Ohio Sunset Review Committee
Agency Questionnaire

Environmental Education Advisory Council

Agency Name _____

Point of Contact Sam Smith, Legislative Liaison, Ohio EPA

Agency's primary purpose and its various goals and objectives

ORC Section 3745.21(B) establishes the purpose of the Environmental Education Council (Council) to advise and assist the Ohio EPA director in administering the Ohio Environmental Education Fund (OEEF), created in ORC Section 3745.22. Per statutory requirement, the Council reviews and comments on all proposed expenditures from the OEEF. ORC 3745.22 (B) and (C) further require the Council to advise and assist the Ohio EPA director in preparing an annual agenda for the uses of the OEEF during the next fiscal year, and an annual financial report on expenditures made during the previous fiscal year. The Council also serves as a broad-based public advisory group, providing advice to Ohio EPA on issues affecting environmental education programs in Ohio. The Council has strongly supported Ohio EPA efforts to align OEEF funding priorities with the agency's regulatory and programmatic priorities, such as education to reduce the nutrient loadings to rivers and streams that contribute to the formation of harmful algal blooms. The Council also supports Ohio EPA efforts to align OEEF funding priorities with other state programs and goals. For example, applicants for K-12 grants must demonstrate how student activities will meet the Ohio Department of Education's New Learning Standards for science. OEEF also funds projects introducing students to real-world careers in environmental science and engineering, to support the strong emphasis on career education in the state education standards, and state emphasis on STEM fields. Current funding priorities are posted in the OEEF's Annual Agenda for SFY 2025.

Agency's past and anticipated workload, number of staff required to complete workload, and total number of staff

Three and roughly one-half FTE positions at Ohio EPA administer the OEEF grant program by reviewing applications, assisting applicants and grantees, and overseeing grant projects. These positions include two grant coordinators, one administrative professional, and a portion of the time of the Chief of the Office of Environmental Education and the Deputy Director (Chief of Staff), who represents the Ohio EPA Director at Council meetings. Total time spent by these employees in direct support of the Council (emails, meeting preparation and minutes, appointments) as opposed to grant administration, is typically less than 100 hours per year.

Four additional FTEs within the Office of Environmental Education at Ohio EPA focus on outreach associated with environmental education and careers. Specific activities include promoting OEEF in under-served counties to improve opportunities for funding, organizing environmental STEM events for K-12 students, developing recycling toolkits for schools, raising awareness of environmental careers such as licensed operators, and participating in environmental educator workshops.

Agency's past and anticipated budgets and its sources of funding

Prior to 2020, direct support of the Council was generally less than $250 per year, with approximately half of that as travel expenses for council members to attend meetings. Since replacing the in-person meetings with virtual meetings in 2020, no travel expenses have been incurred. Copying and mailing costs are insignificant with grant application reviews conducted online.

Funding for the Council comes from the OEEF, which receives one-half the civil penalties collected for violations of Ohio's air and water pollution laws under ORC Section 3745.22 (A). Penalty revenues fluctuate a great deal from year to year as enforcement cases are settled. In the most recent five years, they have averaged $700,000 a year, and when averaging the last four years, the penalty revenues dropped to $490,000. This is much less than the OEEF's statutory annual spending authority of $1.5 million. Most of the funds are distributed in grants, scholarships and other direct support for environmental education projects targeting pre-school through university students and teachers, the regulated community and the general public.

All Ohio EPA staff within the Office of Environmental Education are funded through sources outside of the OEEF and the GRF. They are funded primarily from tipping fees.

Number of members of its governing board or other governing entity and their compensation, if any

The Council consists of 12 members: two members of the general assembly; one from the House and one from the Senate, three *ex officio* members representing the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Director of Natural Resources (ODNR), the Director of Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA), one member appointed by the Board of Regents to represent university-level educators, and six members appointed by the Governor to represent large and small business, statewide environmental advocacy organizations, municipalities, and elementary/secondary school teachers. Members serve without compensation but may be reimbursed for their mileage and parking expenses for attending two meetings a year. No travel expenses have been incurred since replacing the in-person meetings with virtual meetings in 2020.

Current serving members include:

- Brian Buschur, McMahan's Bottle Gas, Dayton, representing small business
- Leigh Ann Miller (Secretary), Grange Insurance Audubon Center, Columbus, representing environmental advocacy
- Ryan Curtis, Ohio Department of Education, representing the Superintendent of Public Instruction
- Jen Dennison, ODNR Division of Wildlife, representing the ODNR Director
- Tracy Freeman, The Nature Conservancy in Ohio, Dublin, representing environmental advocacy
- Shelby Croft (Chairman), Chief of Staff, representing the Ohio EPA Director
- Kip Brady, New Philadelphia City Schools, New Philadelphia, representing elementary and secondary educators
- Mark Papke, Lakewood City Engineer, representing municipalities
- Gwynne Stoner Rife, the University of Findlay, representing university educators
- Amy Weiskittel, LyondellBasell Industries, Cincinnati, representing large industry
- Honorable Tim Schaffer, Ohio Senate

The position representing the Ohio House of Representatives is currently vacant.

Additional notes

In making grant awards, the Council tries to balance the needs of the OEEF's three different target audiences (PreK-12, general public, and regulated community). The Council put in place scoring incentives for education projects that help regulated entities such as farmers and small businesses understand environmental regulations. Outreach efforts and scoring incentives have greatly increased the number of funded general public projects to help Ohio citizens understand technical aspects of environmental issues, and to help local governments meet environmental mandates for public education. These mandates include requirements that municipalities educate their residents about storm water, that watershed organizations educate residents about preventing pollution in local rivers not meeting Clean Water Act standards, and that local communities educate residents and businesses about recycling and waste minimization opportunities. The Council is also sensitive to the importance of serving all geographic regions of the state and implemented scoring incentives for applications from under-served counties. Thanks to these incentives, OEEF grants have been awarded to entities in 84 of Ohio's 88 counties.