

Teaching Outside in Maine 101

An Educator's Guidebook for Building a Culture of Teaching Outside

Welcome to the*Teaching Outside in Maine 101: An Educator's Guidebook for Building a Culture of Teaching Outside*. We are thrilled to be working with you to help introduce students in your community to the outdoors. We see a future Maine where ***all*** students benefit from outdoor learning across all grade levels, disciplines, and backgrounds.

We hope this Guidebook will provide **three key benefit**s:

1. A starting point to facilitate conversations about creating and supporting a culture of bringing students outside at your school
2. A set of practical tools for bringing students outside
3. Resources and guidance for how to explore this type of education further

What Makes This Approach Unique?

We have developed this Guidebook as an accessible entry point for teams of educators who want support in navigating how to effectively take students outside to learn, or participate in environmental learning projects. Long term school culture change in support of outdoor and environmental learning is most likely to occur and be sustained within a team of like-minded educators, administrators and other partners.

This and other Teach Me Outside materials are written specifically FOR Maine educators BY Maine educators. The strategies and structures were co-designed, (that is, developed, written, and reviewed) by a team of Maine educators, including in-school and out-of-school educators, school administrators, and statewide leaders in outdoor and environmental learning.

Who Should Use This Guidebook?

We suggest working through this guidebook with a partner or team. While the language of this guidebook is geared towards in-school settings, the materials and resources included are appropriate for both formal and informal learning settings, and can be applied across any grade, age, and subject level.

How Should We Use This Guidebook?

This guidebook gives instructions for how to facilitate conversations and activities in support of teaching students outside. The lead facilitator can be an educator, a community partner, or a school administrator with any level of experience taking students outside. In addition, the Teach ME Outside staff is available to provide facilitation support to schools and organizations. Please reach out to Alex Brasili, abrasili@mmsa.org if you'd like to discuss how we can support your team.

If you are an individual and are looking to grow your own practice outside of a team, please see the **Teaching Outside in Maine 101 Individual Learning Journey Guide**.

How Can We Add To This Guidebook?

If you have feedback, an idea, resource, or case study to contribute, please contact us at https://teachmeoutside.org/connect

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Teach ME Outside is a collaboration between

NATURE BASED EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

maine environmental education association

MMSA

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This guidebook was developed as a part of the Teach ME Outside project. Teach ME Outside builds on the collaborative work of many different organizations and individuals over the past decade and is led today by a partnership between the Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance (MMSA), Maine Environmental Education Association, and Nature Based Education Consortium (NBEC). This project has been made possible with support from the Pisces Foundation, Elmina B. Sewall Foundation, Onion Foundation, Ferguson Foundation, and Margaret Burnham Charitable Trust. If you are interested in supporting this project, please contact Alex Brasili at abrasili@mmsa.org.

We recognize the contributions of the following advisors who contributed ideas and expertise to the development of this guidebook:

Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance Team
Ruth Kermish-Allen
Alexandria Brasili
Sasha Breus
Pearce Kelley
Len Kenyon
Kelsie Dawson
Emma Carey

Maine Environmental Education Association Team
Olivia Griset
Angela Mavrich
Anna Sommo

Project Advisors and Reviewers
Erica Beck Spencer, University of California
Maisie (Mairead) Campbell, FoodCorps/St. Mary's Nutrition Center
Morgan Cuthbert, Yarmouth Schools
Michelle Erhard, Maine School Garden Network
Sarah Gladu, Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust
Dawn Jones, RSU 13
Meg Edstrom Jones, The Ecology School
Kara McCrimmon, Cobscook Experiential Program at Cobscook Institute
Andrea Mercado, Lewiston Public Schools
Shelly Mogul, Auburn School Department
Erica Papkee, St. Brigid School
Tonya Prentice, Woodstock Elementary School
Johanna Prince, Kingfield Elementary School
David Raponi, Educator
Marie Robinson, RSU 89 Katahdin Schools

Genevieve Trafelet, Sanford High School
Katherine West, Portland Public Schools

Getting Started

Why Work in a Team?

We suggest assembling a team of at least 4 educators/volunteers/community partners to get the most out of the discussions and activities in this guidebook. We recognize how busy educators are and have developed this facilitation guide to maximize time spent engaging in productive discussions by providing the necessary facilitation materials, resources, and prompts. We encourage you throughout to delegate roles such as facilitator, scheduler, notetaker, etc. to help all team members contribute, feel an equal part of the process, and help share the workload. And while we encourage you to facilitate a consistent team to work through the activities and discussions, newly interested educators and community members are welcome to join at any time.

> **FACILITATION TIP**
>
> Consider coining a name for your team to increase buy-in and ownership. You might call your team an "Outdoor Learning Team," "Green Team," or other creative name that helps inspire and create momentum.

Many times there is one "champion" educator of outdoor or environmental learning in a school. This may be you! This guide is designed to help you and your colleagues make the first steps in motivating, inspiring, and supporting members of your school community to feel comfortable teaching outside. This, in turn, will help to build a culture of teaching outside at your school or organization, and provide more opportunities for learning more about outdoor education for all. This guidebook will also provide strategies for identifying how you can use the unique characteristics, natural history, and landscapes in your community to make meaningful connections across the curriculum, making learning more relevant and engaging for students.

Recruiting Your Team

One of the initial barriers of creating a culture of outdoor and environmental learning at your school may be getting your peers on board. Here are several different techniques that you can use to amass a team to progress through the activities in this guidebook together. We encourage you to find a like-minded peer teacher or community partner who can support you in this effort.

