

directions



The journal of the Association of Nature Center Administrators

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Creative and Effective Approaches to Professional Development

Richard Haley,
Director of Centers and
Education, Audubon New York

One of the facilitated discussions held at the 2003 ANCA Summit focused on professional development for staff. Much of the session was devoted to sharing approaches to effective and relatively low-cost development opportunities, and it became apparent that this would be an excellent set of proven practices to share with the ANCA membership.

All of the approaches described here have been implemented successfully at one or more centers. Some of them are professional development in the strict

sense of formal training for one or more staff. Others have a great deal to do with building understanding and camaraderie with the staff along with increasing personal skills, knowledge, and enthusiasm. The ideas are presented roughly in expanding order, from purely internal practices to national resources.

First of all, like any other important aspect of running a center, there should be a plan for professional development. It should be built into the culture of the center and set as an expectation for staff from the time of hiring. Setting goals for appropriate professional development within the staff evaluation process is an important aspect of making evaluation more than an annual filling out of forms that then get filed away.

To get an understanding of the professional development needs for your staff, you might think about each staff member in the context of a passion vs. skills matrix. Ideally we want staff who rate high in both, and no staff who rate low in both. If they rate high in passion and low in skills, professional development can probably help them become great staff members.

(continued on page 4)

No human being, however great or powerful, was ever so free as a fish.
- John Ruskin

Directions is a quarterly publication of the Association of Nature Center Administrators, distributed to members of ANCA as a membership benefit. ANCA is a private, non-profit organization, dedicated to promoting and supporting best leadership and management practices for nature and environmental learning centers.

For more information on ANCA
call our toll-free number:
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President's Message

Ruth Lundin,
Executive Director
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For several years now, the ANCA Board of Directors has been struggling to fund the second volume of the Director's Guide to Best Practices, containing additional topics of fundamental interest in the profession. The board made the decision to produce it as a series of monographs, which will eventually be compiled into a book. Last year, we called for proposals for monographs.

We are excited that we have moved ahead both on funding and on the writing of the first monographs. Thanks to the challenge by Charity Krueger, Leadership Award recipient, we are within sight of our goal of raising \$9,000 to pay for the first monographs. Many of you responded with pledges either during "Fund the Need" at the Summit Auction, or in response to the pledge request in December. If you still have not responded, please consider doing so now, so that we can celebrate the success of this campaign.

Don Watson was the first to respond to the call for monograph proposals. He is a published author and editor in the fields of architecture and planning. He is a registered and licensed architect in addition to being longtime, active member of ANCA and NAI and an NAI Certified Interpretive Planner. By the time you read this, Don will have started the first two chapters, one on Exhibit Planning and Design and the other on Buildings and Facilities. The format will be the same as the first Manual, including samples of best practices and/or case histories from nature

centers and a checklist of recommended practices, which serves as outline for the text.

Don hopes to have the process well along by the Summit in Seattle! We need your help for this. Each chapter will be read by at least five (5) peers. The manuscripts should be ready for review in March. Once receiving a copy, readers will have a period not to exceed one month to review and comment on the first draft. The final draft will be reviewed by the Monograph Committee. If you would be interested in being a reader for one or both of the chapters, or a member of the Monograph Committee, please let Larry Brown at the ANCA office know.

Finally, the committee is still looking for other monograph authors.

Consider sharing your knowledge by authoring a ten to twenty page monograph. Suggested topics are: capital campaign, volunteer programs, marketing, land management, education, diversity, finance and accounting, and safety/risk management. The proposal should include the topic, a two-page outline, pricing, timeline for completion, personal biography and references. Refer to the Director's Guide to Best Practices for the format.



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Investing in Professional Development

Ken Voorhis
Executive Director
Great Smoky Mountains Institute

Finding worthwhile professional development opportunities can be like conducting an Internet search that yields several hundred sites. Of the many opportunities that present themselves, finding the golden nuggets that really meet your needs can be quite challenging. Over the course of my career, my involvement with ANCA and attendance at Summits have certainly been at the top of my list of “golden nugget” opportunities. This past year however, I wasn’t able to make it to the ANCA Summit. I certainly missed the rich exchange of ideas that takes place there. I knew of my scheduling conflict with the summit and at the same time had been looking into other ways that I could be challenged to grow as a more effective leader of my organization.

