

Four Winds Nature Institute
4 Casey Rd. Chittenden, VT 05737
802-353-9440 www.fourwindsinstitute.org

FOUR WINDS NATURE PROGRAM MANUAL

With the Four Winds Nature Program, children and adults learn together and explore nearby nature outdoors. The program is fueled by the energy of local volunteers who teach a lesson every month to their classroom of students in grades K-6. The volunteer coordinators oversee every aspect of the program in their school and are the keystone of our model. Many thanks from all the Four Winds staff to our coordinators for their extraordinary dedication in bringing this program to their communities. And thank you, too, to all our Nature Program volunteers for connecting children to nearby nature!

Table of Contents

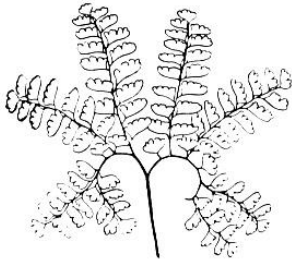
The Nature Program	2
Program Organization	
Curriculum	
Volunteers	3
Recruiting Volunteers	
Matching Volunteers with Classrooms	
Working with Volunteers	
Student Volunteers	
Training Workshops	5
Setting Up the Workshops	
Policy on Children at Workshops	
Recording Workshops on Video	
Snow Days and Other Emergencies	
Classroom Lessons	6
Scheduling the Lesson Calendar	
Connecting with Classroom Teachers	
Integrating the Lesson into the Curriculum	
Substitute Volunteers and Rescheduling	
School Grounds and Beyond	
Teaching Materials	8
Organizing Materials	
Preparing Materials	
Loaned Materials	
Communication Outside the Classroom	10
With School Administrators	
With the Town	
With Families	
Sustaining and Celebrating the Program	11
Fund-Raising	
Finding the Next Volunteer Coordinator	
Celebrating a Year of Natural Science Lessons	
Monthly Reminders for Coordinators	13

The Nature Program

Program Organization

Despite having only eight naturalist-educators on staff, we reach some 17,000 students in 100 communities—thanks to the 1,600 volunteers in participating schools who give their time each month to attend a training workshop run by Four Winds staff, prepare the lesson, and then teach the lesson to a classroom of students (volunteer coordinators have bigger jobs). Here is how this “ripple effect” works:

- The **Four Winds naturalist-educator** runs a two-hour training workshop each month for the school’s Nature Program volunteers. They also deliver all the teaching materials to the volunteer coordinator.
 - The **volunteer coordinators** oversee the program at their school, recruit volunteers, arrange the workshops, and coordinate the presentation of lessons in the school. They manage scheduling, finances, and enrollment and are the primary contact for school staff and for Four Winds. You can see why we suggest that more than one person serve in this leadership role for each school’s program!
 - The **materials coordinator(s)** may assist the head coordinator by preparing all props and teaching materials for the lesson.
 - The **volunteers** teach the classroom lessons, usually in teams of two.
 - The **classroom teacher** may assist them and incorporate the lesson into the curriculum if they choose.
 - The **students** learn natural science and have fun!



Curriculum

The Nature Program lessons are organized into five themes, each of which encompasses a year’s worth of lessons (typically eight, though this may vary by school). The five year-long themes are:

- ECOSYSTEMS: Discovering Connections in the Natural World
- STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION: Adapted for Survival
- PATTERNS IN NATURE: Looking for Similarities and Differences
- CYCLES: Change Through the Seasons
- EARTH: Exploring Our Physical World



Within each theme, there are eight or more lessons that may be taught over the course of the academic year. With their Four Winds naturalist-educator, coordinators select and schedule lessons that take into account the natural features on the school grounds and in the nearby neighborhood. For example, one lesson focuses on beavers; this lesson isn’t as exciting for the students if there is no beaver activity near the school, so another lesson may be substituted. In addition, the lessons are planned to coincide with what is happening seasonally on the landscape.

To see a complete description of each lesson, visit our booksite, nearbynature.fwni.org.

