



Now that you have your master plan completed, it is time to **find funding and support** such as volunteers, monetary and in-kind donations, and grants to help you with the development, use and maintenance of your outdoor classroom. Below are some tips to keep in mind as you begin this process.



Recognize your sponsors, partners and volunteers on signs, in school newsletters, and at the end of all of your Outdoor Classroom Work Days so that they know you appreciate their support.

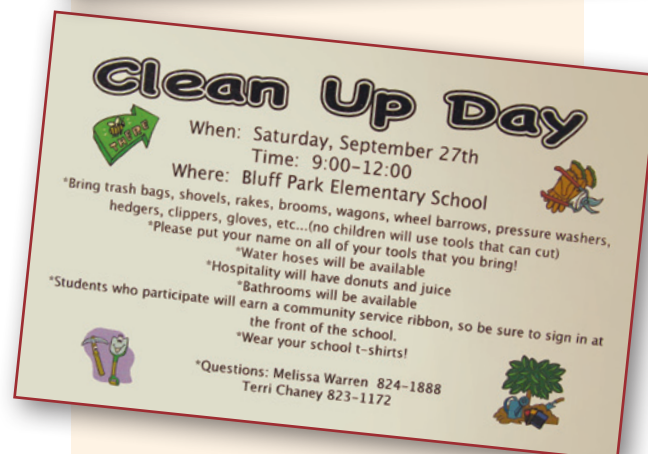
### Tips on how to “Spread the Word”

Continuously publicize your outdoor classroom plans and efforts with your students, faculty, staff, parents, and community. The more you spread the word, the easier it will be to find funding and support.

- ❑ **Outdoor Classroom Brochure** – Have students create a basic brochure that explains the goals of your outdoor classroom including a few details about specific learning stations and/or activities.
- ❑ **Press Releases** – Ask students to write a standard press release about the purpose and status of your outdoor classroom including how it is used for hands-on, outdoor activities. *(You can use the example Press Release on AWF’s website in the OC Planning Guide & Checklists section.)*
- ❑ **Local Newspapers** – Submit a press release to local newspapers before each outdoor classroom event and as you complete different phases of your outdoor classroom development. Be sure to include photographs with captions explaining the photos and identifying the people in the photos.
- ❑ **Local TV Stations** – Contact your local television stations to invite them to attend events, especially if you are holding a special “work day” or ceremony. If they are unable to attend, send them a press release with photos from the event so they can post the story on their website.
- ❑ **PTA/PTO Newsletter** – Submit regular outdoor classroom updates including photos of students participating in hands-on activities to the PTA/PTO newsletter. Advertise your “outdoor classroom wish list” so that parents will know what materials you need for outdoor classroom construction or activities. Also, publicize your “work days” encouraging parent participation.
- ❑ **School Newsletter** – Work with students and planning committee members to maintain an Outdoor Classroom column in the school’s newspaper including outdoor classroom updates, conservation education activities, signs of wildlife found in the outdoor classroom, photos of students using/maintaining the outdoor classroom, photos of volunteers, and/or photos of wildlife using the schoolyard wildlife habitat.
- ❑ **School Website** – Maintain a webpage on your school’s website that includes outdoor classroom photos and updates along with a thank-you to your local partners and supporters.
- ❑ **Billboards/Marquees** – Advertise your work days and your outdoor classroom wish list on the school’s billboards or marquees to help publicize your outdoor classroom needs to the local community.
- ❑ **Bulletin Boards** – Put a bulletin board near the entrance of the outdoor classroom or by the school’s entrance to update visitors about the outdoor classroom and related topics and activities.
- ❑ **Faculty Meetings** – Plan to give a two minute update at each faculty meeting to make sure that the faculty is kept “in the loop.”
- ❑ **School System Meetings** – Keep your school administrators and the school system’s Buildings and Maintenance Supervisor informed of your outdoor classroom progress.

