



# The NORTH CAROLINA ARBORETUM

AN AFFILIATE OF THE UNIVERSITY *of* NORTH CAROLINA

## 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. These guidelines cover the necessary components of your proposed project. Start thinking about possibilities for your project as you are inspired through your course work. There will also be opportunities for final project brainstorming meetings to generate ideas and identify resources. **As soon as you've spoken with the Program Coordinator and submitted a proposal form, you are free to begin your final project!**

**Purpose of the Project:** The key purpose of the final project is to afford each student the opportunity to integrate knowledge gained from their BRN coursework into a project that provides educational, creative and/or ecological value. This can include a creative endeavor, an instructional or interpretive program, or anything else that provides meaning and value to the student and a human or ecological community of the student's choice.

**How to Choose a Final Project:** First and foremost, Adult Education staff encourage you to choose your final project from a place of passion. As a focus point for your project, it can be helpful to think of an area of need in a place near and dear to your heart or a group or community of which you are a part or with which you have crossed paths (including but not limited to a school, nature group, environmental facility, national, state, or regional park, trail system, wildlife habitat, or other environmental and natural history educational venue). In the past, the Arboretum has not been a good possibility for BRN final projects due to existing programs and insufficient staff to serve in supervisory roles; however, 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. For many projects, the BRN student will need to make contact with a person who will function as the 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.

**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 weatherproof 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:** If you choose to work with a community organization for your final project, you should identify a key individual at your chosen 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.

**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, etc.? Will you need to make sure there are future volunteers who will sustain your final project in the future with continued program teaching, making copies of a trail map and keeping a brochure rack filled,

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 both you and your project supervisor will be asked to submit evaluations as the last step in completing your final project for the Blue Ridge Naturalist Certificate Program. Project evaluation forms can be found at [www.ncarboretum.org/education-programs/natural-history](http://www.ncarboretum.org/education-programs/natural-history).

**Note:** These forms should be filled out **ONLY** upon completion of a final project.

### **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, etc. 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 Adult Education about your project ideas. Email [adulthoodeducation@ncarboretum.org](mailto:adulthoodeducation@ncarboretum.org) to set up a meeting to discuss your ideas and planning before you commit to starting a project. Make sure your project idea is in alignment with the BRN program guidelines and that Adult Education is aware of your progress in planning your final project.

4 - Fill out and submit the BRN Final Project Proposal form *after* both talking with Adult Education *and* establishing your partnership with your final project supervisor at your chosen organization. This form exists in a fillable online version which you can find by visiting [www.ncarboretum.org/education-programs/natural-history](http://www.ncarboretum.org/education-programs/natural-history) and scrolling down to the dropdown form titled "Final Project Proposal." In this form, 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.

5 - Upon submission of your online Final Project Proposal form, Adult Education staff will review your proposal. Please allow approximately two weeks for project proposals to be reviewed. Once staff have reviewed your proposal, we will reach out to you to congratulate you on finalizing your plan, respond to any questions you may have, and encourage you to begin your final project. Please 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 troubleshoot different aspects of your final project, give you ideas for how to proceed and help you find ways to implement your ideas.

7 - Upon completion of your final project, submit your evaluation of your final project and ensure that your final project supervisor (if you had one) submits an evaluation as well. Read below for further details regarding final project evaluations. Once you have submitted evaluations, you will be credited as having completed the final project requirement of the Blue Ridge Naturalist Certificate program.

### **Information about your project final evaluation(s):**

The BRN certificate final projects will be evaluated **1**-by you and **2**-by your project supervisor (if you had one). Once you've completed your final project, you and your project supervisor will each need to complete a separate evaluation form.

Supervisors will need to complete the form titled "Final Project Evaluation for Project Supervisors" and Blue Ridge Naturalists will need to complete the form titled "Final Project Evaluation for Blue Ridge Naturalists." Both forms can be found in fillable online versions at [www.ncarboretum.org/education-programs/natural-history](http://www.ncarboretum.org/education-programs/natural-history). Please ensure that both of these forms are submitted no later than two weeks after completing your final project.

There is no right or wrong about this. Evaluations are meant to serve as spaces for thoughtful reflections about final project experiences. Blue Ridge Naturalists can use this opportunity to help future students design their projects.

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. Please allow approximately two weeks for Adult Education staff to review and acknowledge receipt of your final project and associated evaluations.