Volunteers

Recruiting Volunteers

Recruiting volunteers is a key task for coordinators. Volunteers go into the classroom in teams of two (or occasionally more) to present each month's lesson to the students. Each volunteer gives about five hours a month to the program—attending the training workshop, preparing the lesson and gathering materials, and presenting in their assigned classroom. Often a volunteer leads lessons in multiple classrooms, especially if they have several children and want to work in each child's classroom. Here are some tried and true tips for finding and recruiting volunteers:

- Approach individuals yourself; a personal invitation is always the most successful tool.
- Ask teachers to suggest parents for you to call, or request that they ask likely candidates themselves.
- Reach out to community members, grandparents, and retirees about this opportunity to be involved in the local school.
- Call your local chapter of RSVP (Retired Seniors Volunteer Program) or your state's retired teachers association and request volunteers.
- Set up a table at kindergarten registration, school open house, or Town Meeting Day.
- Go to local conservation commissions or other community organizations.
- Advertise in the school newsletter or local newspaper (see ad below).
- Meet with the parent-teacher organization. Invite potential volunteers to attend a training workshop so they can see first-hand how much fun it is.
- Consider recruiting high school and middle school students—they can be excellent co-leaders.
- Offer “part-time” positions where volunteers share a classroom, alternating months with others so their time commitment is less.
- Create a Four Winds bulletin board in a public space (town hall, library) with photos of children doing our activities. Or customize some Four Winds posters (see our website) with your contact information, and display them at the library, senior center, or local churches.



Sometimes people prefer to help in ways other than teaching the lessons. There are many ways volunteers can pitch in: creating a monthly bulletin board related to the current topic, helping with child care, writing articles for a newsletter, working on teaching materials, or fund-raising. Another volunteer job, often done by the school librarian, is to find and display books related to the month's topic.

Sample Recruitment Ad

Volunteers Needed to Lead Outdoor Natural Science Lessons for Kids!

Want to learn more about nature? Eager to share the joy of discovery with children? Become a Four Winds volunteer and join a group of community members who share both an interest in nature and a love of children. Four Winds is a community-based organization that provides natural science education for all ages. As a Four Winds Nature Program volunteer, you will bring fun and engaging natural science lessons to the children at [your school's name].

Adult volunteers meet for two hours every month right here in our town for a workshop taught by a naturalist from the Four Winds staff. Each month we'll learn about a fascinating natural science topic with activities designed to teach children in grades K-6 about this topic. Outdoors, we'll explore the school grounds and nearby woods and fields.

Then, later in the month, volunteers will bring these lessons to the classes, leading children in the activities and taking them outside for an up-close look at the month's topic. This is a great way to meet other people in our community and give the important and rewarding gift of your time to the children in our school.

For more information call the program coordinator, [your name here, at 555-1234].

Matching Volunteers with Classrooms

Many volunteers want to be in their own child's classroom, and they may pair up with a friend to be teaching partners, especially when they have kids in the same class. This may not always be possible, however, and for some children having their parent as their teacher isn't ideal. Thus, sometimes the coordinator needs to assign volunteers to a classroom. It works best to match new volunteers with more experienced folks, as it's easier to learn the ropes from someone who knows the program well.

We expect at least one volunteer from each classroom team to attend the training workshop. If a volunteer is unable to attend the workshops, this person should pair up with a volunteer who can.

Working with Volunteers

There are different policies for volunteers and guest presenters at each school that participates in the Nature Program, on subjects including confidentiality, background checks, emergency protocols, etc. Coordinators should review pertinent policies with the school administrators and be sure all volunteers have a copy of the school handbook and are familiar with school policies. Teachers are expected to be present when Nature Program volunteers are teaching as they are ultimately responsible for the students.

The coordinator should make sure at least one person from every classroom team can attend the monthly Nature Program training workshop. A reminder email to volunteers a few days before each training workshop is very helpful (and appreciated!).

At the first workshop, volunteers are introduced to their teaching partner(s). One volunteer in each pair acts as the team leader, who will organize the team's work and communicate with the classroom teacher. After the first workshop, coordinators will want to send a group email to all volunteers with the year's schedule of workshops and a contact list of volunteers so everyone is connected electronically.