> **FACILITATION TIP**
>
> You may choose to do the activities in this guidebook with your grade level team, especially if you are already meeting together regularly.

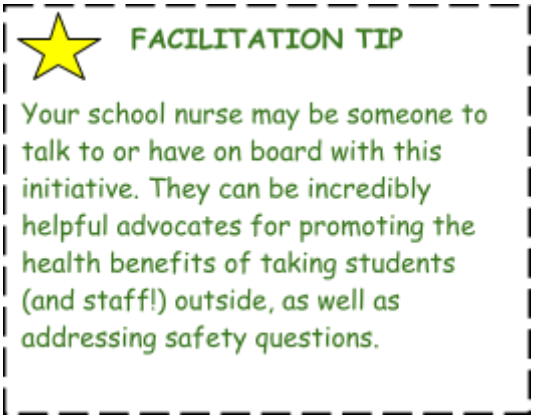
Talk to your colleagues about your experiences taking students outdoors. Expressing your own love and passion for this type of education and sharing your stories can be a powerful motivator for others! At the same time, offering a welcoming, warm, non judgemental space for

other educators who aren't as passionate about outdoor education is a great way to grow your team.

Ask for time at a staff meeting to explain the purpose of the team and your enthusiasm for increasing outdoor learning at your school or in your community. If you have experience teaching outside, you may consider showing a slideshow of some photos of your students outdoors and explaining the work you are currently doing, or share projects from around the state. Explain that you hope to support more teachers to feel comfortable teaching outside.

Consider inviting community members or volunteers at your school to join your team. Building partnerships is key to successful outdoor education experiences. Feel free to use this sample email for an initial contact.





Send out a school-wide email. A sample email is linked here.

Invite one or two educators or school staff members and ask them to "bring a friend." You can explain that there is no commitment needed for the first gathering and if they decide it is not for them, they can decline to participate further. By just getting folks "in the door" at an initial gathering will make them more likely to continue with the group. Newly interested educators and community members can also join after the first gathering.

Messaging for Administrators and School Leaders

Administrators or school leaders who are resistant or unsure may cause barriers to starting an initiative around teaching outside at your school. There are certainly many logistical challenges to consider when taking students outside, and with all of the other responsibilities of running a school, this may seem like an overwhelming task to them. However, there are lots of models of outdoor learning working extremely well in all different types of Maine schools - from the large and urban-centered Portland Public Schools district to smaller, rural schools such as St. George MSU and Kingfield Elementary School.

The following resources can be incredibly helpful to advocate for outdoor learning and get your administrator, other teachers, community members, and parents on board:

- Your administrator may benefit from **reading about other Maine school districts and the administrators that have supported outdoor learning**. You can read this case study that highlights the work of Superintendent Marie Robinson of RSU 89- Katahdin Schools.

- You can present your administrator with **data about the benefits of environmental education for K-12 youth**. Using data from 119 peer-reviewed studies, experts at Stanford University conducted a literature review and compiled key findings into an accessible 5-page summary. Another great, easy-to-read resource is this infographic on how nature can improve academic outcomes from the Children and Nature Network.

- You can **advocate for environmental and outdoor learning** using the talking points in this messaging guide from the North American Association for Environmental Education. Key talking points, backed by research and evidence, are presented for school administrators, funders, parents, and state policymakers.

- You can **appeal to emotion** by sharing this short but powerful video about environmental learning in Maine from Teach ME Outside.

- You can **connect your administrator with other principals** who are supporting this work in their schools. There is also an outdoor learning professional learning community for principals and superintendents in Maine. If you want to learn more or be connected to that effort reach out to the Maine Environmental Education Association at info@meeassociation.org

Organizing Your Materials

Each section of the guidebook has a goal, and outlines pre-work, a summary agenda, materials needed, and provides a detailed overview of each activity. Along the way, there are some highlighted “facilitation tips” designed to help support you in your role and maintain momentum and enthusiasm in your group. However, you are in control of this experience for your team! Feel free to deviate from the plan, adjust the protocols and activity directions, and introduce your own ideas into this process. And tell us about it! We would love to hear what worked for your team, what didn’t work, and what adjustments you made that could help other schools and communities across our state in future versions of these materials!

This guidebook is composed of five gatherings; each gathering should take approximately 1.5-2 hours to complete with your team. All five gatherings can be completed at whatever interval feels best for your community - weekly, biweekly, monthly, etc. and will give your team a solid foundation for taking students outside.

Also, embedded in the gatherings are **GOAL WORK** activities that allow your team to focus time on the development of concrete goals and action plans for advancing outdoor learning at your school. If you are tight on time, or feel you would like to get a strong basis in strategies and tools BEFORE developing goals, we suggest you tackle these activities in a series of meetings at the

end of the five sessions, rather than during. These activities occur at the end of gatherings 3,4, and 5 and are clearly notated throughout as:

 **GOAL WORK**

General Materials Needed
Projector/Screen-sharing equipment
Computer (and internet access)
Chart paper
Sticky Notes
Markers
Tape

Whenever possible we encourage you to **host team gatherings in outdoor spaces at your school**. Part of getting comfortable taking students outdoors is being comfortable in the outdoors ourselves. You can print out articles ahead of time, use chart paper to capture group discussions, etc. Modeling productive use of outdoor spaces will help build your team's confidence and interest in taking students outdoors!

