of experience

Nonformal and post secondary educators who in the past 5 years had attended:

0 EE conferences had 3-27 years of experience
1 EE conference had 4-10 years of experience
2-4 EE conferences had 1-30 years of experience
5-10 EE conferences had 4-51 years of experience

Nonformal and post secondary educators supervising others who in the past 5 years attended:

0 EE conferences had 1-10 years of experience
1 EE conference had 1-4 years of experience
2-4 EE conferences had 1-30 years of experience
5-10 EE conferences had 2-48 years of experience

Most Needed from EE Conferences

59 responded by checking the one statement that best completes the sentence "When I go to an environmental education conference I most need to get: (presented with most checked first)

The latest developments or trends in environmental and conservation issues 35%

Teaching techniques that fit my topics and audiences 30%

The latest information about healthy communities and ecosystems 12%

Models for including environmental education principles in non-formal education 12%

No one checked the statement ending "encouragement from peers to continue using environmental or conservation education in my work." However, the choice of "other" resulted in comments describing networking and support from others.

Marketing that Reached Participants

Statewide EE newsletter	30 (40%)
Direct mail	24 (31%)
E-mail	23 (30%)
Friend	21 (27%)
Local conservation news	8 (10%)
Post card	4 (5%)

Best Future Marketing Efforts Preferences

E-mail	41 (54%)
Direct mail	28 (37%)
Statewide EE newsletter	16 (21%)
Post card	8 (10%)
Local conservation news	2 (2%)

Metaevaluation (or Evaluation of the Evaluation)

A metaevaluation provides a critique of aspects of the evaluation itself. The purpose is to apply professional standards for evaluation to an evaluation project.

Metaevaluation is included this project to extend what has been learned so others may adopt useful criteria when doing their own evaluations and to help people working in the EE field be good consumers of evaluation services. It's nice to know where to kick the tires on an evaluation, so to speak, when you are buying a product about which people can have strong opinions, conflicting emotions, and differing levels of experience. An educational conference is not a high-stakes project with evaluation results having near life or death consequences, but people in EE do come in contact with evaluated projects that are vital to their lives. Unfavorable evaluation findings can make everyone chafe about the unknown quality of the evaluation. Evaluation does not exactly match the standards for research – purposes of evaluations are different than research and while some aspects “look” the same, the intended outcomes are quite different and thus they need to be judged differently.

This is the place to be transparent, critical, and humble about what worked and what didn't work so well from the evaluator's standpoint. It is appropriate for the evaluator conducting the evaluation to do the metaevaluation, though it's rare to have sufficient funds for this to be done by the contracted evaluator let alone by an outside evaluator contracted to examine the full evaluation project. Including a metaevaluation is an indicator of quality of a particular type. It is meant to judge the quality of the evaluation regardless of whether the report recipients happen to like the findings. The checklist in **Appendix 10** is a list of professional standards that apply to a multi-state conference evaluation project. The checklist has notations where aspects were done or not done well during the evaluation project but mostly the list is included as a future resource. What follows are the consultants' comments about the evaluation.

Consider for Future Conferences

Prepare a **Logic Model** for the conference. This can provide standards for committees choosing presenters and arranging the schedule along with guiding the evaluation. The Logic Model format from EPA (Appendix 1) is a good place to start.

An **after conference survey** is important, though future conferences should use a simple format to simplify data processing. Processing this survey required handling many times to pull off the open-ended data written in response to 5 sections of questions, and numeric data in response to 4 sections. The goal for this form was to test and capture rich data this time and the entire form was not intended to be replicated by volunteers in the future though aspects are highly useable. The logic model can drive the components needed for a future survey. Watch for opportunities to gather more than “happiness” indicators, though, as this is probably going to be the biggest conference data set. If space allows, including questions for demographic information on this survey permits sorting participants into useful groups for comparisons. Did first-timers respond differently? Did veteran teachers like the same things? Did people from one location perceive things the same way?

Field trip surveys for each field trip are valuable to show what happens on field trips where conference planners are not present to observe. Be aware that each field trip requires separate identifiers and separate analyses unless results of all field trips lumped together are what you want.

Include demographic and marketing questions on the conference registration form if at all possible. First-timers, most effective media to reach them, and formal or whatever occupational information is needed can be captured independently of other survey information. Gather e-mail addresses and phone numbers to use for post-conference surveys (and let people know they may be contacted or ask them to check a permission box indicating they are willing to be contacted).