Coordinators may delegate jobs such as the newsletter, bulletin board, fund-raising, and materials preparation so that everyone shares the work. Volunteers can be thanked at the end of the year at an all-school assembly or with a potluck lunch. Celebrating the learning community is so important!

Student Volunteers

Older students who have taken part in the Four Winds Nature Program since kindergarten are often glad to share their knowledge and experience with younger kids in the school. With some supervision, students as young as 5th or 6th graders can be excellent assistants in lessons for younger children. They help with puppet shows, small group activities, and outdoor supervision. Student volunteers learn to be role models and leaders, and they solidify their own knowledge through teaching.

One adult volunteer or school staff member should coordinate the student volunteer program. This person meets with the students and their teachers to plan out a schedule for their participation, including time to be trained (review the lesson, practice puppet show script, review activities, or simply attend the training workshop) and times that students will help the adult Four Winds volunteers in the classroom.

Student volunteers should always work with adult volunteers in a classroom, never alone. In some schools, the older students help only with the puppet shows, while in others they are fully involved in leading the lessons. We recommend that no more than three students act as assistants per classroom at a time. The same students may help all year long, or they may take turns with other students.

Having student volunteers participate in the Nature Program can be helpful for the adult volunteers and exciting for the children. However, it does take a lot of organization and supervision by an adult volunteer, and it is not necessarily right for every school.



Training Workshops

Setting Up the Workshops

The coordinator needs to find a meeting space for the monthly training workshops held prior to every classroom lesson. Workshops are two hours long and take place during the school day. Ideally, they are held at the school so volunteers can become familiar with the school grounds before taking kids outside. Other places, such as town halls, libraries, or fire stations, are also used in many towns.

We ask that no more than 30-35 people attend these workshops so that everyone can participate in the hands-on activities. We also request that at least one person from each classroom team attend.

Policy on Children at Workshops

Although our program is ultimately designed for children, our adult volunteers need the time and space to focus on learning a topic in depth during a short period of time. Therefore, we find it's best for adults to attend our workshops without bringing their children along. We realize that exceptions are sometimes necessary, but the group should discuss childcare options first.

Similarly, volunteers should consider carefully whether they'll be able to focus on leading the lesson and activities if they bring a child with them when teaching. The classroom teacher needs to approve any younger siblings in the classroom.

In some towns, daycare is provided at someone's house during the workshops, and in others, daycare can be provided in the same building as the workshop (this only works if the two rooms are completely separate). Volunteers may take turns attending workshops and caring for each other's children. Some groups find high school students enrolled in baby-sitting classes to run daycare sessions as part of their course requirements.



Recording Workshops on Video

Some coordinators in large schools routinely record the workshops for volunteers who can't come. Certainly watching a workshop video is an alternative for those who can't make it, but it's not a replacement for attending the workshop. Participating in activities is very different from watching them, and the best preparation comes from actually taking part.

Videos of our trainings should not be posted on a website available to the public. They may be temporarily posted on a password-protected school website. Some schools simply save the training video to a flashdrive and loan it to those interested. Thank you!

Snow Days and Other Emergencies

The coordinator and Four Winds educator need to know ahead of time how to contact each other in case of school cancellation, emergency or other reasons. Generally, workshops are cancelled on snow days as a safety precaution; plus, parents are occupied with children at home. If school is cancelled on a training day, coordinators should contact their Four Winds educator as soon as possible. They may wish to establish a phone tree or send out a group email to inform volunteers about a cancellation.

If a snow day interferes with a classroom's monthly Nature Program lesson, the classroom volunteers should work with the classroom teacher to find a new time slot.

Classroom Lessons

Calendar of Training Workshops and Classroom Lessons

In May, the coordinator and Four Winds naturalist-educator pick dates and lesson topics for the following school year's workshops. Coordinators then provide this schedule to all volunteers and to the teachers (including art, music, and gym teachers, and librarians) so they can plan ahead. In August or September, each team of volunteers should meet with their classroom's teacher to schedule their in-class lessons for the year. If possible, it's helpful to schedule them all for the same day of the month and time of day, so it becomes a routine that's easy for everyone involved to remember. The schedule could also be posted in the teacher's classroom.