Continuing the Conversation
We hope that throughout the process of creating a team to explore outdoor learning at your school that you have generated some exciting ideas that your team can continue to pursue. We encourage you to continue the conversation with your team and take advantage of the many opportunities for educators in environmental and outdoor learning from organizations across our state! Some ways you can continue this work after completing this guidebook include:

- Schedule bi-monthly or quarterly meetings to reflect on outdoor and environmental learning progress with your team or community
- Share the guidebook with other teachers, (and offer yourself as a resource!)
- Sign up for professional learning available from Maine organizations (search the Maine EE and Outdoor Learning Resource Directory for opportunities near you or download this list of opportunities developed by Teach ME Outside advisors)
- Attend the Maine Environmental Education Association Annual Conference together as a team or attend one of their teacher trainings
- Join the Nature-Based Education Consortium
- Visit the Teach ME Outside website for more information and upcoming opportunities
- Check out this comprehensive list of resources for teaching outside in Maine

Team Gatherings

Gathering 1: Team Agreements and Why Teach Outside

Goals:

- *Set team agreements*
- *Provide participants with an overview of the goals of the guidebook*
- *Gauge the experience and comfort levels of the group with teaching outside.*

Pre-Work:

- *Email a reminder to all team members about the first gathering and ask them to email you a picture of one of their favorite places in nature (see this sample email, which includes information about logistics, the agenda, and what to expect.)*
- *Prior to the first gathering, make sure all pictures are loaded into a slideshow or are in a place available for all to view. (Or, plan to use another "get to know you" ice breaker activity.)*
- *Print or write on chart paper the Sample Group Agreements.*
- *You can also prepare a Land Acknowledgement, (more about Land Acknowledgements below) by searching https://native-land.ca/ to find out what land your school occupies.*

Land Acknowledgements

What is a Land Acknowledgment?

A Land Acknowledgement is a formal statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of this land and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories.

Why do we recognize the land?

To recognize the land is an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose territory you reside on, and a way of honoring the Indigenous people who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial. It is important to understand the long standing history that has brought you to reside on the land, and to seek to understand your place within that history. Land acknowledgements do not exist in a past tense, or historical context: colonialism is a current ongoing process, and we need to build our mindfulness of our present participation. It is also worth noting that acknowledging the land is Indigenous protocol.

–From Northwestern University and http://www.lspirg.org/knowtheland

Gathering 1 Summary:

1. *Welcome, Introductions, and Logistics (20 minutes)*
2. *Group Agreements (15 minutes)*
3. *Indigenous Perspectives in Outdoor Learning (10 minutes)*
4. *Why Teach Outside Activity (30 minutes)*

5. *Teaching Outside Discussion (40 minutes)*

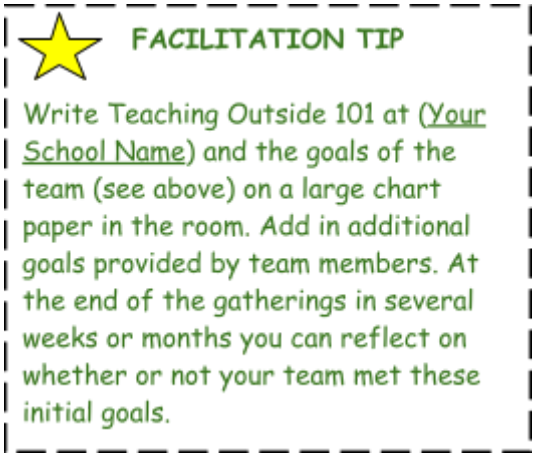
Length: *Approximately 2 hours*

Activity 1: Welcome, Introductions, Logistics (20 minutes)
Purpose: This activity orients team members to the people, goals, and schedule and allows for time for networking and getting to know each other.

1. I**ntroduce yourself as the facilitator and share the goals of the team**:
    a. To begin or continue to create a culture change at the school in support of teaching outside
    b. To provide concrete strategies and examples for teaching outside effectively
    c. To reflect on individual experiences and share knowledge for teaching outside within the group
    d. Provide a time for our team to build a community and network with each other

2. Ask the team members **if they have any additional goals they would like to add to the list** based on their expectations of the team.

3. One-by-one **display team members' nature photos on a slideshow** and when a person's photo comes up, ask them to introduce themselves and describe why they chose their photo. Team members can also share why they are excited to participate in this team or why they personally love the outdoors.



4. **Describe the structure of the guidebook** (five sections comprising several activities, approximately 1.5-2 hours each, there may be some work in between gatherings). Explain that this is a jumping off point for creating a culture of taking students outside at your school and providing the resources and tools to do so effectively and with confidence.

Activity 2: Group Agreements (15 minutes)
Purpose: This activity allows team members to set ground rules for participation in the workshop and builds trust among all team members by creating agreed-upon ground rules for everyone to follow.

1. Share the **purpose of Group Agreements** (develop a safe space, clarify expectations, create an atmosphere and structure where all group members can do their best work, etc.) and explain that team members will be laying ground rules for participation.

2. Post the **Sample Group Agreements** where team members can see them, and read the list aloud (or ask team members to volunteer to read each one).

3. Allow time for team members to ask clarifying questions about the Sample Group Agreements and to add, remove, or edit group agreements as they see fit.

4. Gauge consensus on the group agreements by asking for a vote: **thumbs up** (agree with the group agreements), **thumb to the side** (I have some reservations but won't be a barrier to moving forward), or **thumbs down** (something needs to be addressed before moving on). If anyone has a thumbs down response, ask for clarification or how the challenge can be resolved. If there are a lot of thumbs to the side votes, consider revisiting the group agreements before moving on.

