

Guide for Schools, School Districts and ESDs: Steps for Working with Outdoor School Program Providers



Are you starting an Outdoor School program from scratch, or expanding your current program? Following are some ideas to help you evaluate your needs when considering program providers. In addition, when starting or reviewing a current program, we highly recommend referencing the Gray Family Foundation's full 2012 report entitled, "Guide to Launching an Outdoor School Program" (grayff.org/guide-to-launching-an-outdoor-school-program).

Step 1: Consider: Will this provider meet our needs?

- Before contacting the provider, ask yourself which overarching objectives you are trying to achieve:
 - Community needs: "What are the academic and social goals of our school district and community?"
 - Scope: "How many students do we expect to serve? Will we launch a day program? A residential program? How many nights?"
 - Volunteer participation: "Will we utilize parent, high school student, and/or other volunteers?"
 - Evaluation design. "When and from whom will we collect evaluation information?"
 - Outcomes: "What level of growth do we expect? What test results do we expect? How much energy, water or other resources do we expect to save?"
- Once you've identified these goals, you can outline your desired program elements—including curricula, site location, daily activities, and staffing—to support them.
- Then, ask the provider:
 - What are you teaching?
 - How are you teaching it?
 - How do you determine that your programming is aligned to Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and Common Core State Standards (CCSS)? Can you give examples?
 - Can you equitably accommodate the needs our students with specific needs, non-English speakers, etc.?
 - How will you know that you are successful? (Or, what are your evaluation criteria/plans?)
 - Is your program approved by OSU Extension, the Outdoor School program administrator for Oregon?
 - Do you have a standard program outline that we can evaluate?
 - Are you already partnered with a camp facility? If yes, who?

Step 2: Get together with your teaching team to evaluate the answers in Step 1.

- How do these partners meet our intended outcomes?
- Are their programs driven by standards? How do they determine this?
- Do their programs align with Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and Common Core State Standards (CCSS)? How?
- Are there other activities or program elements that we want to ask the provider to include for us that they aren't offering? Can they, and will they, include them? If not, what are our other options?
- How do we coordinate this provider's work with other material that we are teaching our students? Does this provider assist with pre- and post-camp classroom curriculum? Does this provider's work align with our overall mission and outcomes?
- Don't obligate your school or commit to a provider until you are well-versed in the provider's programming and determine that the provider meets your needs.

Step 3: Secure the provider, then stay engaged with their programming.

- Be aware of what is being taught and how the material is being presented.
- Observe the program provider's interactions with students.
- Share the experience with others on your team.
- Evaluate whether your needs are being met.
- Give regular feedback to the provider.
- Go back to Steps 1 and 2 and review the previous answers with your team.

After you engage a provider:

If your needs are not being met, let the provider know. Work with the provider to adjust the programming to meet your needs. This might be a professional development opportunity for the provider's staff and your staff.

If your needs are being met, let the provider know that, too, and be specific. How can you work together to take the program and the relationship to the next level? This is another great professional development opportunity.

Ask for help from your teaching team. Together, you can build a program that will enhance learning, engage students, bring science to life, meet curriculum needs and add excitement and variety to your teaching practice.

Resources:

Oregon State University Extension Outdoor School Funding Program

<http://oelp.oregonstate.edu/outdoorschool>

Gray Family Foundation Guide to Launching an Outdoor School Program

grayff.org/guide-to-launching-an-outdoor-school-program

Map of Residential Camp Facilities Serving Oregon

grayff.org/oregon-residential-camps

List of Camps Serving Outdoor School

grayff.org/camp-maintenance/list-of-oregon-camps

Friends of Outdoor School

FriendsOfOutdoorSchool.org