



Maryland Environmental Literacy Advisory Network

NETWORK CHARTER

April 2024

Funded by
NOAA BWET &
Chesapeake Bay Trust

Prepared by
MELAN Design Team



Contributors

Thank you to the MELAN Design and Advisory Team who supported the creation of this Network Charter.

Design Team

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Thank you to the following contributors for their invaluable input on the Network Charter.

Contributing Networks

- Maryland Association for Environmental Education (MAEOE)
- ShoreRivers
- Chesapeake Bay Trust
- NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office
- MD Dept of Natural Resources
- MD State Dept of Education

Our Network Charter will evolve over time as our Network grows and changes. Feedback and ideas for how to keep this document current, useful and relevant are welcomed.

Please email suggestions to Jemima Clark melan@maeoe.org

Advisory support and facilitation provided by:



MAEOE

Maryland Association for Environmental & Outdoor Education



MELAN comprises all 22 counties of Maryland and Baltimore City, which are entirely located in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. MELAN collaborates closely with the Outdoor Learning Partnership (OLP) and the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) to advance environmental literacy networks across the great state of Maryland.

Overview

This Network Charter provides a high-level description of why MELAN exists, the work that we do, and the foundational statements that guide network operations. The Charter is a tool for aligning existing network participants, for onboarding new participants, and for introducing the network to new audiences. Every few years the Charter will be revisited to ensure that, as MELAN evolves, these foundational statements reflect that evolution.

Origins & Progress

The Maryland Environmental Literacy Advisory Committee originated as a NOAA BWET Grant Proposal in late 2020, in response to many Project Green Classrooms and Chesapeake Bay Program Education Workgroup discussions identifying the need for an independent Network, with a funded Coordinator, positioned adjacent to the State Governing bodies and tasked with meeting the outcomes in the Logic and Action Plans around cultivating networks and conducting landscape assessments.

The Network-of-Networks model of the Regional Outdoor Learning Network, as originated by Local Concepts LLC, is being employed as a strategic organizing model to re-establish and rebuild Environmental Literacy Networks across Maryland (see page 2).