5. Remind team members that these are **co-created agreements**, which can be adjusted throughout the team's work together. Remind team members they may keep each other accountable for sticking to the group agreements.

6. (Optional): Determine roles and responsibilities for your team members. Roles might include a notetaker, scheduler, timekeeper, refreshment-bringer, etc.



Virtual Modification

You can run a similar activity as described above using Jamboard and virtual sticky notes. Throughout this guidebook, you can use Jamboard to collect ideas, brainstorm, and create lists with your team.

Activity 3: Indigenous Perspectives in Outdoor Learning (10 minutes)

Purpose: The practice of acknowledging Indigenous stewards and integrating Indigenous perspectives is an ongoing journey, particularly for white educators. We encourage you to discuss in your small group and spend some time with the resources below.

1. **Land acknowledgments** are a powerful way to recognize, show respect, and honor Indigenous peoples as traditional and current stewards of the land you are meeting on. To recognize the land is an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose territory you reside on and a way to seek to understand your place and Indigenous narratives within history and in the current moment.

2. Practice sharing an acknowledgement if you feel comfortable. It can be as simple as "Let's take a moment of silence to recognize the land and people who have stewarded the land where we are meeting".

3. Ask your team to think about how your school is currently honoring Indigenous stewardship of the land and how you can work to understand the past and current

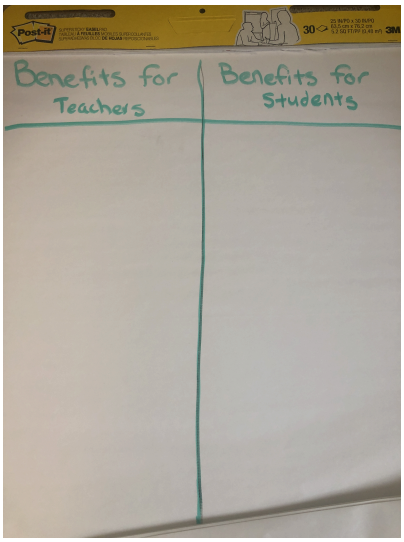
perspectives of Indigenous people in your community with your students. Brainstorm some concrete action items you can take.

Resource Roundup

The Maine Department of Education has Wabanaki Studies Learning Progression. Portland Public Schools also has a Wabanaki Studies Planning Guide, both of which offer many resources and support to teachers. Other resources that might be helpful: Decolonizing Environmental Education, Conversation about Land Acknowledgements from Wabanaki REACH, Heartbeat of the Earth: Connecting Children to Nature Through Indigenous Teachings.

Activity 4: Why Teach Outside? (30 minutes)

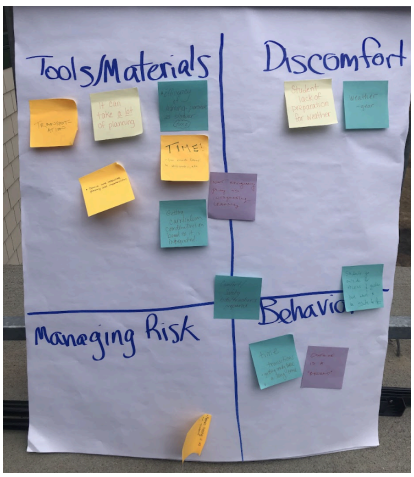
Purpose: To provide a point of inspiration and a rationale to teams for why teaching outside is important and beneficial to students and educators.



1. Divide a chart paper into two sections: **Benefits for Students** and **Benefits for Teachers**.

2. Ask team members to share **why it is beneficial to teach and learn outside**. Ask team members to recall an experience teaching and learning outside and explain what it looked like, how it felt, and their reactions as well as the reactions of their students.

3. **(Optional) Acknowledge the challenges** that may come up in conversation by creating four sections on a large piece of paper that represent the four most common themes: “Discomfort,” “Behavior,” “Managing Risk,” and “Tools/Materials.” Have educators write their challenges on sticky notes and then add them to the grid to create a group list of “Challenges to Teaching Outside.” Then have a brief conversation about resources, tips and tricks, and tools to overcome these challenges, focusing on small goals for educators who are more hesitant.



4. Screen the four minute video from Teach ME Outside.

5. Hand out the “Stanford Analysis Reveals Wide Array of Benefits from Environmental Education” article (or provide a link to the digital resource) and allow team members to read individually and reflect on what benefits identified earlier have been confirmed in the research and what new benefits have been identified.

6. Discuss how the benefits of outdoor and environmental learning can support students at your school/in your community.

Activity 5: Teaching Outside Discussion (40 minutes)

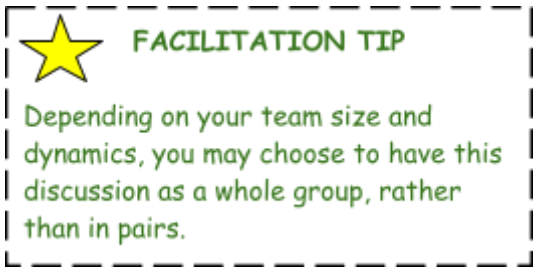
Purpose: To gain insight into team members experience, expertise, and comfort with teaching outside.

1. Explain that **everyone has unique experiences when it comes to teaching and learning outside**. Some team members may do this quite often, others may have hesitation, but everyone has their own unique perspective to bring. It is important to begin by gaining insight into the resources you have as a team.

2. Instruct individuals to fill out the Teaching Outside Initial Worksheet and provide approximately 15 minutes for team members to do so.

3. After team members have finished filling out their individual worksheets, pair them up to share out with each other for approximately 15 minutes.

