



Enhancing Aquatic Stewardship Education

This Info Sheet gives a brief overview of the wealth of helpful information you can find in *Best Practices Workbook for Boating, Fishing, and Aquatic Resources Stewardship Education (Workbook)*. See the back for details.

As expansion of human development puts more and more pressure on aquatic resources, it is critical that more people become good stewards of those resources.

Environmental stewardship is defined as “informed, responsible action/behavior on behalf of the environment.” Aquatic stewardship education helps individuals acquire and learn to apply stewardship skills needed to make informed choices and take environmentally responsible action.

► Know Where You’re Going

If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there. Effective stewardship education programs begin with clearly defined goals and instructional objectives that reflect the nature and purpose of stewardship education. Think about the characteristics of a citizen whom you would consider to be a good steward and create your program to help develop these characteristics in your learners.

► Make it Personal

Awareness and ecological knowledge are important, but are not enough to cause long-lasting behavior changes. Effective programs also help individuals and groups:

- Personalize environmental problems and issues so they take ownership of the problems or issues.

- Apply critical thinking, investigation, decision-making, and problem-solving skills (this empowers them to address problems and issues of personal interest).
- Believe they can make changes and help resolve important issues on the basis of their training and experience (this empowers them to get involved).

► Ethics

Effective stewardship programs help individuals develop ethical competence, including:

- Sensitivity to recognize when a situation poses one or more ethical considerations.
- Knowledge of what behaviors are legal versus what behaviors might be ethical in a situation.
- Willingness to contribute, participate, and act.
- Judgment to weigh various considerations where there are no laws or guidelines.
- Humility to seek advice and additional knowledge to guide one’s actions.

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►Take Them Outdoors

Research shows that environmental sensitivity is developed through significant, positive contact with the outdoors over a long period of time. Fishing and boating are outdoor activities that may help individuals develop a “deeply” personal connection with nature.

►Eliminate Constraints

To obtain long-term results, educators must seek to understand and identify constraints, design aquatic education programs to minimize or eliminate them, and then provide continued reinforcement. Constraints might be:

- Not feeling able to perform the activity; lacking knowledge, skills, or confidence.
- Not having someone with whom to engage in the activity, or having others who are discouraging them from taking part.
- Lack of time or money, or lack of access to a site to perform the behavior.

►Effective Curricula

Effective programs develop curricula for stewardship education that are structured to give learners a well thought-out and data-supported sequence of opportunities. These curricula should:

- Result in an in-depth knowledge of issues.
- Teach learners the skills of issue analysis and investigation as well as provide the time needed to learn to apply these skills.
- Teach learners citizenship skills and how to apply them.

- Provide an instructional setting that helps learners develop an internal locus of control—the feeling that they can make a difference.

►Social Context

The social context in which stewardship education takes place is as important as the methods by which stewardship concepts are taught. For example, if a person’s family does not support the stewardship actions, the program participant may not continue them. Provide avenues to enhance social support for learners.

►Other Considerations

Effective program developers replace piecemeal approaches with in-depth and sustained programs.

Research shows that getting participants to set goals, make commitments, and demonstrate their actions are effective approaches in encouraging responsible behavior.

Program participants should be encouraged to study all sides of an issue. In addition to the environmental and biological aspects, it is important that they understand and weigh historical, social, political, and economic aspects as well.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

This information sheet is just the tip of the iceberg. MUCH more information on planning, developing, and evaluating education programs can be found in the *Best Practices Workbook for Boating, Fishing, and Stewardship Education*. The more Best Practices you can incorporate into your program, the greater the chance that your program will achieve the goals you set for it.

To review and/or order copies of this and other Information Sheets, the *Workbook*, or other Best Practice tools and materials, go to: www.RBFF.org/educational/bestpractices.cfm or contact RBFF at: 601 N. Fairfax St. • Ste. 140 Alexandria, VA 22314-2054 • 703 519 0013