

A Program of the Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment



NSTEP

NATURAL STATE STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

HANDBOOK

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1. OUR PURPOSE



NSTEP

NATURAL STATE STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

The Natural State Stewardship Program (NSTEP) is a voluntary stewardship program that provides recognition for organizations in Arkansas that excel in sustainability practices, the conservation of Arkansas' natural resources, or the advancement of education in their communities. There are three (3) membership levels: Quartz, Turquoise, and Diamond.



2. ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility Requirements

- Operate in Arkansas.
- Meet compliance and beyond-compliance requirements. These may vary depending on the type of organization.
- Organizations will receive a lifetime membership unless the organization no longer wishes to participate in the program.
- If a member is a permitted entity, E&E will conduct a review of the member's compliance history with all issued permits every three (3) years. E&E maintains the authority to place members on probation or revoke their membership if permit violations are discovered during the review.



Compliance-Related Requirements For Permitted Organizations

Compliance-related eligibility requirements are listed below:

- No serious violations, or a pattern thereof, of applicable local, state, or federal laws and permits within one (1) year prior to applying for membership.
- No conviction of applicable laws or out-of-court settlements of formal charges of criminal violations within three (3) years prior to submitting an application, unless under a new ownership not associated with the act.
- If the applicant entered into a Consent Administrative Order (CAO), the organization must be monitored and in good standing with an agreed-upon remediation schedule.

*Compliance history and the evaluation of commitment to the improvement of an organization's performance will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the agency.

NOTE: The voluntary disclosure of permit violations through [E&E's Self-Disclosure Incentive Policy](#) will not impact an organization's membership status in NSTEP provided the finding(s) does not have a significant impact on human health and the environment, of which the determination will be made at the discretion of the E&E Secretary.

Beyond-Compliance Requirements

Beyond-compliance requirements for entities that desire to participate in NSTEP are outlined in the section below.

Membership and tier level assignments are based on the organization's commitment to the following: 1) the optional development, implementation, and maintenance of an environmental management system (EMS); 2) going above and beyond compliance of applicable laws; 3) pollution prevention and improving an organization's performance; and 4) reporting to the agency on its performance annually.

3. MEMBERSHIP TIERS

Quartz Membership

An organization applying for the Quartz Membership must meet the following:

- Demonstrate improvement in the organization's performance, conservation of natural resources, and/or be active stewards of their community.
- Provide sustainability and/or stewardship goals to further these efforts.



Turquoise Membership

An organization applying for the Turquoise Membership must meet the following:

- Meet all requirements of the Quartz Membership.
- Commit to completing one (1) stewardship project within a three-year (3) timeframe (the development of an EMS may count towards the fulfillment of this project requirement).



The areas of improvement, which must be beyond compliance, may include one (1) or more of the following:

- *Improvement in air quality.*
- *Improvement in water quality.*
- *Reducing water usage.*
- *Reducing energy use (e.g. an Energy Star achievement or LEED certification).*
- *Solid and/or hazardous waste reductions.*
- *Implementing pollution prevention actions.*
- *Land use improvements or protection.*
- *Implementing alternative fuel/energy measures.*
- *Other innovative measures that benefit Arkansas.*

A performance report will be due by January 1 of each year following an organization's admission into the program. For example, if an organization is accepted into the program on July 1, 2024, they will be required to submit a performance report by January 1, 2025. The report must be submitted through E&E's ePortal system: <https://eportal.adeg.state.ar.us/app/#/formversion/7b7c717d-5852-4754-89c8-84a611195f24>.

Membership Tiers (Continued)

The items below should be followed by members who elect to develop an EMS in order to fulfill their stewardship project requirements:

- By the end of year one (1), demonstrate EMS implementation steps beyond that of the time of applying to the program.
- By the end of year two (2), have additional portions of an EMS beyond that of the first year.
- By the end of year three (3), have a fully functioning EMS, at which time the organization may then apply for membership to the Diamond tier.

NOTE: This framework is not required under program policy. It is simply a guideline to assist program members.

If status requirements are not met by the end of the three-year period, the organization is subject to demotion of its NSTEP status to the Quartz Membership. However, extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis.

More information regarding the EMS can be found on the Enterprise Services Environmental Management System (EMS) Requirements document, at https://www.google.com/url?client=internal-element-cse&cx=013699214857357159252:vk-xbyzrlwa&q=https://www.adeq.state.ar.us/poa/enterprise-services/pdfs/es_ems-guidance-document.pdf&sa=U&ved=2ahUKEwjbpJjQkMiJAxX2IEQIHRIeJDwQFnoECAMQAO&usg=AOvVaw1PPKkQ8Dc2i9QTDIf2gML.

Diamond Membership

An organization applying to the Diamond Membership must meet the following:

- Meet all requirements of the Quartz Membership.
- Have in place a fully functioning, facility-specific EMS, if they are permitted by E&E.
- Provide a description of continual or future goals to improve and promote Arkansas' natural resources.
- Commit to completing two (2) stewardship projects within a three-year period.
 - a. One (1) project must be community-based.
 - b. One (1) project must demonstrate an improvement of performance of either the facility, its activities, products, or services.