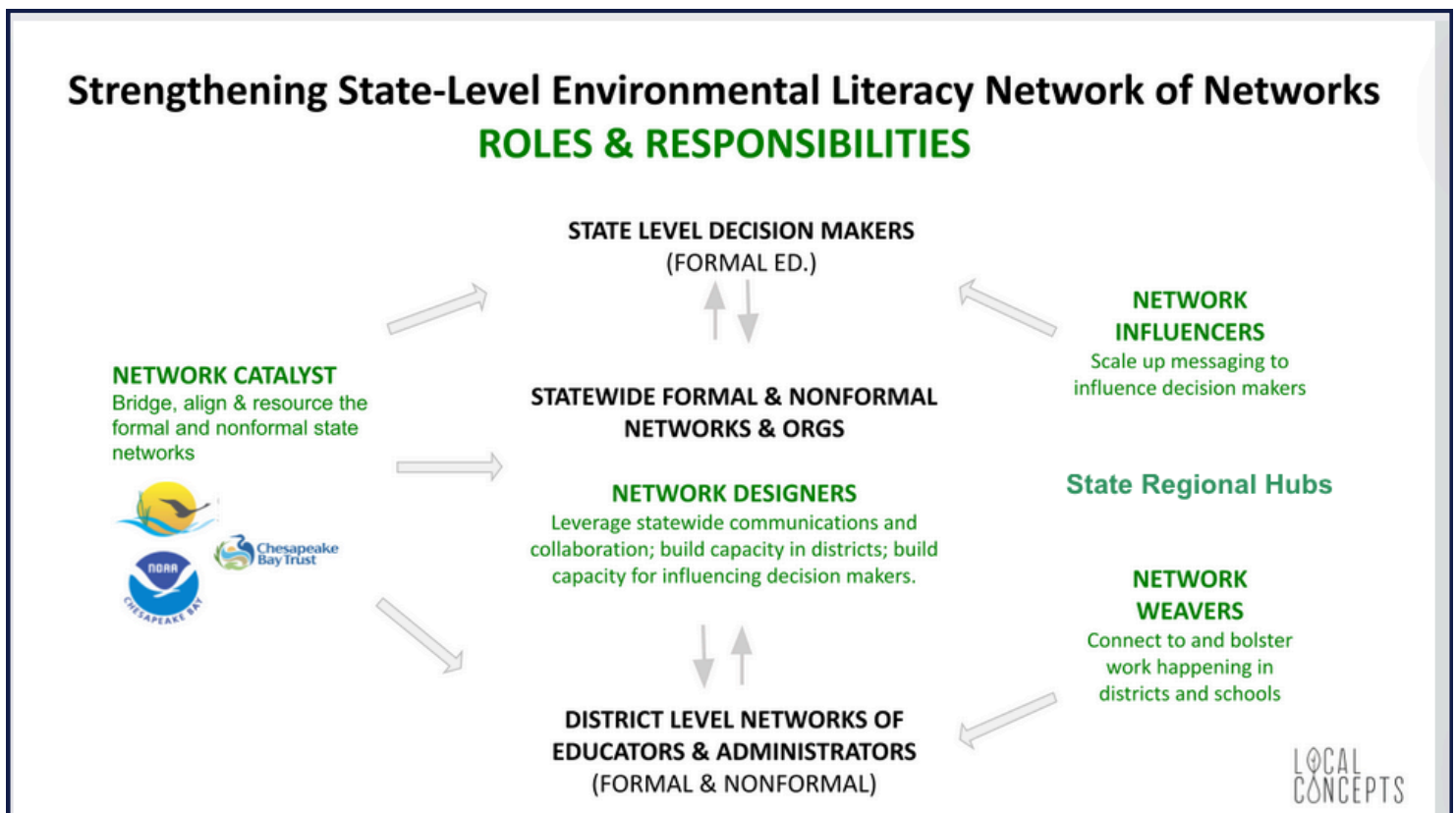
With a particular focus on regionally specific hubs in under-resourced areas, MELAN's role is relationship and trust building first, and then network growth and local capacity building. Utilizing additional funding from the Chesapeake Bay Trust, a part time Network Coordinator was hired in April 2023. The first Regional Hub meetings kicked off in January of 2024, and the first state convening at the MAEOE Conference in February 2024. MELAN launched a statewide landscape assessment/resource directory through EcoRise: GenThrive 2020 in May 2024.

Regional Outdoor Learning Network (ROLN)

The Regional Outdoor Learning Network (ROLN) was convened in 2020 by NOAA and the Chesapeake Bay Trust based on an assessment conducted by Local Concepts LLC. Its recommendations came from the environmental literacy community across the Mid-Atlantic. The network aims to reinforce resource networks across the Chesapeake Region to ensure all students have access to high-quality environmental education opportunities and meaningful watershed education experiences (MWEEs).

The state model below visualizes the multiple levels of actors in a state system and the high-level roles of network leaders within each level to effect change together. Strong relationship-building, communication systems, shared purpose, and aligned change strategies are critical for long-term systemic change efforts.

The State Network-of-Networks Model of the Regional Outdoor Learning Network



Mission = Vision & Purpose

Vision

MELAN embraces environmental literacy as a life-long learning journey cultivated through formal and non-formal educational experiences that spark inspiration, enhance critical thinking, improve physical and mental health, and empower learners with the knowledge and skills necessary to fuel a greener economy and shape a more resilient & equitable region.

MELAN envisions healthy, engaged, and prepared youth, adults and communities nurturing our lands and waters and rising to meet the environmental and socio-economic challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

Purpose

The purpose of MELAN is to strengthen relationships, establish communication pathways and identify collaboration opportunities state-wide between formal and non-formal networks of educators and the communities they serve to cultivate the conditions necessary for equitable environmental literacy efforts to grow and thrive across all of Maryland's diverse county landscapes.