A colleague had mentioned that he had been impressed with the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) and the training opportunities that they provide. He also let me know that most of their clients were corporate, the courses were high quality but expensive, but that they offered scholarships to non-profits. After talking to one of their staff about which course would be most appropriate for my needs, I applied for a scholarship to attend a session for experienced senior managers entitled Developing the Strategic Leader. I received the scholarship and learned later that CCL, itself a non-profit, holds one spot in each course for a non-profit manager. One of their senior managers wrote me that, “a less than explicit intention of our practice of including non-profit leaders in our programs is to help the for-profit world learn from the non-profit perspectives on leadership and organizations.” The scholarship pays for all but 25% of the course cost, which I must tell you, was a good investment even though it still taxed my training budget.

CCL has several training facilities around the world. The course I attended in November was held at their impressive facility in Colorado Springs. Before arriving, the participants (20 of us) had about a day’s worth of work to do completing assessment instruments such as Myers Briggs, and distributing other surveys to bosses, colleagues and direct reports to assess our competencies as well as the those of teams with which we worked within our organizations.

One of the things that I was looking forward to was working with people outside of our field who might hold different per-

spectives and ways of approaching things. In that, I certainly was not disappointed. My fellow course participants included upper managers from Mercedes-Benz, Blue Cross Blue Shield, the International Monetary Fund, Bacardi, a family owned textile company, Liz Claiborne, and DirecTV to name a few. It was a different world than that of a group of nature center administrators but as such gave me that different perspective that I was seeking.

The 5-day course was quite intense and had several components that were beautifully woven together by a team of excellent instructors. The thread that ran throughout the week were discussions about a model that we were challenged to consider regarding the idea of strategic leadership. Leading is something we are all called to do but how could we be more strategic in our efforts? We focused on three areas of strategic leadership: Thinking, Acting, and Influencing. How did we currently divide our time toward those efforts? Could we become more effective by dividing our efforts differently? Another significant part of the week was understanding and analyzing the various assessment instruments that had been completed ahead of time. All of us had done some of these before but the insights of analyzing these together and within the context of a 4-day problem solving exercise was very powerful. That exercise involved all of us as employees of an international corporation which we managed over the next several days. Our time was divided between running our make-

believe company, analyzing survey instruments and focusing on strategic leadership. We were encouraged to experiment with ideas that were developing changes in our managerial behavior. It was a great opportunity to take new ideas and play with them in a very realistic but temporary and inconsequential work simulation.

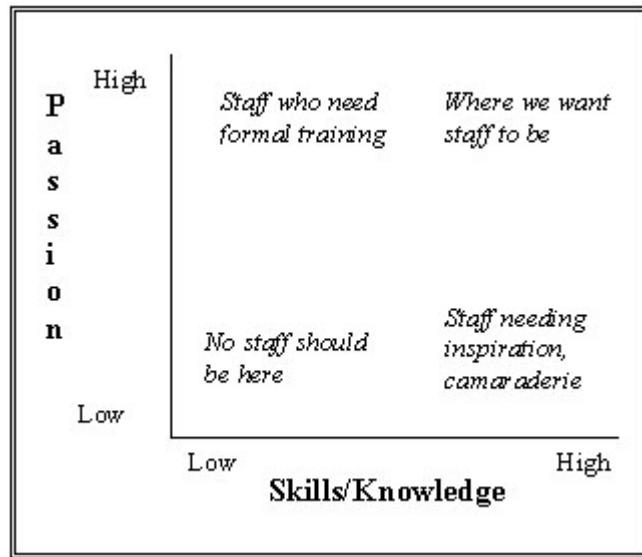
We were encouraged to experiment with ideas that were developing changes in our managerial behavior.

The insights that I gained from this combination of learning venues were significant. As the week concluded two final opportunities helped me to pull all that I had taken in and begin to develop ideas about what I might put into action once I returned home. The first was a chance for each of us to receive input from our fellow course participants. We first reviewed some excellent techniques for giving useful input to co-workers and then within our regional teams (who had developed a good rapport and understanding through working together and dealing with some intense issues) spent time with each team member reviewing our perceptions and ideas about their strengths, areas of opportunity etc. I believe that the input each of us gained from these peer groups was invaluable. The other opportunity was a one-on-one two hour session with our own executive coach who helped us process what we had learned over the week, further discuss and interpret the various assessment instruments, and look at ways to put into practice what had been learned.

