



Blue Ridge Naturalist (BRN) Certificate of Merit Program Final Project Guidelines

Learning is a lifelong creative endeavor. The North Carolina Arboretum, a University of North Carolina System Affiliate, is proud to offer immersive learning opportunities through its certificate of merit programs. As a student in the Blue Ridge Naturalist program, you've explored the natural world with us and expanded your understanding of the uniqueness of this place in the Southern Appalachian mountains, one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world. We believe that we shape place and place shapes us. The final project requirement is a way to synthesize your learning across your core and elective classes and share how you shape and are shaped by the places you love and want to protect.

Each BRN certificate student is required to complete a final project in order to receive a certificate of completion from The North Carolina Arboretum. This document provides guidelines which cover the necessary components of your proposed project. Start thinking about possibilities for your project as you are inspired through your course work. ***You will need to submit a proposal form and have it approved by the Adult Education Manager/Program Coordinator before beginning your final project.***

Purpose of the Project: The final project should provide some benefit to a group or community of people living in western North Carolina or the student's home region. The final project allows the student the opportunity to integrate knowledge gained from their BRN course work into a project that is educational and provides a needed service.

How to Choose a Final Project: *The BRN final project should answer a need expressed by a school, nature group, environmental facility, national, state, or regional park, trail system, wildlife habitat or other environmental & natural history educational venue.* Traditionally, the Arboretum has not been a good possibility for BRN final projects due to existing programs and insufficient staff to serve in supervisory roles. We are actively trying to change that perception and see any number of needs to be addressed or creative projects to undertake. If you see a need at the Arboretum or have a flash of insight, we're glad to hear it and will guide you to the right staff member to help in brainstorming and advising.

Previous projects have included designing an educational program and/or a curriculum guide, providing environmental interpretation brochures for an organization or newsletter design, trail or garden building with signage, or native flora and or fauna habitat improvement. The BRN student needs to make contact with a person who will function as their supervisor of their project. Finding this person and asking them what their organization needs can often provide a focus for the project. We encourage you to go out into the community and find a venue that has a strong need for your contribution in natural history and ecology.

Funding: Consider if your project idea will need funding. Part of your project may include soliciting funds either through grant writing or developing a community partnership with another interested organization as a funding source. Perhaps the organization you partner with already has funds. Ask questions. Do research. Also consider the longer term implications of your project. It's not enough to produce a guide for an organization, especially if that organization does not have funds to print, publish it online or promote it. Complete a budget in the preliminary stages of planning.

Project Description: On the project proposal form, in a short paragraph, describe what your project will entail. Include the target audience, what you plan to create and which areas of study provided you with inspiration for this project. Describe what the final outcome of the project will be. The results of the project need to be documented in a substantive way. Also include information on how you think the project will be funded and maintained once your part is completed.

Objectives: Each project should have at least three specific objectives that are measurable when applicable. For instance, if you are creating a nature trail for a school you may choose to create 10 nature stops on the trail with weather proof signage, and you may also create an online teacher’s guide for anyone who wants to lead groups on the trail.

Time Frame: The time devoted to the final project should range from 30 to 50 hours. This includes research, planning, meetings, resource gathering, design, implementation, and evaluation. While there is no hard deadline for beginning and completing the final project, we recommend completing the project within 6 months after completing all BRN course work.

Project Supervisor: Each student should identify a key individual at your chosen community organization who will serve as your project supervisor and evaluator. For instance, if the project is to develop a birding class, nature trail, or wildlife garden for middle school students, the science teacher may be the individual who approves the details of your curriculum, oversees your design and implementation of a curriculum guide and evaluates your project. At a community center, your supervisor might be the activities coordinator. For Buncombe County, your supervisor might be the recreation manager. At a church, your supervisor might be the youth/adult education director, etc. these are the people to whom you should ask the question “What do you need?”

Resources: What resources will you need to complete your project? Will you need to find funding to make this project happen? Can the agency you are working with provide materials, funding, volunteer labor, website space, a computer or copier for making brochures? Will you need to make sure there are future volunteers who will sustain your final project in the future with continued program teaching or with making copies of a trail map and keeping a brochure rack filled or with cleaning out bat-houses or birdhouses, weeding a garden or making sure trail signs are repaired, etc?

Evaluation of Final Project: Keep in mind as you are proposing and implementing your final project that you and your supervisor will be asked to submit an evaluation as the last step in completing your final project for the Blue Ridge Naturalist Certificate Program. Project evaluation information is supplied on the second page of the project proposal form.



Steps for how to find, propose, conduct and complete a final project:

1-Make sure you are in your last semester of class work for the BRN program before proposing and starting your final project. Please be thinking of various options all through your BRN program, but try to wait until your final semester to officially submit a proposal for your final project. We recommend this so that you can complete most of your core classes, particularly as you go into Natural History Interpretation. What you choose to focus on for your project in Natural History Interpretation might well be a part of your overall final project.