WHO WE ARE

The Maryland Environmental Literacy Advisory Network (MELAN) is a group of education professionals from diverse backgrounds and perspectives dedicated to the advancement of environmental literacy across Maryland.

MELAN serves in an advisory capacity and as a conduit for increasing environmental literacy capacity for decision-makers at the state and local levels.

Network Values



Shared Leadership & Decision-Making

We cultivate shared commitment, decision-making, and action that recognizes the interdependence of our communities.



Equitable Inclusion & Accessibility

We affirm that every individual brings their own unique wisdom, value, and experience, and we uphold their right to recognition, representation, and dignity.



Responsive

We evolve in response to the changing needs and assets of network participants, and Maryland's diverse communities. We commit to remaining flexible and responsive to challenges and opportunities.



Data Driven

We draw upon quantitative and qualitative data from assessments and other community evaluations to inform our work.



Relationship Focused

We focus on building trusted relationships and seek collaborations with diverse partners who share a common purpose.

What We Do

What We Do

The Maryland Environmental Literacy Advisory Network (MELAN) builds capacity of, and increases collaboration between, existing state-wide environmental literacy networks to ensure all students in Maryland are environmentally literate upon graduation.

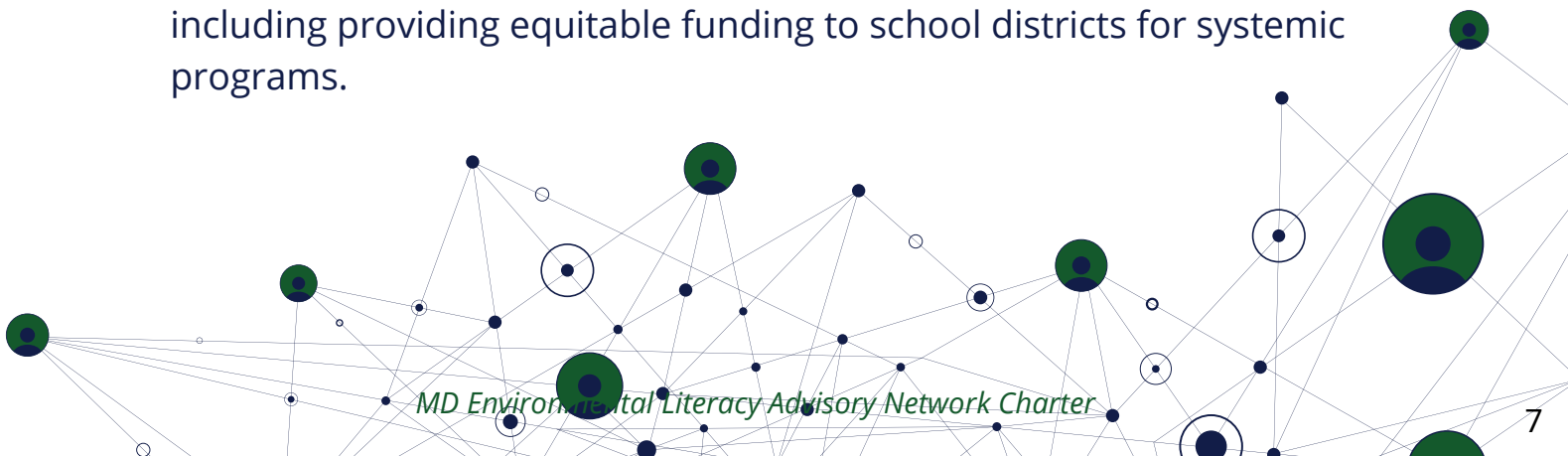
How We Do It

Foster Connectivity & Collaboration

- Facilitate communication and relationship-building between representatives of networks and organizations.
- Convene stakeholders to assess opportunities for collaboration around our shared purpose, needs, and assets.
- Support coordination among community partners.
- Collect, analyze, share, and utilize data.

