



After you have informed key people about your outdoor classroom plans, you need to **organize your planning committee**. An outdoor classroom cannot be effectively sustained or used as an educational tool if only one or two teachers try to develop, use and maintain it by themselves. Tips for how to organize your planning committee are below.

Create your Outdoor Classroom Planning Committee

After your Outdoor Classroom Consultant provides the faculty presentation about the Alabama Outdoor Classroom Program, the consultant will set up a free online survey so that you can get the faculty's feedback about developing, using and sustaining an outdoor classroom. On the faculty survey, faculty members will have the opportunity to sign up and volunteer on the Outdoor Classroom Planning Committee.

Your goal is to have one teacher from each grade level and all of the science teachers on the committee, if feasible, to ensure that the outdoor classroom meets the needs of all students and teachers regardless of grade level.

If you do not have enough teachers to volunteer to serve on the planning committee through the faculty survey, then you should recruit other teachers to join the committee. Try to avoid assigning teachers to the committee if possible.

Other Potential Outdoor Classroom Planning Committee Members

In addition to including faculty members on the planning committee, you can also invite other members of your school community to serve on the planning committee including the following:

- ❖ school administrators, staff, and grounds personnel;
- ❖ students including 4-H, Junior Master Gardeners, Future Farmers of America, or other student club members;
- ❖ PTA/PTO members, parent volunteers, or grandparents;
- ❖ your local Alabama Cooperative Extension Agent or local agriculture and natural resource agency personnel; and
- ❖ community groups, Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists and city/county officials.



In a survey of our most active Outdoor Classroom schools (those that used their outdoor classrooms for hands-on activities 20-30 times per year), 80% of them reported to have an active planning committee that meets at least two times in the fall and two times in the spring.

Example Planning Committee Member Responsibilities

Your planning committee will work together as a team to develop and sustain the outdoor classroom. You may have more than one person sharing a particular task, or you may share these responsibilities evenly among the entire committee. Example responsibilities include the following:

- ❖ Take notes and share the meeting notes with the whole committee after the meeting.
- ❖ Maintain communication between the team members via email updates.
- ❖ Create an agenda for upcoming meetings in order to keep the committee focused and moving forward.
- ❖ Document progress with “before” and “after” photos, a scrapbook, and/or video journal.
- ❖ Post updates about the outdoor classroom to the school newsletter, website, Facebook page, and other social media.
- ❖ Maintain an outdoor classroom bulletin board in the school with photos of what plants are growing or blooming in the outdoor classroom and what wildlife is visiting the habitat to encourage teachers to use the outdoor classroom with their students.

- ❖ Research and write grant proposals for materials needed to create and use outdoor learning stations, educational signage, and activity kits.
- ❖ Prepare a “wish list,” and ask parents and local businesses for monetary or in-kind donations.
- ❖ Work with the school bookkeeper to gather invoices, submit Purchase Order requests, collect receipts, and submit payment for items and services related to the outdoor classroom.
- ❖ Coordinate the Maintenance Plan including work days in the outdoor classroom.
- ❖ Write thank-you notes for donations of time, materials, plants, or educational resources.
- ❖ Compile educational resources and activity kits that can be used for outdoor classroom activities.
- ❖ Schedule inservice teacher training workshops or share local outdoor classroom workshop opportunities with your faculty.

Outdoor Classroom Project Leader Tips

Stay organized!

- ❖ Take notes (or ask someone else to take notes) during each meeting to keep the committee organized and on-task.
- ❖ Email the meeting notes within a week of the meeting as a follow up for those who attended and as an update for those who were unable to attend.
- ❖ Send reminders about upcoming meetings including an agenda as a reminder to those who will need to give updates on their projects or tasks.

Delegate, delegate, delegate!

- ❖ Delegate the other outdoor classroom development and maintenance responsibilities to committee members, teachers, students and other volunteers as needed.
- ❖ Divide the tasks into small, finite commitments to help you delegate some of the work, make the projects less overwhelming, and get more people involved.
- ❖ Keep a log of who volunteers to assist with various tasks so that you can easily follow up with them before the next meeting.
- ❖ Review and update your school’s outdoor classroom information and photos each year on the Outdoor Classroom Schools Map on AWF’s website.
- ❖ Review and update your Master Plan each year with your faculty to create your “To-Do List” for the school year. A link to your Master Plan can be found on your school’s outdoor classroom webpage by clicking on your county on AWF’s online OC Schools Map and then clicking on your school’s name.

Planning Committee Tips...

- ❖ Meet at least four times a year—twice in the fall and twice in the spring—even after certifying your outdoor classroom.
- ❖ Spread the workload by delegating specific tasks to teachers and volunteers who are not serving on the committee. The more people involved, then the more support the project will have, the more it will be used, and the longer it will be sustained.
- ❖ Give volunteers very clear and limited tasks for a specific period of time.
- ❖ Have appointed leaders on your committee with clearly defined oversight responsibilities. For instance, planning committee members can serve as project leaders for specific learning stations.
- ❖ Streamline communication between all planning committee members and volunteers by setting up an email list, and have one person on the planning committee send out monthly updates to everyone on the list.
- ❖ Have one central location (such as an online Google Docs Drive) where copies of all outdoor classroom documents are kept including the master plan, learning station project plans and budgets, site map(s), grant applications, photos, newspaper articles, etc.
- ❖ Review and update your Master Plan Checklist with your planning committee each August to establish your goals and projects for the upcoming year.
- ❖ Annually survey the teachers at the beginning of each new school year to ensure that new teachers have the opportunity to serve on the committee.
- ❖ Give updates at faculty and PTA/PTO meetings so that everyone will be “up-to-date” and “in the loop,” especially at the beginning of each school year since the school will have new teachers and parents who might be interested in getting involved with the outdoor classroom.