2-Make a list of places you are interested in. Now it is time to share your natural history knowledge with the outside community. Think of local elementary and high schools, nature centers, national and state parks, designing a curriculum for a youth or adult program. You may choose to work through a faith community, neighborhood, or county recreation area. Other ways to generate ideas include attending one of the final project brainstorming sessions, talking with your fellow students in a class or bring up questions in a BRN round table discussion, and talking with graduates about their projects (making connections through the Blue Ridge Naturalist Network is a good place to start).

3-Make an appointment with the Blue Ridge Naturalist program coordinator about your project ideas. Email adulthoodeducation@ncarboretum.org to set up a meeting to discuss your ideas and planning before you commit to start a project. Make sure your project idea is in alignment with the BRN program guidelines and that the Coordinator is aware of your progress in planning your final project. The BRN final project should answer an expressed need. This means someone already has a need for your project. *Ask them what they need rather than telling them what you want or what they need.*

4-Fill out and submit the BRN Final Project Proposal form firstly after talking with the Program Coordinator and secondly after establishing your partnership with your final project Coordinator at your chosen organization.

5-Receive a copy of your proposal signed/approved by the BRN Program Coordinator, and then begin your project. Plan to complete your final project in 6 months or less.

6-Please contact the BRN Program Coordinator with any questions you have along the way as you work on your project. The Coordinator can help you trouble shoot different aspects of your final project, give you ideas for how to proceed and implement your ideas.

7-Submit your evaluation of your final project upon completion. Provide written reflection, testimonials, and a selection of photographs, video or other forms of documentation of your project with this evaluation. Once you have submitted your evaluation and 5 photos of your finished final project, you will be credited as having completed the final project requirement of The Blue Ridge Naturalist Certificate program.



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**Blue Ridge Naturalist Certificate Student
Final Project Proposal**

Student's name: _____

Student's email address: _____

Student's telephone number: _____

Date of pre-proposal meeting with BRN coordinator: _____

Project Start Date: _____ Project Completion Date: _____

Project title: _____

Project Description:

Project objectives:

Proposed time frame (how many hours will you devote to this project?): _____

Proposed site for project implementation (include mailing address):

Project Supervisor: _____

Supervisor's contact email and telephone: _____

Who is the target audience for this final project?

What resources will be needed to implement this project and how will you obtain these resources? (money, personnel, equipment, space, staff of organizations you are working with, etc.):

Is this project sustainable and replicable or a one-time event?

What is the specific plan for sustaining this project for the next 12 months?

Other information you wish to share:

Student's Signature

Date

Project/Site Supervisor Signature

Date

BRN Adult Education Coordinator Signature

Date

Info about your project final evaluation:

The BRN certificate final projects will be evaluated **1**-by you and **2**-by your supervisor.

You will be provided with a review form at the end of your project.

There is no right or wrong about this. It is just a thoughtful reflection about your experience. You can use this opportunity to help future BRN students design their projects. When you are ready, ask for a project review form from the Coordinator.

1. Your project evaluation will include your reflections on:
 - What you originally proposed
 - What you actually produced eg: how the final project actually came out—your conclusion of the project's outcome.
 - Did you complete your objectives (what worked, what you would have done differently, if anything, your recommendations for this or future projects of a similar kind)
 - Your recommendations for future projects and recommendations to BRN students.
2. Provide at least 5 photos of your final project with your written evaluation and submit this to Adult Education Coordinator, The North Carolina Arboretum, 100 Frederick Law Olmsted Way, Asheville, NC 28806.
3. Your Supervisor's Evaluation will be requested through email. You will receive a copy of your supervisor's evaluation. Your supervisor will review the outcome of your project and will comment on the implementation and future of your project.
4. Submission of your project evaluation and your supervisor's evaluation constitutes completion of your final project for credit towards The Blue Ridge Naturalist Certificate Program.



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**Blue Ridge Naturalist Certificate Program
Final Project Evaluation**

This form is to be completed by the student's final project supervisor/project counterpart within 2 weeks of the project's completion and the student will submit to the Adult Education Coordinator.

Student's Name: _____

Evaluator's Name and position:

Name of Project: _____

Location of Project: _____

Audience or recipient of project: _____

Date of Project Completion: _____

Objectives: Were the student's objectives for the project met? ____ Yes ____ No
If no, please explain:

Who was the target audience for which the project was designed?

Is it possible to continue, replicate, or sustain this project going forward? Or is this a one-time project?

If this is a one-time project, is there a way to document it as a useful learning tool?