Support a Network Ecosystem

- Build understanding, culture, and capacity among members to operate within a network.
- Create and maintain a governance structure that ensures equitable access to resources, information, and decision making across MELAN.
- Establish mechanisms to influence state and local leadership to advocate for systemic integration of environmental literacy efforts, including providing equitable funding to school districts for systemic programs.



Network Structure Diagram

NETWORK MANAGEMENT

Network Coordinator

Jemima Clark
with MAEOE

Design Team

Network Funders,
Non-profit reps, DNR

Advisory Team

Weavers, Communities
of Practice

Network Participants

Weavers, Communities of Practice, Non Profit Env. Ed, Existing Networks

Regional Hubs

Regional Weavers & Network Participants

Communities of Practice

Weavers & Participants

Lower Shore

Mid Shore

Southern MD

Frederick Area

Lower Shore

Central MD

Higher Education

LatinX

Who is MELAN for?

To meet the overarching goal of increasing capacity and collaboration of existing state-wide environmental literacy networks, MELAN participants are drawn from a wide variety of “environmental fields,” including formal and non-formal environmental education, green jobs and workforce development organizations, sustainable schools, facilities people, as well as climate literacy, community resilience program, and green careers leaders.

Having representation across a broadly defined environmental literacy/environmental education spectrum is essential for providing multiple access points and for widening network reach to be more inclusive and impactful.

Network Roles & Responsibilities

Network Management

Internally Advancing MELAN
Building an Inclusive Culture of Collaboration

Network Coordinator & Staff Management Team

Primary Role

Serves as the backbone of the network

Contributions

- Handles daily operations
- Supports the Design Team, providing strategic framing & analysis
- Manages communications & programs
- Promotes & weaves the network

Commitment

20 hours/week

Design Team

Network funders, non-profits
reps, DNR

Primary Role

Shapes & leads the network,
provides guidance &
oversight

Contributions

- Develops goals and strategies
- Shapes network design & governance
- Provides oversight
- Promotes & weaves the network

Commitment

Quarterly meetings +
asynchronous work est.
at 30-40 hours/year

Advisory Team

Reps from Hubs &
Communities of Practice

Primary Role

Engage in inclusive
strategies to strengthen the
specific networks

Contributions

- Leverages community expertise & relationships
- Builds community awareness & capabilities
- Strengthens local to state connections
- Scales innovations, practices & stories
- Promotes & weaves network

Commitment

Quarterly meetings +
asynchronous work est. at
30-40 hours/year

Network Roles & Responsibilities

Network Weavers & Participants

Externally advancing MELAN's shared purpose and priorities in diverse geographies and sectors throughout the state of Maryland. Reps serve on the Advisory Team to promote communication and scaling.

Regional Hubs

Regional network weavers and network participants based on geography

Primary Role

Operate as a community hub to advance impact locally focusing on areas of greatest need

Contributions

Communicate needs and wins to state network, grow the network, identify levers of change, activate other partners

Commitment

Quarterly meetings + asynchronous work est. at 30-40 hours/year

Hosting events throughout the year

Communities of Practice

Network weavers and network participants based on topical or audience themes

Primary Role

Operate as a community of topics to advance the impact programmatically and in audiences of greatest need

Contributions

Communicate needs and wins to state network, grow the network, identify levers of change, activate other partners

Commitment

Quarterly meetings + asynchronous work est. at 30-40 hours/year

Hosting events throughout the year

Network Partners

Maryland Association for Environmental & Outdoor Education, (MAEOE)

MAEOE encourages, engages and empowers our community to understand, responsibly use and promote the natural world. This support of Maryland's environmental educators enables students to explore, investigate and act to improve the health of their schools and surroundings. In addition, meaningful change is the goal of MAEOE's collaboration with other environmental organizations to produce educational programs and promote environmental literacy throughout Maryland.