4. Have each pair share out a few key items they discussed (approximately 2-3 minutes each) and capture them on chart paper.



5. Wrap up the discussion by **highlighting key experiences, hesitations, and questions to address** throughout subsequent gatherings. **Collect worksheets** to inform topics of discussion for the next gathering. Remind team members of the next gathering session and adjourn.

Gathering 2: Case Studies of Teaching Students Outside in Maine

Goals: *To review existing models and examples of learning outdoors in Maine, as well as examples of the logistics of taking students outside to provide inspiration and a point of reflection for what could be done in their own school settings.*

Pre-Work:

- *Email a reminder to all team members about the gathering, including date, time, location, and a summary of Gathering 1 and Gathering 2.*
- *Combine responses to the final question ("What questions do you have about teaching outside?") from the Teaching Outside 101 initial worksheet onto a chart paper.*
- *Encourage team members to invite other peers to join the group, now that they have a better understanding of the goals of this group. They can get caught up on some of the materials/reflection points by accessing the* ***Individual Learning Journey Guide*** *for this module.*

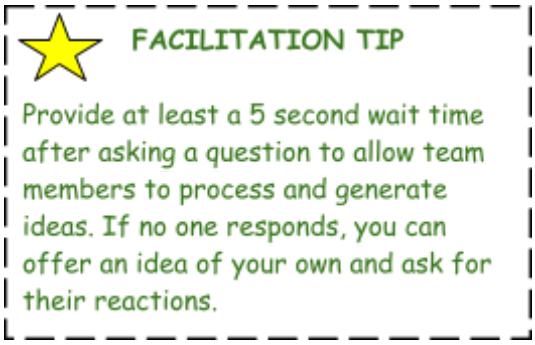
Gathering 2 Summary:

1. *Welcome and Framing (10 minutes)*
2. *Case Study Review (Independent Work) (30 minutes)*
3. *Case Study Discussion (30 minutes)*
4. *Documenting Our Own Programs (20 minutes)*

Length: *Approximately 1.5 hours*

Activity 1: Welcome and Framing (20 minutes)

Purpose: To revisit questions raised at the end of the last gathering to provide context for examining program case studies throughout Maine that could be applicable to your school.



Procedure:

1. Welcome team members back. Ask team members to share a rose, bud, and/or thorn from the last gathering.

 Rose = A highlight, success, small win, or something positive that happened.

 Thorn = A challenge you experienced or something you can use more support with.

 Bud = New ideas that have blossomed or something you are looking forward to knowing more about or experiencing.

2. Revisit the questions that were raised on the Teaching Outside Initial Worksheet last session. Explain that today we are going to **explore case studies of existing examples of outdoor and environmental learning in Maine** to try to generate some answers to these questions as well as inspiration for what is possible.

3. Explain that the case studies represent a **wide range** of schools, regions, and grade ranges; some represent new programs and others highlight programs that have existed for years.

Activity 2: Case Study Review (Independent Work) (30 minutes)

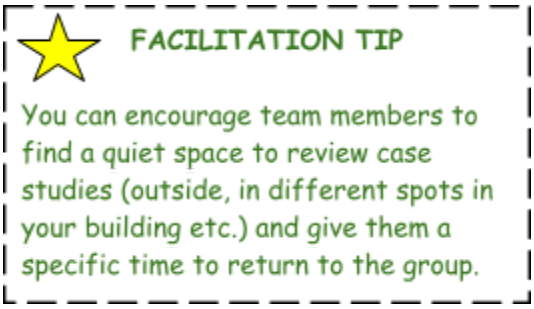
Purpose: For team members to familiarize themselves with a range of program models across Maine as examples and inspiration for what could be done at their own schools.

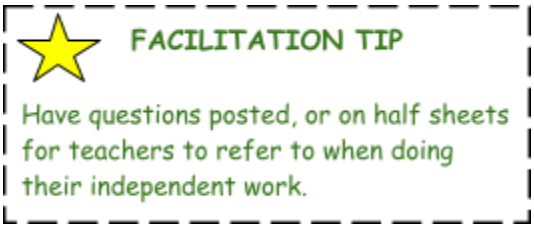
Procedure:

1. Provide team members with the **Teaching Outside 101 Case Study webpage**.

2. Ask team members to each choose 2-3 case studies to read/watch independently over the next 30 minutes.

3. Ask team members to think about the **following questions for discussion**:
    a. What goals were the case study schools trying to achieve through teaching outside?
    b. What assets or resources did the school have to accomplish their outdoor learning goals?
    c. What were some of the challenges experienced by the educators and how were they overcome?
    d. What lessons from these case studies can be applied to our own school community?





Activity 3: Case Study Discussion (30 minutes)

Purpose: For team members to discuss commonalities and differences between the case studies they independently reviewed and to bring key themes back to the group for action at your school.

Procedure:

1. Put up four pieces of chart paper in the room highlighting each of the four questions above (**Goals, Resources, Challenges, Applicable Lessons**).

2. Ask team members to **explain the highlights of the case studies they read** and take notes (or ask a volunteer) on the appropriate chart paper.

3. After each team member has had a chance to share, ask for **common themes** that have emerged, focusing on lessons that can be applied at your school.

4. Wrap up the discussion by identifying **3-4 potential goals or ideas** that your team has for supporting outdoor learning at your school.



FACILITATION TIP

While the case studies represent a wide range of programs from the very elaborate to those that are more emergent, some team members may still feel intimidated and like these programs are unachievable. Remind team members that these programs all started somewhere and that it is important to identify small steps that can be achieved.