## Let your faculty, parents and community know about your Outdoor Classroom!

- ❑ **School Open House** – Include a tour of the outdoor classroom during any school “Open House” event so that parents are aware of how your school provides hands-on, outdoor learning opportunities.
- ❑ **Parent-Teacher Conferences & Meetings** – Be sure to discuss the outdoor classroom face-to-face with parents, including specific activities that you are using with the students in conjunction with the outdoor classroom, to help explain how the outdoor classroom is used as an educational tool and to garner parents’ support.
- ❑ **Sponsor Sign** – Post a sign in or near the outdoor classroom site that recognizes your volunteers, donors, sponsors, and partners either by name or by using logos.
- ❑ **Certification Signs** – Post your official Alabama Outdoor Classroom certification sign in or near the outdoor classroom along with your National Wildlife Federation Schoolyard Habitat® sign once you are certified to remind your faculty, students and parents what your school has accomplished.
- ❑ **Outdoor Festival** – Hold an annual “Outdoor Festival” in your school’s outdoor classroom area, and invite the classes to tour the outdoor classroom area and participate in a structured outdoor classroom activity. This will excite the students, and help fellow teachers understand how to use the outdoor classroom for hands-on learning opportunities. *(Contact your local OC Consultant so s/he can help you organize the event.)*



### Potential Sources for Funding & Support

Continuously publicize your outdoor classroom plans and efforts with your students, faculty, staff, parents, and community. The more you spread the word, the easier it will be to find funding and support.

- ❑ **Visit the Outdoor Classroom Grants, Funding and Support** webpage on the Alabama Wildlife Federation’s (AWF) website for funding opportunities such as upcoming grants.
- ❑ **Contact local businesses** such as plant nurseries or lawn & garden centers about donations or discounts on their plants and products.
- ❑ **Ask your local botanical gardens and/or Master Gardeners** if they have extra plants that they could donate to your school.
- ❑ **Ask the PTA/PTO** to provide a line item in their budget for annual maintenance to increase the sustainability of the outdoor classroom from year to year.
- ❑ **Ask your local “Partner-in-Education,”** a business who has adopted your school and promised to support your school’s projects, to provide volunteers and financial support for the outdoor classroom.
- ❑ **Contact your local Alabama Cooperative Extension System office** to ask if any 4-H Agents or Master Gardeners would be able to provide hands-on, nature-based activities or expertise during on Outdoor Classroom Day.





- ❑ **Set up a DonorsChoose.org project** for your outdoor classroom or a specific learning station project so that people can donate funds directly to the outdoor classroom projects.

## Solicitation Tips

- ❑ **Check with your school administrator** to find out what the school's solicitation policies are before you start contacting businesses and potential donors.
- ❑ **Create a standard solicitation letter** on school letterhead that can be used by anyone to easily explain your project(s) and ask for donations. *(You can use the example Solicitation Letter on AWF's website on the OC Grants, Funding & Support webpage.)*
- ❑ **Start looking for funding and support** at the local level as donors and volunteers are more likely to support projects in their own backyards than in other counties or states.
- ❑ **Avoid asking one business or foundation** for all of your needed materials or funds as businesses and foundations like to be involved with projects that are supported by the community.
- ❑ **Personally visit each person or business** that is a possible funding source, and invite a young person involved in the project to assist with your "ask."
- ❑ **Let a potential donor know up front** what kind of publicity you can provide in return for their support such as listing their support in the school's newsletter, on a sign in the outdoor classroom, or as a message on the school's marquee.



- ❑ **Share your master plan and outdoor classroom site map** with potential donors so they can have a clear understanding of how the outdoor classroom benefits the students and community.
- ❑ **Provide a specific list of materials** needed so that potential donors, including parents, will see exactly what their money is supporting.
- ❑ **Be flexible with your "asks"** as some businesses will donate materials, labor or equipment before they will provide funds.
- ❑ **Send thank you notes promptly**, and include photos if possible.
- ❑ **Incorporate fundraising activities** into each year's short-term plans by holding annual fundraisers such as bake sales, plant sales, Earth Day tee shirt sales, a fish fry, run/walk race, silent auction, raffle, car wash, banquet, concert, carnival, or a birding festival.
- ❑ **Be sure that your fundraising event complies** with applicable state, federal and school regulations governing fund raising activities.
- ❑ **Keep copies of your grant applications**, so that you can copy and paste information from one grant application into another.
- ❑ **Keep copies of fundraising letters** and donors' contact information for future reference.
- ❑ **Review the grant writing tips** on the OC Grants, Funding & Support webpage on AWF's website.



Master Gardeners provide lots of wonderful FREE advice and technical support for schools enrolled in the Alabama Outdoor Classroom Program. Contact your county Extension office to invite local Master Gardeners to serve on your planning committee and to help oversee garden projects.