Because each school has several teams of volunteers but typically only one box of teaching materials, a calendar must be maintained for scheduling classroom lessons. A shared online calendar works best, or at least a master paper calendar displayed in a place where all volunteers can look at it. The coordinator and volunteers together resolve scheduling conflicts, if they arise. Ideally, coordinators confirm the master calendar every month at the training workshop and then email dates and times for all classrooms' lessons to all volunteers.

Connecting with Classroom Teachers

When volunteers meet with the teacher at the beginning of the year to schedule the lessons, they should also discuss: the role the teacher would like to have during the lesson, what method the teacher uses for getting the students' attention (e.g. hand-clapping, dimming lights, etc.) so volunteers can use it as well, what to do in case of a fire drill or other emergency, any allergies or other health issues in the classroom, and any other special classroom rules or issues. Ultimately, classroom teachers are responsible for the students, as Four Winds volunteers are guests in the classroom. Teachers should always be present during the lesson.

When the classroom teacher fully participates in Nature Program lessons, it sends students the message that these lessons are an important part of the school day. Volunteers should ask teachers how they would like to be involved in the lesson, whether helping with classroom management, leading small groups in activities, or assigning children to groups—they know what teams will work best together.

It's also helpful if teachers can send notes home the day before each lesson reminding children (and parents) to bring appropriate outdoor clothing. Teachers can help with permission slips for special outings to a pond, forest, or stream, and, if necessary, help to arrange transportation for these outings.

Most teachers really appreciate having volunteers lead natural science lessons in their classrooms and are happy to include outdoor nature exploration in their curriculum. That said, there is a great deal that classroom teachers must teach, and school days are packed, so it is important that our program provide valuable science education and learning opportunities to all students.

Integrating the Lesson into the Curriculum

There are many ways that teachers can extend the natural science lesson beyond the time allotted to Four Winds volunteers. Volunteers should send a link to the year's lessons ahead of time to their teacher (ideally as early as the preceding spring) so they can plan around the topic. We have developed Teacher Resource pages that include ideas for extension activities that teachers can do as preparation for the

month's workshop or as follow up. All of our lessons comport with the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS); documents outlining these standards accompany each lesson.

Some teachers have the students keep a nature journal about the topics they study during the year with Four Winds. The children could also record their nature observations on a school-wide or classroom calendar.

In many schools, the librarian puts out a display of books related to the topic of the month. With the music teacher, students might compose a song and add a verse for every lesson. Some classes make a scrapbook or photo album, or a collection of students' creative writing that can be displayed in the classroom or at special events in the school or community.

Substitute Volunteers and Rescheduling

Children and teachers look forward to the Nature Program each month and so are disappointed if the lesson is cancelled. In general, volunteers are expected to find their own substitutes or to reschedule if they cannot come to a lesson. Everyone should have a contact list of volunteers noting those who are willing to substitute in case of illness or emergency. When rescheduling, volunteers should first look at the school-wide calendar and make sure the teaching materials are available during the new time slot.

School Grounds and Beyond

Most of our lessons have an outdoor portion, and usually the school grounds are adequate for our needs. Coordinators should inform all volunteers of the school's boundaries. Go out with the facilities manager in the fall to note the property lines. It's very helpful if the grounds have an area of overgrown, unmowed lawn (for finding insects and spiders), a small patch of woods, and a hedgerow.

However, several lessons are best taught beside a lake, pond, stream, or beaver dam. These are typically not present on the school grounds, though they may be within walking distance of the school. Every school has its own policies about transporting children and specific permission slips for outings. The coordinator should check with the principal about these policies and let volunteers know the process, which may affect the choice of lessons as well as the logistics of getting children to and from a pond or stream. These outings should be arranged in advance, and the principal, teachers, and staff need to know about them ahead of time.

If permission slips are required for a lesson, volunteers should work out the details with their classroom teacher. Some schools have a general permission slip for Four Winds outings that are within walking distance.