Resource Roundup

You can use a **SMART goals** framework to help ensure your goals are clear and reachable:

- **Specific** (simple, sensible, significant).
- **Measurable** (meaningful, motivating).
- **Achievable** (agreed, attainable).
- **Relevant** (reasonable, realistic and resourced, results-based).
- **Time bound** (time-based, time limited, time/cost limited, timely, time-sensitive).

Visit https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm for more information on how to use SMART goals.

Activity 4: Documenting Our Own Programs (20 minutes)

Purpose: To emphasize the importance of and provide tools for documenting your outdoor learning journey at your school.

Procedure:

1. Tell team members that **a key piece of guidance from existing outdoor learning programs was to take LOTS of pictures and documentation of their outdoor learning journey**. As they developed outdoor learning spaces, outdoor classrooms, and partnered with community organizations, teachers and administrators have all emphasized the value of documentation to demonstrate progress and capture the story of outdoor learning at their schools. For example, there is really nothing more powerful than to see before and after photos of a schoolyard when it has been transformed from blacktop to garden - these photos will help you make the case for support in the future and share your story!

2. Ask team members to brainstorm **other reasons** we may want to document our outdoor learning journey. Answers might include: to share our story with others, for self-reflection

with teachers or students, for fundraising purposes, for media attention and to inform families.

3. Ask team members to come up with **some examples of other programs or initiatives they've documented and shared** at their school, (these don't need to be about outdoor or environmental learning). Discuss what was successful about these processes, and capture the common themes. Brainstorm and discuss how to translate these themes and experiences into documentation for outdoor and environmental learning.

4. Generate a plan for how you will document your own outdoor learning journey at your school. Some ideas might include:
    a. Setting up a shared folder for pictures featuring outdoor learning
    b. Taking video clips of students in action to create an end of the year video
    c. Reaching out to local media outlets for positive press
    d. Writing and submitting a case study to Teach ME Outside for use by other educator teams
    e. Sharing photos on your school's social media. Don't have one? Get permission from your administration and set one up! This is a great opportunity to get other students involved as photographers, graphic designers, etc.



Resource Roundup

There are several networks and organizations across our state who are interested in hearing your stories of success and how you have overcome challenges in teaching outside. The Nature-Based Education Consortium, Maine Environmental Education Association, Inside-Outside, and University of Maine Farmington are collaborating to create short two page case studies of outdoor learning.

Teach ME Outside also has a "Communicate Your Work" webpage that has tools to help you organize and share your story. If you'd like to share your story with Teach ME Outside and be included in the list of case studies available to educators through this guidebook, please contact us. You can also use this Case Study Toolkit to learn how to structure and submit your materials.

Gathering 3: School Space and Community Support Inventory

Goals: *For educator teams to think strategically about what resources they currently have on their school grounds to support outdoor learning and to begin planning on what they can do to enhance use of existing spaces and resources.*

Pre-Work:

- *Email a reminder to all team members about the gathering, including date, time, location, and Section 2 and 3 Gathering Summaries.*
- *Sketch the outline for the community asset map on a large piece of chart paper (see example below). Print and cut out the Community Asset Mapping cards to use as prompts during Activity 2. Gather sticky notes and writing utensils.*
- *Print or write out the below definitions of different types of community assets on chart paper as a thinking prompt for team members.*
- *Encourage team members to invite other peers to join the group, now that they have a better understanding of the goals of this group. They can get caught up on some of the materials/reflection points by accessing the **Individual Learning Journey Guide**.*
- *REMEMBER: If you're tight on time, you can always skip the GOAL WORK activities for now, and come back to them later.*

Gathering 3 Summary:

1. *Introduction to Potential Outdoor Spaces (10 minutes)*
2. *Community Asset Mapping (30 minutes)*
3. *School Space Inventory Activity (30 minutes)*
4. *Outdoor Space Goal Setting (20 minutes)*

Gathering Length: *Approximately 1.5 hours*

Activity 1: Introduction to Potential Outdoor Spaces (10 minutes)

Purpose: To revisit lessons learned from reviewing case studies during the last gathering and use that to frame a discussion about assets and resources available at this school site.

Procedure:

1. Welcome team members back and explain that today's gathering is going to take the background and conversations we've had during the first two gatherings and think more concretely about the **resources and assets** at our school.

2. Ask team members the following discussion question: **Is there anything that percolated up in your minds based on our last conversation together?**

3. Encourage all team members to share how they are feeling about teaching outside and how to support it at your school.

4. Take notes on chart paper about key or recurring themes - these will be revisited in Activity 4.

Activity 2: Community Asset Mapping (30 minutes)

Purpose: For team members to think about what's special and unique about their school and community and to use their collective wisdom to identify resources available to support outdoor learning for your students. Remind team members this activity is about *Community Assets* - the next activity will dive further into *School Space Resources*.

Procedure:

- Introduce **Community Asset Mapping**: a great way to think about what's special and unique about your community and what resources you have available to support environmental learning for your students.

- Review the different types or categories of "assets" your community has (below). Ask if the group has any additional categories to add.

Types of Community Assets

1. **Physical Assets** include land, buildings, transportation, and facilities (either used or unused)

2. **Economic Assets** include what residents produce and consume in the community, in both formal and informal ways. These may be local businesses or bartering and trading relationships.

3. **Stories** and history carry the memory of a community. These include the perspectives of local historians, community members, Indigenous peoples, etc.

4. **Local Residents** are those who live in the community. All community members have skills, experiences, and capacities that can contribute to community strengthening.