(continued on page 8)

Creative (Continued from page 1)

If they are high in skills but low in passion, helping them become great staff might be more difficult – we have to find ways to encourage their enthusiasm and inspire them – two of the goals we usually have for program participants. One successful and simple practice for building camaraderie is the short staff meeting at the start of each day. Often done as a stand-up meeting, this is a 15-minute gathering that allows everyone to say what they will be working on that day, what programs are going on, what seasonal natural events are now to be seen on the trails, and other items that keep the staff aware of the total operation.



Staff development can be built

into a regular schedule of staff meetings. Holding regular weekly or biweekly staff meetings where alternate meetings are for professional development is an easy means of building training into the culture. Such internal training sessions need to be given the same importance at the center as a program for a school or public group, as it becomes easy for staff to start avoiding them if they are not made a priority. The possibilities for such meetings are many. When an educator is developing a new program or activity, this can be a testing opportunity by using the staff as an audience that can give constructive critiques. This is also an excellent opportunity to have training conducted by non-educators on the staff. Having a maintainer show the rest of the staff how to use and properly care for the tools, or having the receptionist go over procedures and how calls and visitors are handled, to cite just two examples, can be a big help in forming an effective team, streamlining procedures, and reducing behaviors that waste time or resources. Finally, internal training meetings can get the staff – the whole staff – outside to build familiarity with the site and local knowledge. It really improves a center if a visitor can learn from any staff person they encounter where to go to see a great stand of trillium this week, or which trail is best for someone pushing a stroller.

Passion vs. Skills Matrix

Putting in place a system of job shadowing and peer review can also help, so long as it is done carefully. It is important to be sure you have a culture that will encourage positive approaches to peer critiques. This does not mean that all comments or observations need to be of the sort that say “What you are doing is great!” But criticism from peers needs to be done in a fashion that promotes constructive criticism rather than verbal attacks that can severely weaken morale and create hard feelings among staff. A session on how to criticize constructively or forms that lead people to write suggestions may be helpful. Job shadowing – having one staff person follow along with what another does for a day, can really help to promote understanding and can lead to new procedures that make work easier for all involved.

Moving beyond internal practices, there are several approaches to professional development that can be put in place if there are other centers within a reasonable drive of yours. Taking a few days over the course of each year to go to other facilities – nature centers, museums, visitor centers, historical interpretation centers, cultural centers – is both a way to build camaraderie in your staff and to learn from other institutions. Centers that make this a regular practice find that there is both

positive and negative learning involved. In other words, your staff will see facilities and practices they want to emulate, and others that they will want to avoid. There are different rewards to be had in both visiting another facility anonymously and in arranging for conversations with their staff. Over time, you can conduct both kinds of visits.

Some centers that do this regularly

leave a skeleton staff behind; some close up for the day and make sure that everyone goes along – from the director to the part-time janitor to the busiest educator. Speaking from personal experience, this is an easy, inexpensive and very powerful way to generate new ideas and build the feeling of the staff as a team. Building in amenities such as paying for the lunches that day and other small touches can make it a very enjoyable day. Bringing along a board member or two can help build relationships and understanding as well.

Involving board members in professional development for staff can be critical to making it part of your institution. Involving board members will help when you are justifying a professional development budget line.

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It is important that boards not perceive staff development days or events as frivolous – one director found that the board was perfectly happy to back a “staff workshop,” but not a “staff retreat,” though the work being done was the same!

Joining with other centers in your area for joint professional development has worked well in several states. Informal get-togethers for directors, educators, gift shop managers, and any other set of peers can be arranged. In some areas this has been done through a state Environmental Education organization. It has also worked simply to arrange for meetings via phone or email and just get together for discussion of a particular topic, along with a tour of the host facility. In one state, the host facility gets to choose the topic for discussion and gets to show off their site. Once a network for these kinds of gatherings exists, outside experts can also be brought in to provide training. Busy academics or state agency biologists who are frequently asked to do talks on their area of expertise are often happy to spend a day training a number of teacher/naturalists from a variety of centers as a way to multiply their impact.