Teaching Materials

Organizing Materials

The Four Winds Nature Program lessons are available on our booksite: nearbynature.fwni.org. Each lesson in this digital publication includes a background essay, lesson plan/activity write-up and puppet show. The lessons for each theme are also available as a printable pdf booklet for Nature Program volunteers. Download the pdf booklet from the general resources section of the booksite if you want to print individual pages and maintain page formatting.

Four Winds volunteers have access to teaching materials for their school's workshops via a password protected portion of the booksite. Passwords are sent to coordinators in August and shared with all volunteers at the first workshop of the year. Please protect that password (and our copyrighted materials).

The teaching materials include puppet drawings, large-size charts, and any required worksheets or other hand-outs, as well as a Volunteer Teaching Outline and Teacher Resource Page for each lesson. We also provide slide shows, kits for some activities, and other hard-to-find items such as galls, feathers, compasses, and tuning forks.

Teaching materials for each lesson should be stored at the school in a place easily accessible to volunteers. A large storage container or a rolling audio-visual cart in a closet allows volunteers to transport materials easily to their classroom. Volunteers need to come a little before their scheduled lesson begins to look through the box before teaching, so it's helpful if the box is kept in a place where they can organize and repack the materials without disturbing a class.

On the outside of the Four Winds box or cart should be taped a sheet of paper that lists both the contents provided and the items that each team of volunteers is responsible for supplying (such as leaves or pressed flowers), organized by activity. This paper is also a good place for volunteers to write any teaching suggestions after having run the lesson for themselves.

The contents of the box should also be grouped by activity, inside labeled ziplock bags or manila envelopes. Puppets for each workshop go in a big labeled envelope. Paper scripts last longer if protected by a plastic sleeve. Given all the work that goes into making puppets and props, it's a good idea to find a space in which to store, in clearly labeled boxes, the materials for lessons in future years.



Preparing Materials

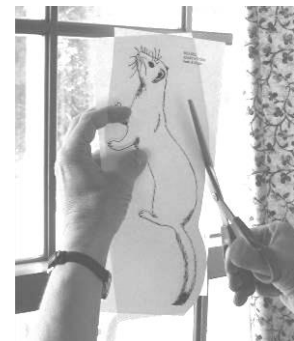
In schools that do not have a designated materials coordinator, each team of classroom volunteers signs up at the beginning of the year to make the materials for one month. They usually need at least four days after the workshop before the first lesson can happen. Instructions follow.

Puppets:

1. On cardstock, print out color versions of our puppets (from password protected files on nearbynature.fwni.org).



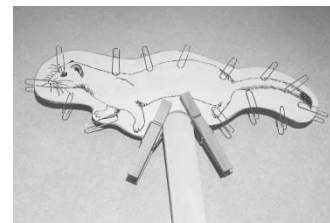
2. Cut front and back sides of the puppet apart.
3. Match outlines by holding the paper up to the light, then cut around the broad outline of the character.
4. Tape a handle—a wooden tongue-



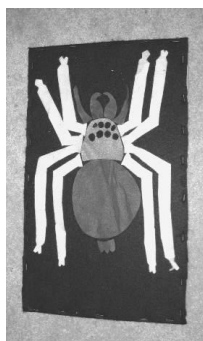
depressor, flat wooden paint-stirrer, or bamboo skewer—to one blank side, then glue front and back together.

5. Use clothespins or paperclips to hold together while the glue dries.

- Some puppets are made differently, in which case instructions are included with the stencils.

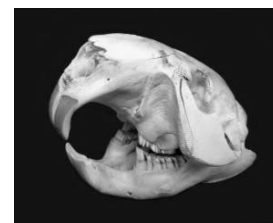


Puppet Theater: A tri-fold display can make a simple stage. Cover the outside with fabric or colored paper, or drape cloth over the tri-fold like a stage curtain. Tape the script inside (a piece of clear packing tape stuck at the top of the tri-fold will protect the cardboard and make it easier to tape up and remove the paper scripts without tearing). Another way to make a stage is simply to drape fabric over a desk or rolling cart, place the materials box on top, tape the script to the back of the box, and hide behind the desk while using the box as the stage.



