



DWR's Virginia Naturally Schools Application Directions and Requirements

The Application

The application is an online form. We suggest you compose your answers to each question in a savable document, such as Word, and then cut and paste your answers into the online form to prevent you from losing your work.

Schools will need to be prepared to **submit the following items in their application:**

- A. The accurate Recognition Year you are applying for**
 - a. Be sure to check the [Virginia Naturally Historical List of Schools](#) ensure you are applying for your school's correct recognition year.
- B. One document containing a letter of support from the principal (required)** and any other optional supporting evidence you would like to include (student work, letter from a partner organization, etc.)
- C. Two narratives (required)** (described below) where schools should discuss their successes, challenges, and what they hope to improve upon in the future in the areas of authentic in-classroom learning and expanding learning beyond the classroom walls.
- D. Three top photos of your projects/activities (optional)** (see last page of this document for more details).

Narrative One- Authentic In-Classroom Learning

- This narrative should describe the authentic hands-on, real-world learning taking place in the classroom at your school. This classroom learning must emphasize environmental and/or sustainable education and includes civic engagement and/or STEM connections.
- Authentic Classroom learning can, but is not limited to the following topics taken from the VDOE [Virginia Science Standards of Learning](#) and [Environmental Literacy](#) documents:
 - Habitat change- fragmentation, loss, conversion, sedimentation, erosion, succession, habitat restoration
 - Schoolyard habitat analysis
 - Green career pathways
 - Energy conservation and efficiency
 - Carbon Footprint/Ecological Footprint analysis
 - Climate Change
 - Improved water quality, efficiency, conservation, and mitigation
 - Watersheds, wetlands, or oceans studies
 - Reduced waste production, improved recycling and composting programs
 - Use of alternative transportation to, during and from school
 - Key relationships between dynamic environmental, energy and human systems
 - Biodiversity concepts: Virginia threatened and endangered species, native and nonnative species, endemic species and keystone species
 - Natural Resources conservation and policy
 - The relationship between the environment, society, and economics

Narrative Two- Expanding beyond the Classroom

- This narrative should describe how your school is expanding beyond the classroom and incorporating opportunities to *support* the hands-on, real-world environmental education students are receiving in their day-to-day classrooms (criteria 1).
- These opportunities (often referred to as meaningful field experiences) can take place in the schoolyard, through community partners, on field trips, etc. They should be tied to the authentic classroom learning criteria and rooted in best practices for field trips, MWEEs, etc.
- These opportunities can also be a training program for staff to be able to provide experiences beyond the classroom in the future
- Possible opportunities can include but are not limited to:

DWR State-wide Programs:

- [NASP Program](#)
- [Hunter Education](#) courses
- [Boating safety](#) courses
- Integrated [Project WILD](#) curricula
- Angling in the classroom- Backyard Bass, [Tackle Loaner Program](#)

Environmental Literacy Programs supported by DOE:

- Completed the [Environmental Literacy Indicator Tool \(ELIT\)](#) survey- ask your science supervisor, this survey is only available every other year. Please include a screenshot or other documentation when submitting. *Not available for the 2025-2026 application cycle*
- Completed a [Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience](#) (in or outside of Chesapeake Bay watershed)
- Environmental Literacy professional development for majority of staff, not just science teachers

Additional Opportunities:

- Participation in Citizen Science programs
- Partnerships with community environmental/sustainable organizations. May include a letter of support by partners.
- Creation/maintenance of a schoolyard habitat (outdoor classroom, native plant pollinator garden, natural play areas, rain garden, wildlife observation areas). This could also include identifying and labeling trees/plants in the school grounds. Lesson ideas can be found [here](#).
- Field trip to one of DWR's Birding and Wildlife Viewing Trails site or Wildlife Management Areas found on <https://dwr.virginia.gov/explore/>
- Other Meaningful Field Experiences (hikes, field trips, etc. that support authentic learning about Virginia's environment)
- Other state-wide programs: [Adopt-A-Highway](#), [Project Learning Tree](#), [Project WET](#), [AG in the Classroom](#).

How often can my school apply for VAN Recognition?

School can but do not have to apply consecutively! A school may apply this year, then take the next year to run the same program again (not applying for VAN) before expanding the program the following year and applying for VAN again. Schools may also apply when they take on new topics and opportunities that support environmental literacy.

Each year a school applies for VAN recognition beyond Year 1, their narratives must show how their in-classroom and meaningful field experiences/programs have improved and/or progressed from the previous recognition application. If previous experiences/programs have been fully integrated, schools may report on new topics and opportunities.

Submitting photos to your VAN application

To help us show off your efforts, we are asking you to submit your 3 best high-quality photos representing your Virginia Naturally Schools efforts for the year using our [Virginia Naturally School Program Photo Submission Form](#). All photos sent to us need to have photo permissions in your files for any identifiable person, must be .jpeg or .png format, and be labeled "SchoolName1," "SchoolName2," etc. With your submission we plan to share your efforts on our recognition page and potentially social media pages.

Once you submit your written application, you will be directed to a "Thank you for Submitting your Virginia Naturally Schools Application" page. On this page you will see a "Please submit any photos that accompany your application [here](#)" statement. Please click on the word "here" to access our Content Submission Form.

Photos shared any other way beyond this Content Submission Form will not be included in our program outreach efforts.