A few centers have tried exchanging educators for a time – a couple of weeks or a month, so that different approaches to programs, special knowledge, and novel experiences can all provide inspiration and help to both centers.

Most education staff and many administrators attend the state, regional, and national conferences offered by various organizations. There are several strategies for making these experiences more valuable to your staff and center. First, require that staff who go to a conference provide training or at least a report after their return, or that they implement one new program or significant change as a result of attendance.

I have found it valuable to encourage staff to present at conferences, and to become involved with the committees that put them together, especially on the state and regional level. Putting on a workshop at a conference is a great way to focus an employee’s attention and care on one area, and often the feedback from a good presentation leads to new ideas for programs. It also builds the professional esteem in which your staff are held, by themselves, by board members, by supervisors, and by anyone who reads the annual report in which you list professional presentations given by your center’s staff.

Setting up yourself or staff to teach a course at a local community college or adult education center is also a terrific way to push the teacher to organize and update their knowledge of a particular subject, and a way to build the perception of nature center educators as professionals. This can be set up as part of the staff member’s job, with the money from the community college going to the center’s budget, thereby helping build organizational relationships.

There are some excellent training opportunities available at the national level.

There are some excellent training opportunities available at the national level. For new administrators or for staff with the potential to be administrators, the Delaware Nature Society offers the weeklong Professional Leadership Institute every January, co-sponsored by ANCA. Participants interact with a diversity of experts in all aspects of nature center management and operations. For more information contact them at 302-239-2334 or www.delawarenaturesociety.org. The National Association for Interpretation offers a variety of courses designed to certify participants as managers, planners, interpreters, or interpretive

hosts. The last category is for non-interpretive staff who still have a great deal of contact with the public. More information is available by going to www.interpnet.com or calling 866-326-4642.

Certification can also be done at other levels. In North Carolina, the state office for environmental education has created a certification program that has become very popular in the state and has established a baseline level for people calling themselves environmental educators. If time and travel are restrictions, there are a growing number of professional development opportunities available electronically. The University of Wisconsin Stevens Point now offers an online course in Environmental Education that gives students a strong background in the history, theory, and diversity of EE. Another example is Windstar Wildlife Institute’s certification for Wildlife Habitat Naturalists, which trains people of any background level in the world of improving habitat at private homes, schools, or nature centers.

Finally, some centers have started to perform cost/benefit analyses of professional development. The cost of sending a staff member to a conference is measured, over a reasonably long period, against the benefits derived in new programs developed or new practices implemented. This helps in justifying professional development budget lines, evaluating staff performance, and evaluating the options for professional development.

As mentioned at the beginning, all of these practices are used successfully somewhere, though probably no one center uses all of these approaches. These are presented as an aid to the creation of professional development plans for centers. Adopting any of these, especially those that promote the free exchange of information within and among centers, will improve the quality of staff, programs, and our profession.

Profiles: ANCA's Officers

TREASURER: Bill Rose



Bill Rose has been President and CEO of the Kalamazoo Nature Center for the past 15 years. In the past, Bill was the Regional Director of Stewardship for The Nature Conservancy in the 13 states that make up the Southeast Region.

As President of the Kalamazoo Nature Center he is responsible for an annual budget of \$2.1 million. There are 60 staff members (50% full-time and 50% part-time) during fall, winter and spring. The Center grows to 110 staff during the summer. Last year there were over 300,000 participants in the Center's programs throughout the State.

Since the \$5 million dollar renovation in 1997, the Kalamazoo Nature Center has more than doubled: 1) the number of people served through programs; 2) the number of staff; 3) the size of the budget.

Bill has his Ph.D. from Michigan State University in plant ecology. He currently serves as Treasurer on the National Board for the Association of Nature Center Administrators, the Board of the Kalamazoo Academy and the External Advisory Committee for the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism at Michigan State University.

Bill has served on the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Interpretation Advisory Committee and the Michigan State Parks Strategic Planning Committee on Interpretation. In addition, he has served on the Kalamazoo/Calhoun Counties Tourism Economic Cluster Group, the Kalamazoo County Chamber of Commerce Environmental Committee and the Kalamazoo Rotary Board.