Felt Board: Use tape or hot glue to attach a piece of black felt to a piece of cardboard that measures approximately 18x30 inches. Wrap the felt around the edges of the board to cover it completely. Cut felt pieces for spiders, flower parts, insects, and frogs out of colorful felt and display them on the black felt background.

Photocopies: Inquire at the school about making copies of hand-outs (task cards, survey sheets, etc.) for the children. Also, it's great to provide a copy of the monthly *Nature's News* to each student to take home.



Loaned Materials

We are happy to loan a variety of hard-to-find materials to schools in our programs, and we appreciate your help in preserving them for others to use as well. Below are some guidelines for the care of special Four Winds' teaching materials.

- **Handle with care**, but remember that we do want the children to handle the objects that we provide. Certainly, we appreciate your supervision when they are handling delicate materials.
- **Do not label.** Please do not mark up any items in our kits or sets.
- **Keep track of permits.** Towns teaching the *Bird's Bodies*, *Owls*, and *Feathering the Nest* lessons will receive sets of feathers, wings, or nests respectively. Federal permits are required for possession of these items, so Four Winds will send the coordinator a sub-permit that allows volunteers to use these items for their lessons.
- **Check inventory.** Check the contents of the sets both when you receive them and before you return them to Four Winds. Most include an inventory list for this purpose.
- **Return materials promptly.** Please return loaned materials to your Four Winds educator or to the address below no later than one month after the last lesson of the month. (Before returning, check the calendar to make sure that all the volunteer teams have presented the lesson.) These sets are expensive to replace, and we want to keep costs as low as we can so all schools can afford the Nature Program.

Four Winds Nature Institute
P. O. Box 1810
Norwich, VT 05055

Slide Shows and Photographs

Slide show presentations and color photographs for some units are loaned to each school on a flash drive at the beginning of the school year. Slide shows are formatted in Power Point and will open properly on any operating system that has Power Point (for PC) or Keynote (for Mac). If needed, there is an open source download of programs in Open Office for Macs that reads files from Microsoft programs, such as Power Point, Word, and Excel. Slide show scripts are useful for telling the story that is illustrated through the photographs on the slides. They are located on our booksite (nearbynature.fwni.org) under materials.

Some activities suggest using large color photographs to initiate student observations. These can be found in a folder on the flash drive labeled “jpg files”. Photographs are larger and print with better resolution when printed from the jpg files as opposed to the slide show.

We expect flash drives to be returned at the last workshop of the year. Sometimes the final unit requires use of the materials on the flash drive, so it is fine to keep it until the end of the school year. If this is the case, please communicate a plan with the Four Winds educator about how the flash drive will be returned to our Business Office. Our address is provided on the manila envelope that it comes in, so coordinators can easily mail the flash drive back after their classroom workshops have completed. A \$10 fee will be charged for flash drives that are not returned by June 15th.

Communication Outside the Classroom

With School Administrators

The coordinator is the primary Four Winds contact for each school and receives communications from us about administrative specifics such as billing, enrollment, and scholarships. The coordinator discusses these matters with the principal as needed. Each year, the coordinator and principal fill out the Nature Program enrollment form together. Tuition bills for the school’s portion of the payment are sent in August to the principal (due Sept. 30), and on a quarterly basis to the coordinator for the remainder.

The coordinator may want to invite the principal to a fall workshop so he/she can welcome and thank the volunteers. It’s important to keep the principal informed about lesson topics, field trips, and any other news of note relating to the program and its volunteers. Coordinators may also wish to attend a school staff meeting to give teachers an update or to introduce the year’s lessons.

All school staff should receive a copy of the upcoming year’s schedule and topics in June so they can include these in their curriculum planning.

With the Town

Finding ways for the whole school and town community at large to take part in and hear about the Nature Program is another important job for coordinators. They can keep the public informed by putting up a bulletin board at school, setting up a display at Town Meeting, and printing articles in the school and community newsletters. Many grandparents and other senior citizens volunteer for the Nature Program, building a richer connection between the school and community.

