



MN Project WET Needs Assessment Summary

In 2006, the Minnesota Project WET Advisory Board and staff determined that a participant needs assessment was vital for program improvement. The group outlined goals and potential questions and hired contractors to create an online tool to better understand participant needs, and the barriers to using the curriculum. This survey was posted at www.surveymonkey.com, and targeted workshop attendees from July 2003 to June 2006. The final sample population was 520 participants, of which 56 (11%) completed the survey. This paper summarizes the research findings and recommendations. For the complete report, see www.dnr.state.mn.us/projectwet.

Workshops have been a successful method to reach and teach the Project WET Program and provide opportunities to learn about water education curriculum. Survey results indicate that educators attend workshops for a variety of reasons. More importantly however, all 56 respondents reported that they acquired new skills at the workshop, 77% including the skill of learning how to use the Project WET Guide. Seventy-five percent of the respondents indicated they are applying these skills and knowledge in the classroom sometimes and 5% are applying them all of the time. Participants indicated it was critical to spend time during the workshop discussing how to integrate Project WET into their curriculum.

Participants generally found the Guide useful citing several reasons including the hands-on aspects, variety, engagement, and useful instructions. Despite these encouraging remarks, 30% indicated they are not using the Guide as much as they would like. Factors for lack of use include the lack of time and other logistical barriers. When participants do use the Guide, they are most likely to use the activities demonstrated at the workshops.

Communications and resource availability is crucial in assisting with the growth of MN Project WET. As indicated in the results of the needs assessment, our current method of communications and resource promotion is not being fully received by our participants. The scope of responses to questions asking about resource awareness and product/services usage is across the spectrum. This indicates an unclear picture as to what MN Project WET participants truly need to accentuate Project WET in their classrooms.

What is clear from the needs assessment results is that participants utilize the internet as a primary resource. Respondents indicated using the Internet as their prime resource for gathering new information, 65% of the respondents utilize the MN Project WET website and 68% of the respondents utilize the internet as their primary vehicle for searching for professional development opportunities.

Another component that became evident as a result of the needs assessment is that MN Project WET participants want more local information. In addition to the MN Project WET website, 54% of the participants utilize the provided posters, resources and student materials allowing for local connections. Participants (60%) indicated they would find a MN supplement very useful. While 53% indicated a desire for more in-depth resources available on the MN Project WET website and 49% believe that an E-newsletter would be beneficial to promote Project WET resources, products and services.

The “lack of supplemental information on Minnesota” does not seem to be presenting itself as a barrier to using Project WET activities. However, respondents are interested in a Minnesota specific supplement, with 76% indicating they would be likely or very likely to use a supplement. Respondents also indicated they want all of the suggested potential topics included in the supplement, but most notably, ‘information on Minnesota’s water resources.’ If a supplement is created, respondents first choice for format is overwhelmingly a paper booklet, followed by an online booklet or CD-ROM.

The primary barriers found to implementing Project WET include:

- The transition between learning about activities at the workshop and using the activities in their formal or non-formal education setting was not always successful. Some comments suggested that teachers use the same small set of activities.
- Activities don’t seem to be as useful to 9-12 teachers as to other groups.
- Lack of time to incorporate into their existing programs/curriculum. The time it takes for participants to apply the activities to their work and/or adapt it to their curriculum is one of the biggest barriers to Project WET use. Many of the detailed responses echo this time issue.

The majority of respondents were white females between the ages of 26 and 45. Thirty-five percent of respondents participated in a Project WET training in the last 12 months, while more than half the respondents participated 2 or 3 years ago. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents were from the Twin Cities 7-county metro area, 19% from central MN, 9% from NE MN, 7% from SE MN and the remaining 7% now live outside MN.

Based on the data analysis and full report, MN Project WET has identified participant needs are currently being addressed and potential ways to meet those not yet being adequately addressed. The MN Project WET Advisory Board and staff will be setting priorities taken from this data for years 2007-2010.