Bill attended the Leadership Development Program at the Center for Creative Leadership, the Disney Management Institute's program on Service and Customer Loyalty, Leadership Works at Indiana University and numerous fundraising workshops.

SECRETARY: Annie Guion



Annie Guion has been involved in environmental education for over 13 years with experience in positions ranging from teacher/naturalist to regional director. She began her career as an interpretive Park Ranger for the National Park Service, then served as teacher/naturalist at

the Ragged Hill Woods Environmental Education Program, and became the director in less than a year. She created the first regional director position for the Connecticut Audubon Society in the fall of 1998, where she worked until 2003. Annie recently accepted a contract position with Kroka Expeditions in Putney, Vermont, where her goal will be to grow this small, start-up non-profit and take it to a new level of professionalism. Her proudest professional achievement to date is the creation of a new nature center in northeast Connecticut. Her next big challenge will be to create a comprehensive three-year business plan for Kroka, and to guide the New England Environmental Education Alliance (NEEEA) as president. Her smartest decision was to spend the summer volunteering for the National Park Service at the Grand Canyon.

She served on the Connecticut Outdoor and Environmental Education Association (COEEA) board for 7 years, serving as newsletter editor and chairing four conferences. She was awarded COEEA's Outdoor and Environmental Educator Award in 1998, and the Environmental Education Service Award in 2002. She served as a NEEEA board member for 7 years, co-chaired the annual conference in 1997, and is currently serving a two-year term as President. She joined the ANCA board in the summer of 2002.

Annie earned a Masters of Science Teaching from Antioch/New England in Keene, New Hampshire in 1990. Her undergraduate degree is a B.A. in Biology from Cornell University, in Ithaca, New York. She attended the Raising More Money Workshop and the Professional Leadership Institute of the Delaware Nature Society.

from the field: nEW, nOTES & nATURAL hISTORY

Jennifer Kleffner
Community Resources
Coordinator
Durango Nature Studies

Nature is amazing, but don't believe everything you hear!

The myth of the baby bird.

We've all heard it. "If you touch a baby bird in a nest, the mother will smell your scent on the baby and abandon the chick". While this is a myth that we don't often correct with children, as we don't want to encourage small hands reaching into nests, it is actually untrue. By the time a mother bird has chicks in her nest, she has invested a substantial amount of time and energy into reproducing, and she (or he...most fathers help raise the chicks too) is unlikely to abandon the chicks due to an unfamiliar smell.

What can happen when you visit a nest is that you leave a scent trail for predators to follow. Bird researchers, who monitor nests regularly, are very careful to observe nests from a distance whenever possible to avoid tipping off wily predators to the nests location.

The myth of the Daddy Longlegs.

We hear this several times a year from wide-eyed young ones. "The Daddy Longlegs is the most poisonous spider in the world, but its fangs are too small to bite

humans". The species being referred to here is most likely the common web building Pholcid house spider, with its almost round tan body and very long legs. All spiders are poisonous, because they use venom to immobilize or kill their prey. There are over 34,000 species of spider in the world. However, very



few are tested for venom toxicity unless they are a threat to humans. It's difficult to milk spiders for venom, and its hard to find volunteers to test it on once you have it! The reality is we really don't know how poisonous this spider is, because like most spiders, it has

never been tested. Pholcid spiders have fangs very similar in size to the brown recluse, a spider that does bite humans.

The myth of one worm into two.

It is not true that when you cut a worm in half, each half regenerates. Worms can grow new tails, but not new heads. If you cut the clitellum (the fat ring around the worm that contains many vital organs) in half, you will most certainly kill the worm.

Interestingly, earthworms are not native to the United States. They were brought over by settlers in the soil holding their plants. However, we are happy to have them, as worms eat dirt, and in doing so they help churn and aerate the soil. Worm castings (worm poop) are five times richer in nitrogen, seven times richer in potassium and eleven times richer in phosphorus than the soil that went in.

DON'T MISS THIS!!