A **post-conference survey** is crucial if participants are going to have time to DO something as a result of the conference – or for outcomes to develop and be expressed. Whoever has the most vested interests in getting this information should be in charge of carrying this out – this is likely to be driven by funders in the future as it was for this conference. Funders want to know more than just how many people showed up and how happy they were, though that is still important to collect.

What Could Be Improved (or Don't Try This At Home!)

The **registration survey** was valuable for comparing participant goals with post conference outcomes. However, if this is not a goal of future conferences it is not worth the effort by volunteers. Open-ended data can be tricky to process and a large conference could overwhelm a volunteer tasked with reading and making sense of all the responses. People responded in “professional” mode, particularly with their names on the form – it is likely many answers are “public” or “right” answers. This doesn't make the information false, but makes analysis more difficult and may frustrate planners who want to understand what “really” motivates people to attend. This survey was the only place we captured marketing information and a second set of e-mail addresses to compare with if there were errors in one set.

The **after conference survey form** included a special section of critical incident responses to help us identify the moments when networking occurred, and what prevented it from happening. This was effective and useful for this conference, but does not need to be repeated for all future conferences. What participants told us is not likely to change significantly and is important to pay attention to when planning another conference. We would not have concluded with certainty what participants told us in this section without this question set, but it does not need to be replicated indiscriminately. Volunteers may be frustrated with data analysis for this.

The gradients on the after conference survey to measure critical thinking and inspiration to action were difficult for participants to fill out correctly. However half of the respondents did it correctly with few reminders to read directions carefully, so the data set was still useful. A better system for volunteers to process is to simply ask for one mark on a gradient such as was done for Food and Facilities sections. Participants can provide pre-then post- knowledge or confidence gains using this type of gradient – it is a retrospective method with sound theoretical underpinnings. The experiment for this conference was to measure speakers for different criteria than is typical. The survey form should be tested with volunteers as many times as necessary to fix design problems before they are committed to print. Check directions with people who are not familiar with the conference.

Two items were omitted from the after conference survey form. There are three possible reasons for this – insufficient form checking by designers, last minute changes by planners after it was too late to change the form before printing, missed communication between planners and designers about what should and shouldn't be included. Fortunately participants who wanted to give feedback wrote in the margins about what they felt so the missing presentations were accounted for at least in a small way. Field testing is valuable to prevent this in the future.

Post conference surveys conducted by each of the state partners with participants from their states did not work in this case. Because the goal of the evaluation was to help people learn as much as possible about evaluation or about the participants from each state, the post conference survey task was offered to partners in each of the sponsoring states. This did not work and is unlikely to work in the future because there are too many challenges for volunteers to pick up this task.

E-mail survey for post-conference surveying should work better than it did in this case. Getting correct e-mail addresses is challenging but should not be as difficult as it was this time. Be aware there are fees for this unless the survey is small enough with a small enough data set to qualify for the free SurveyMonkey service or others. See www.surveymonkey.com for more information.

Additional Notes

Demographics and confidentiality can be tricky issues for conference evaluators. Consider carefully what demographic data is NEEDED to make the data as useful as possible but don't over do it. This after conference form might have been more interesting with a checkbox for formal educators or nonformal educators to mark, or one for first-timers to check. Occupational and organizational information can pinpoint individuals even if their name is not present on a form, causing breeches of confidentiality.

If volunteers are processing the evaluation forms, limit the amount of open-ended questions if you expect to receive 100 forms or more. Handwriting can be recognizable in a small community of people who know each other well, threatening confidentiality and anonymity – and it can be hard to read! Because we know from experience that conference planners search first to read the open-ended questions, we included all written comments from all surveys in the appendices in this report. However, making meaning from that much data is time-consuming and could be discouraging for volunteers without training in analyzing qualitative data trying to summarize findings as was done in the earlier sections of this report.

Appendix 11 is a checklist that was adapted and simplified for this multi-state conference evaluation from standards developed by the Joint Committee Program Evaluation Standards and a Program Evaluations Checklist available from The Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University.

Four categories of evaluation standards, Utility, Feasibility, Propriety, Accuracy, have checkpoints that apply to this multi-state conference evaluation project. There may be other checkpoints that could apply. Please consult the full checklist and standards from the sources listed at end of appendix if this is a particular area of interest.