With Families

Children will want their parents to know what they have been doing with Four Winds. The school newsletter reaches all school families, so it's a great place to include a monthly update about the latest lesson topic. Four Winds' monthly *Nature's News* can be customized to include in the school newsletter or sent home with the children.

A good way to keep parents informed is to send a note home ahead of a lesson outlining the topic and mentioning necessary clothing. It's also nice to send something from the lesson home with children so they'll remember to tell their parents about it. Some of our hand-outs can be used for this purpose.

Volunteers may want to give students a fun assignment for them to do with their families—recording birds at the bird feeder or predicting the weather, for example. They could create a drawing or story together to add to their nature journal.

Some volunteers make nametags each month that reflect the lesson topic; others add a sticker every month to sturdier, reusable nametags, then send these home with the children at the end of the year. Sometimes teachers have their students write letters to their classroom volunteers or their parents about their favorite activities following a lesson, which gives the children a way to reflect on the topic they have been studying. Older students can write articles for the local paper.



Sustaining and Celebrating the Program

Fund-Raising

Schools pay for the Nature Program in different ways. We request that at least one third of the fee come from the school budget, in order to ensure that school administrators and staff wholeheartedly support the program. Coordinators should therefore make sure to ask the principal or school board to include at least a portion of the program fee in the school's operating budget. In some cases, the school pays the entire fee. In others, it's necessary to raise money through grant-writing, fundraising events, or a letter-writing campaign to request support from townspeople or local businesses. Here are some fundraising ideas:



- Do a bottle drive or collect used ink cartridges to recycle.
- Hold an auction, yard sale, or raffle. One city school raised over \$3000 by holding a huge rummage sale in the gym.
- Have a baked goods sale or put on a community spaghetti supper or pancake breakfast. This is a great way to engage the whole community and raise money at the same time.
- Arrange a run-athon, bike-athon, or read-athon in which students collect pledges for their efforts. Or hold a Winterfest with a sled-athon (find sponsors for each sled run!).
- Organize a Mother's Day brunch, Christmas tree pickup and disposal, sale of homemade bluebird houses, or order-ahead pie sale with delivery on the day before Thanksgiving.
- Partner with a local restaurant. Four Winds volunteers wait tables and the restaurant donates a portion of the evening's income to program fees.
- Approach the town's Conservation Commission about contributing to the program, either in fees or by supplying willing volunteers.
- Write a letter to parents asking them to donate \$5 or \$10 toward the program fee.

Finding the Next Volunteer Coordinator

Coordinators are encouraged to recruit a co-coordinator with whom to share the planning and organizing. Not only is it more fun to have a partner, but when two coordinators share responsibilities, one coordinator can take over the lead role when the other leaves. This sets up a nice succession plan.

In order to ease the transition, it's wise to think ahead about volunteers who might next assume the coordinator role. Those with young children in the primary grades will probably want to be involved in the program for a long time, so they may be good choices.

Celebrating a Year of Natural Science Lessons

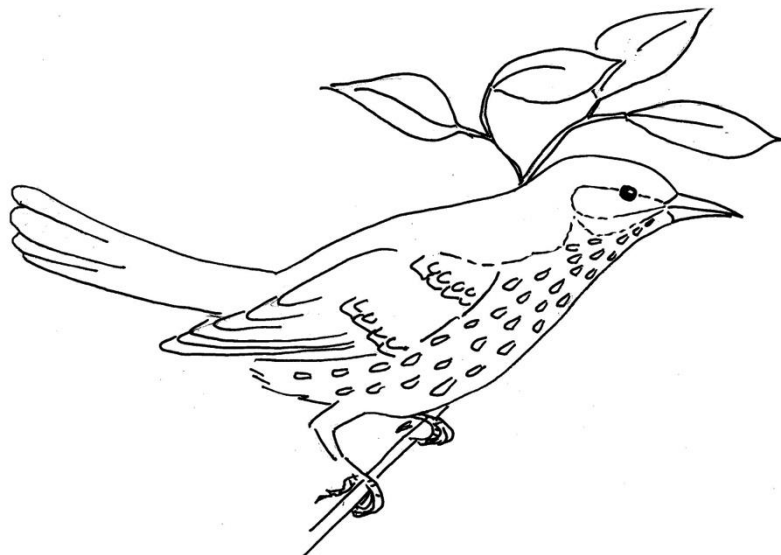
Teachers and volunteers may wish to plan a springtime celebration of the full year of natural science learning. This can be as simple as a special snack provided during the last lesson, or as elaborate as an all-school assembly with performances by each class relating to the year's topics.