ANCA Summit X

August 12 - 14, 2004



Seattle, Washington

for more informatoin visit:

www.islandwood.org/anca

Investing

(continued from page 3)

While I was anxious to get back to the reality of the world of residential environmental education I was glad to have taken this chance to step out of that context and reflect on my leadership style and development. The CCL course gave me some excellent insights and tools to lead in a more strategic and dynamic way. I have already begun to put into practice ideas that I gained from this experience. One important thing that I recognized was that developing my leadership abilities requires time to reflect and plan. As such I've set a goal of spending some regular time to review the areas that I most want to develop and determining ways that I can put into practice what I have learned about myself. That practice has already yielded benefits including positive comments from co-workers.

As managers we often talk about the importance of continued professional development but are we working to find ways to continually challenge ourselves and polish our skills? I'd recommend taking one of the CCL courses enthusiastically. For me it was a golden nugget found in my search for an enriching training opportunity. For more information go to www.ccl.org.

Director's Guide to Best Practices

The Director's Guide includes chapters on five essential areas: leadership, strategic planning, boards, staff, and fund raising.

ANCA developed this book for busy directors and staff people with many roles and responsibilities. It is a handbook for those new to the profession and will also challenge and inspire the most experienced directors and their staffs. ANCA members have also found it valuable to give to board members, and volunteers. Directors from 23 states and 40 different facilities reviewed and commented on the chapter drafts and evaluated the book's effectiveness.

Order Your Copy Today!

Price of the book is \$60.00 plus \$5.00 shipping and handling.

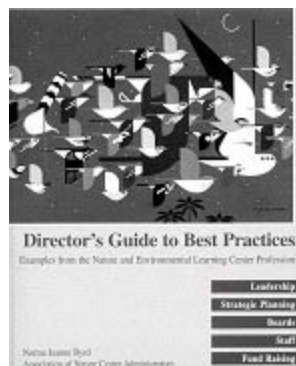
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Endowment Update

Through your generous support the ANCA endowment fund continues to grow. Recent contributors to the fund include:

- Dave Imbrogno
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- Kristin Alexander
- Corky McReynolds
- Ellen Turner
- Bob Thomas
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If you would like to make a pledge please contact the ANCA Office at 1-800-490-2622 or email at lbrown@audubon.org.

ANCA Technical Consults: YOUR FRIEND IN THE BUSINESS!

ANCA offers consulting assistance

to nature centers and other environmental education organizations at very reasonable fees. The charge includes the cost of transportation, lodging and meals for the team, plus a \$2,750 fee that goes toward supporting ANCA's professional services and planning. Our Board of Directors, and members, provide these services with no personal financial gain, while you gain the advantage of advice and guidance from some of the profession's most respected and experienced leaders.

What can be covered? Well, just about anything involved with planning, funding, and operations. Some topics include:

- Assistance with long range and strategic planning
- Review education programs, exhibits, or trails
- Mission focus
- Fundraising and fiscal management
- Facility planning
- Starting a center
- Management strategies and use planning

To find out more about

ANCA's Peer Consults, contact any ANCA board member or Wayne Clark at
817-237-6940
Wayne.Clark@fortworthgov.org.

Jeff Brown from the Yellowstone Association had this to say about ANCA consults:

"We contacted the folks at ANCA and they pulled together some of the best people in this business on very short notice. The consulting team spent two full days in the park and provided a detailed written report within one month. The process was fun, the cost was reasonable, and the results are tangible - we are moving forward with a revised proposal based on the excellent advice we received from these experts."

ANCA Membership Form

Please Join Us!

If you would like to become a member of ANCA, fill out this form and mail to the ANCA office (address below). Members receive

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Institutional Memberships allow for two staff members to receive benefits. Questions? Call 1-800-490-2622.

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Your literary contributions are needed for Directions.

- **Profiles:** Highlights people who put their efforts toward improving the profession. Send a paragraph or two about their background and accomplishments and a picture.
- **From the Field:** Features news, notes, and natural history from your nature center or beyond.
- **Articles:** The best articles come from you - the members. Articles need to be 1-2 pages (500 - 1,200 words). Technical language can be used as needed, but, remember your audience may not have your level of expertise in the subject. Fun, light-hearted, and inspirational articles are always welcome as well.

Submit your
articles to:

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