5. **Local Associations** include associations in the community primarily run by volunteers, such as athletic clubs, faith-based groups, birding clubs, etc.

6. **Local Institutions** are public spaces in the community such as schools, libraries, parks, and government entities, such as nonprofits.

- With your team, define the **boundaries** of what you consider your school community to be - this may be your town, region, watershed, etc.

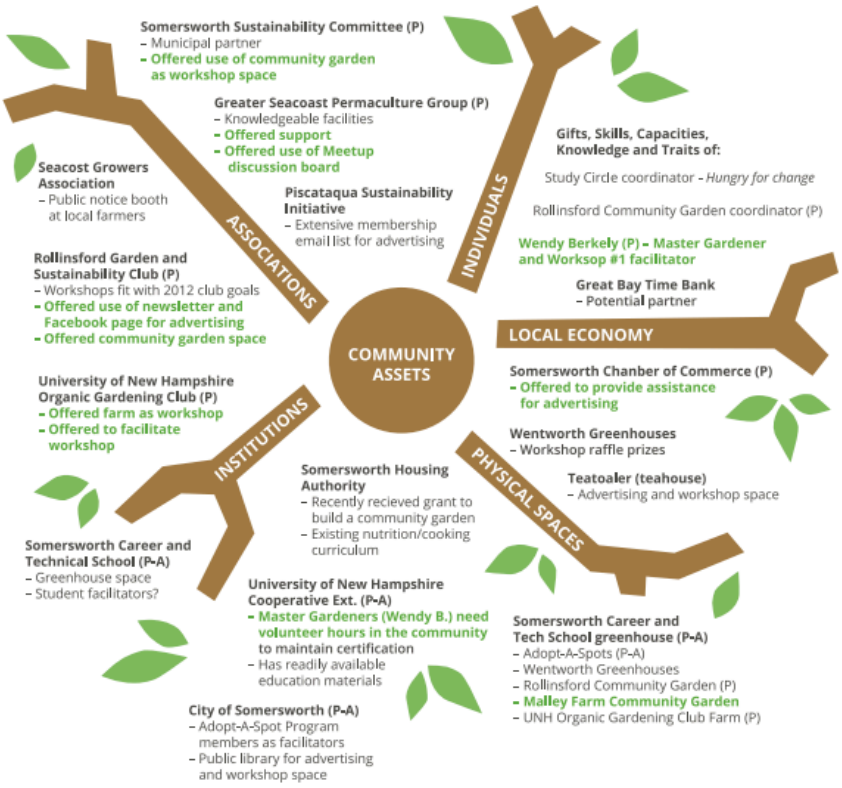
- Show your team an **example community asset map** (see the one pictured below) and point out the asset categories and examples that fall within each category.

- Instruct your team to use sticky notes to write down the names of assets (in any one of the 6 categories). Include notes about why/how this asset could be a potential partner to your school to support environmental learning.
    - Put the Asset Mapping Cards on the table as a source of brainstorming.

- Allow everyone to work for 5-10 minutes to brainstorm and write down as many community assets as possible. Place the sticky notes in the appropriate spots on the community asset map chart paper.

- Discuss the ideas and categories that team members brainstormed. Identify "low hanging fruit" - assets that may be most easily accessible or individuals most willing to help. Consider existing connections within the team to these assets. These will be further discussed in the next activity, as well as the next gathering.

Example Community Asset Map[1]- Don't worry if yours is simple!



Activity 3: School Space Inventory Activity (20 minutes)

Purpose: To identify what assets, physical spaces, and natural features are available on your school property to support teaching and learning outside.

Procedure:

[1] Example community asset map from NAAEE (2017). Community Engagement Guidelines for Excellence. Retrieved from: https://naaee.org/eepro/resources/community-engagement-guidelines

1. With your team, **walk around your school grounds** and explain that you are going to think about the assets available on your own property. Feel free to take a moment to reflect on examples from other schools that you discussed in the case studies in the previous gathering and the potential for transformation of your landscape.

2. Prompt team members to think about and discuss the following prompts as you are walking the school grounds:
    a. Are there outdoor spaces that are beloved by your students?
    b. Are there areas that are very highly used or underutilized?
    c. Are there spaces with potential or areas you would like to see developed to support more outdoor learning?
    d. Who else needs to be involved in this conversation about developing outdoor spaces (certain administrators, town planning board, facilities directors, etc.)?

3. Return to your gathering space and **revisit the asset map**, adding in any school property assets that weren't previously there.

4. Discuss whether there are local people/institutions on your asset map who could help support any potential development of outdoor spaces (i.e. you really want benches and an outdoor classroom space and there's a local lumber yard that might be able to support you in building these).



Resource Roundup

The Teach ME Outside website has a directory of outdoor and environmental learning organizations who can help support your work. To find organizations or resources within your community, you can use the "near me" search and mapping feature. See if there are any resources in your community that you might not have been aware of before!



Activity 4: GOAL WORK: Outdoor and Environmental Learning Goal Setting (30 minutes)

Purpose: To identify goals and concrete actions your team can take towards development of your school's outdoor spaces and environmental/outdoor learning projects to support use by teachers and students.

Procedure:

1. Revisit the chart paper from Activity 1 where team members brainstormed how they are feeling about teaching outside and how to support it at your school. Briefly revisit the asset map.

2. Based on previous discussions - prompt your team to identify and come to a consensus on an overall vision for outdoor and environmental learning at their school. Then, work to

identify 1-2 attainable school-wide goals for outdoor spaces and/or environmental learning at their school **this year** to support teaching and learning outside. Goals might include the development or addition of physical structures, cleaning up or revitalizing spaces that are underutilized, or making a commitment as a team to utilizing existing outdoor spaces a certain number of times a week.

