



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

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 or 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). We highly encourage students to find a space in their own community to complete their project because the Arboretum likely does not have the capacity to serve as a project supervisor or have opportunities for projects. 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 contact 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 to 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.

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.

Evaluation of Final Project: Keep in mind as you are proposing and implementing your final project that both you and your project supervisor (if you have one) 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. *This evaluation form 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 about to take the last few classes for the BRN program before proposing and starting your 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.

3 - Make an appointment with Adult Education about your project ideas. Email 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 and scrolling down to the bottom of the page.

5- Upon submission of your Final Project Proposal form, Adult Education staff will review your proposal. Once your project has been approved you can begin working on it!

6 - 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. Once you have submitted evaluations, you will be credited as having completed the final project requirement of the Blue Ridge Naturalist Certificate program.

7 – Present your Final Project or prepare a Poster for the next Graduation Celebration usually held in September each year. Adult Education staff will reach out to invite students who have completed their projects with details about the celebration.