Outdoor Learning Partnership, (OLP)

In April 2024, the Outdoor Learning Partnership (Executive Order 01.01.2024.15) was signed into law by Governor Wes Moore, replacing the Project Green Classrooms Initiative (2017), which, replaced the Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature (Executive Order 01.01.2017.12).

The OLP Initiative is a renewal of Maryland's commitment both to environmental education, through environmental literacy programs, and to ensuring that Maryland youth experience, understand, and learn to conserve the natural environment. The goal of the partnership is to develop Maryland students as environmental caretakers by providing structured, outdoor educational opportunities where they can learn how to access, conserve, and restore the state's natural resources.

Chesapeake Bay Trust, (CBT, funder)

Mission of the Chesapeake Bay Trust is to engage and empower diverse groups to take actions that enrich natural resources and local communities of the Chesapeake Bay region. Leading to the vision, the Chesapeake Bay and local watersheds are healthy and safe, our waters are fishable and swimmable, local communities benefit from these healthy resources, and everyone participates in restoring and protecting our natural resource treasures.

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office (BWET, funder)

The NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office uses science, service, and stewardship to improve the health of the Chesapeake Bay and ensure its sustainable use for generations to come. As part of NOAA Fisheries' Office of Habitat Conservation, we apply science and engage communities to tackle problems and challenges facing the Bay. Our work includes habitat science, oyster restoration, sustainable fisheries, climate resiliency; and environmental literacy. To carry out this work, the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office is organized into three branches: Environmental Literacy and Partnerships, Ecosystem Science and Synthesis, and Scientific Operations.



Appendix A

Definition of Terms

Network: An organizing model that intentionally brings a community of people together to work as equal partners pursuing a shared purpose over time.

Network-of-Networks: An organizing model that intentionally connects the work of multiple networks (affiliate networks) to share information and increase coordination on behalf of a shared purpose in alignment with a shared set of principles (*David Erlichman, Impact Networks*).

Network Weaver: A network weaver is someone who is aware of the networks around them and works to make them healthier." June Holley (writer, activist, network consultant) Network weaving is an umbrella term for the practice of network leadership/stewardship, and it refers to a specific role.

Access: To be able to get or use something

ROLN: Regional Outdoor Learning Network. A regional network funded by NOAA and the Chesapeake Bay Trust composed of state-based networks from Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia who come together to share, learn, build network capacity, and advance systemic environmental literacy across the watersheds of the Mid-Atlantic.

Community of Practice: A community of practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or an interest in a topic and who come together to fulfill both individual and group goals.

Regional Hub: A regional hub is a central mechanism for member engagement in a network. It helps coordinate communication and activities between members in a specific region. In MD these are defined as Western MD, Frederick Area, Central MD, Southern MD, Mid-Shore and Lower Shore.

Environmental Literacy: The goal of Maryland's Environmental Literacy instructional program is to enable students to make decisions and take actions that create and maintain an optimal relationship between themselves and the environment, and to preserve and protect the unique natural resources of Maryland, particularly those of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed.

DEIJA: DEIJA stands for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice, and Accessibility. It is a framework that aims to create a more inclusive and equitable environment by valuing and engaging with different cultures, identities, and experiences.

Equity: The term "equity" refers to fairness and justice and is distinguished from equality: Whereas equality means providing the same to all, equity means recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and must acknowledge and make adjustments to imbalances.

Equitable Access: Equitable access is the principle that everyone should have fair opportunities to access resources, services, and opportunities, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Appendix B



MELAN's Charter allows for a Design Team and an Advisory Team. The Design team is comprised of invested nonformal and formal educators, changemakers, and leaders in E-Lit. The Advisory team is comprised of the self-selected Weavers for the regional hubs and communities of practice.

Maryland Environmental Literacy Advisory Network (MELAN) Organizational Chart Contact Information

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