A performance report will be due by January 1 of each year following an organization's admission into the program.

Membership Level	Stewardship Projects Required
QUARTZ	0
TURQUOISE	1
DIAMOND	2



5. STEWARDSHIP AWARDS

The Secretary's Stewardship Awards

About

The Secretary's Stewardship Awards are administered on behalf of the Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment and are presented to NSTEP members who have demonstrated outstanding leadership, are notable contributors to the preservation or improvement of our state's natural resources and their community, and have strengthened the state's economy and workforce. Winners are chosen by a panel of E&E staff members, and all decisions of the panel are final.

Eligibility

To be eligible for any of the listed awards, entities must be a member in the Natural State Stewardship Program and the project(s) submitted must be completed prior to the awards ceremony held annually in May. Nominations for the awards program are accepted electronically on ePortal from January 1st – 31st, by visiting the following link: <https://eportal.adeq.state.ar.us/app/#/formversion/2db5051b-1974-4e5c-8e56-f5a6fe25a49f>. Projects that are required via an enforcement action imposed by E&E are deemed ineligible. Entities who have been nominated for an award previously can be nominated again. You may submit the same project/program for nomination in more than one category. Each nomination must be a separate submission.

For any questions regarding the nomination process or eligibility, please contact Dalton Barnum, NSTEP Coordinator, at Dalton.Barnum@arkansas.gov or 501.682.0648.

Award Categories Include:

1. Partnership Award

For outstanding achievement in community involvement and/or the most impressive community-based improvement project.

2. Education Award

For outstanding achievement in sustainability educational outreach (available to all members, although schools and institutions of higher education are prioritized).

3. Innovation Award

For outstanding achievement in completing the most impressive and innovative improvement project.

4. Technology Advancement Award

For outstanding achievement in the best use of technology in an improvement project.

4. APPLICATION PROCESS

Getting Started

An applicant with multiple locations in Arkansas cannot include all locations into one (1) membership. Another location of the same company must apply on its own and distinguish themselves as a separate facility. A person operating an organization in Arkansas that has been denied acceptance into the program may reapply for consideration at any time.

Application Submission Information

Applications may be submitted electronically at any time throughout the year via ePortal: <https://eportal.adeq.state.ar.us/app/#/formversion/2db5051b-1974-4e5c-8e56-f5a6fe25a49f>

Application Review and Determination

After a review of complete applications and, if applicable, any compliance-related records, E&E will contact the organization on the status of acceptance into the program. If accepted, E&E will schedule a site visit to award the organization its membership certificate.

Incentives For Members

Incentives For Members	
Incentives	Description
Framed program certificate	Participants may display the framed program certificate in a prominent location at their facility.
Provide press release and other assistance for public/community outreach purposes	E&E will recognize participation publicly through a press release and/or in-person photo opportunity.
Promotion of members on E&E's NSTEP webpage	Participants will be listed on E&E's NSTEP webpage.
Annual Secretary's Stewardship Awards Ceremony	An annual awards ceremony will be held for NSTEP members to network and the Secretary's Awards recipients will be announced.
Input into Future Incentives	Members will be invited to participate in discussions about incentives, to provide feedback, and offer suggestions to future incentives.

Incentives For Permitted Members

Incentives For Permitted Members	
Incentives	Description
Permit technical assistance and follow-up regulatory compliance assistance	E&E will expedite program members' request(s) for technical assistance for permit renewals and/or major modifications when practicable. Once a permit is issued, E&E will follow up with program members to ensure they understand the permit requirements and answer questions.
Advanced Inspection Notice	E&E will consider providing advanced notice of on-site, non-complaint-based inspections for program members on a case-by-case basis.
Reduced Inspection Frequency	E&E will consider reducing inspection frequency for members on a case-by-case basis.
Reduced Reporting Requirements	E&E will consider reducing the reporting requirements for members on a case-by-case basis.

Change Of Ownership

E&E should be notified within thirty (30) days of acquisition. If the new organization wishes to continue in NSTEP, it must submit a new application for approval. E&E may consider the performance record of the new owner in determining whether the criteria in this document has been met.



5. PROBATION / TERMINATION

Probation or Termination of Program Tier Designation

E&E will advise the NSTEP member of their intent to place the member on probation not less than thirty (30) days before the action occurs. Length of probation and actions required will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

E&E may place a member on probation or revoke its designation for any of the following issues, if applicable to the organization:

- The member has been convicted of a criminal violation of applicable requirements.
- The member has received a violation(s) that has resulted in significant civil or administrative penalty or damages.
- The member has been found by a court to have been responsible for an illegal action that caused substantial endangerment to public health or to the environment.
- The member was found by E&E to have failed to promptly or adequately correct and resolve a violation of applicable requirements.
- The member failed to submit their performance reports by January 1 of the year following their admission into the program.
- The member has not completed the above-mentioned requirements as appropriate.

There is no formal appeal of E&E's probation decision. As such, existing incentives may be restricted or terminated and requested incentives may be postponed or denied.

Program status will be terminated at the written request of the organization at any time or if the member fails to submit annual performance reports.





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