Some volunteers present each student with a certificate, badge, button, or bookmark, while others write a personal note to each child. Template certificates can be found on the Four Winds website.

In some schools, volunteers organize a day of outdoor activities, drawing on all the year's lessons, so that children get a chance to do some of their favorites again. Other schools arrange a field trip to a natural area related to the year's theme, either as the last lesson or as a special field trip for a school-wide celebration. Some schools organize an Earth Day Celebration or plan a Green-Up Day service project. A guest speaker or entertainer could present a school assembly related to the year's theme.

Year-end events are also a great time to recognize the wonderful volunteers who donate their time and energy to bring natural science education into the school. A big banner with all the volunteers' names, thank you notes from each class made into a slideshow presentation, a thank you puppet show written by children – there are lots of ways to recognize those volunteers. Some schools' Nature Program volunteers get together each May for a picnic lunch and hike to wrap up the year with nature.

If you choose to do a big year-end celebration involving the entire school, we suggest that the group form a committee to help plan and carry out an event. These are memorable affairs that require a lot of planning, so recruit help and have fun!



Monthly Reminders for Coordinators

August

Recruit volunteers

Send reminder to returning and new volunteers about upcoming September workshop

Confirm meeting space for workshops

Check in with principal about upcoming year

Place welcome letter in teacher's mailboxes

September

Four Winds workshop

Review this Program Manual and the Four Winds website and booksite

Assemble names, phone numbers, and emails, and provide these to all volunteers

Make sure all volunteers have the schedule of training workshops for the year

Create an online calendar or pin a master calendar near materials box/cart for easy access by volunteers

Delegate teaching materials preparation

Optional: have a Nature Program volunteer sign-up table at school Open House

Remember the school's portion of the fee is due on Sept. 30

October

Four Winds workshop

Delegate teaching materials preparation

Check in with all volunteers to answer questions or address concerns

Ask a volunteer to create and maintain a Nature Program bulletin board at the school

Send email with numbers of students and volunteers to Emily Pals (Emily@fwni.org)

Keep a list of volunteers willing to be substitute presenters

November

Ask principal to request school board support and funds for next year's program

Four Winds workshop

Delegate teaching materials preparation

Check in with classroom teachers

December

Holiday Break!

Ask a volunteer to write an article about the program for the newsletter

Send out group email reminding volunteers about the January workshop



January

Check that program tuition is included in school's operating budget for upcoming year
Look into parent-teacher organization funding or outside funding for next year's program
Four Winds workshop
Delegate teaching materials preparation

February

Four Winds workshop
Delegate teaching materials preparation
Look out for next year's enrollment form in the mail

March

Enroll in Four Winds Nature Program for the next year!
Four Winds workshop
Delegate teaching materials preparation
Set up a Nature Program display at Town Meeting
Submit second payment

April

Four Winds workshop
Delegate teaching materials preparation
Invite potential volunteers to training workshop or a classroom lesson
Receive confirmation for next year's program

May

Four Winds workshop
Delegate teaching materials preparation
Schedule next year's workshops with Four Winds educator
Return all loaned materials and flash drive to Four Winds educator
Give a copy of next year's lesson topics and schedule to all classroom teachers and volunteers
Attend kindergarten registration day to recruit new volunteers
Organize a Thank You celebration for volunteers

June

Return any missing materials by June 15
Call the Four Winds office at (802) 353-9440 with questions as they arise
Have a wonderful summer!