3. Come to a consensus and finalize your school's 1-2 goals. Tell team members that you will revisit these goals next session to identify some action plans for achieving success this year.

4. Designate one person from your team to reach out to the rest of your school community with an update on goals that were determined by the group and with an open invitation to join the conversation. Keeping communication channels open will increase buy-in from your school community and generate further interest in teaching outside! Also be sure to ask questions and gather perspectives of reluctant staff. This information will support conversations about removing potential roadblocks.



FACILITATION TIP

Consider some of the following facilitation and decision making strategies if the team needs help settling on a vision or specific outdoor and environmental learning goals:

- **Narrowing ideas:** have participants "vote" for their top 2 or 3 goal ideas using sticky notes or sticker dots on the chart paper - this can help quickly identify the ideas that are most likely to gain consensus. The "dot voting" can be used multiple times in rounds to narrow from a long list of ideas to just a few.
- **Further discussion:** if further discussion is required, make Pro/Con lists, or talk in rounds where each participant has 20-60 seconds to voice support or concern; participants can pass if desired.
- **Consensus:** Use the Fist To Five hand signals to gauge nuanced consensus level in the room around specific goals. Or use the Thumbs Up/Sideways/Down hand signals from Section 1, Activity 2 for a more simplified "yes/no" to gauge consensus on a single idea.
- **Integrative Consent:** Go around the group and integrate feedback and ideas until there is a proposal that everyone feels is "safe enough to try" knowing that the group can go back and revisit the decision at any time.



Student Opportunity!

You can involve your students in the process of identifying goals and thinking about outdoor spaces on your school grounds. For example, the Boston Schoolyard Initiative has developed this student survey and student mapping activity to ensure that students have a voice in the revitalization of their schoolyards.

Gathering 4: Managing Students Outdoors and Refining Outdoor Goals

Goal: *For educator teams to share and discuss strategies for managing students in the outdoors, learn tips and tricks from educators across Maine working with a wide range of students, and reflect on what strategies they could incorporate into their work with youth. This section will provide additional time to work towards and reflect on the outdoor space goals identified in the previous section.*

Pre-Work:

- *Email a reminder to all team members about the gathering, including date, time, location, and Section 3 and 4 Workshop Summaries.*
- *Review team members' "Teaching Outside Initial Worksheets" from Section 1 to identify any specific questions or concerns related to managing students outside.*

Gathering 4 Summary:

1. *Welcome and Framing (10 minutes)*
2. *Managing Students in the Outdoors (45 minutes)*
3. *Outdoor and Environmental Learning Goal Work (30 minutes)*

Length: *Approximately 1.5 hours*

Activity 1: Welcome and Framing (10 minutes)

Purpose: To set the stage for today's key work- learning about resources for managing students in the outdoors and dedicating a substantial amount of time for working towards the team's outdoor and environmental learning goals identified in the previous session.

Procedure:

1. Welcome team members back and let them know that the focus of today's session is going to be moving beyond the physical assets available on the school's grounds to the **skills and capacities of the team** to work productively with students outside.

2. Remind team members of the **outdoor and environmental learning goals** set at the end of the last gathering and let them know that the last half of today will be focused on making concrete plans for achieving those goals.

3. Ask team members if there is anything that has come up since the last gathering regarding their thoughts about outdoor and environmental learning at their school, the spaces available on school grounds, or the resources present in the community to support this type of education.

Activity 2: Managing Students in the Outdoors (45 minutes)

Purpose: To discuss the importance of developing confidence for taking students outside and the development of a unique set of skills for facilitating this from each others' experiences and the experiences of educators across the state of Maine.

Procedure:

1. Tell team members that the focus for this activity will be on **sharing strategies for managing students in the outdoors** - a critical part of ensuring a successful outdoor learning experience. Explain that there is a lot to consider when going outside, but just like inside the classroom, by establishing clear routines and group agreements, your students can thrive and you all can have an enjoyable experience. It is important to set a structure and boundaries on the experience so that students don't just fall into a default "recess" mode when outside.

2. Bring up (anonymously) some of the **questions/concerns or strategies** highlighted in their "Teaching Outside Initial Worksheets."

3. Ask team members to **reflect on a time that they took students outdoors** for a learning activity, whether they consider it successful or unsuccessful. Ask each team member to share what strategies worked for managing students and what strategies did not work. On a chart paper, keep track of both the successes and the challenges.

4. Explain that this guidebook draws on experiences from educators all across the state and that there is a library of "tips and tricks" for managing students outside developed by Maine educators for Maine educators.

5. Screen the "Getting Started with Outdoor Learning" video from the Cathance River Education Alliance (15 minutes). Ask for reflections from the group about tips/strategies in this video. Have team members revisit some of the unsuccessful strategies or challenges they previously faced and reconsider where the problem was in light of the discussion, (Was it a one-time thing? Poor instructions? A bad day? Not enough planning?). Acknowledge that it is possible to learn just as much from a poor outdoor teaching experience as a positive one!

6. Ask team members to identify one or two strategies from the **Maine Outdoor Learning Tips and Tricks Library** that they think will be helpful in their own work with students outdoors. Instruct them that their "homework" will be to try out and reflect on these strategies and to report out at the next gathering how their experiences went. Encourage your team to add tips and tricks to the library as well!

FACILITATION TIP

Depending on when you are having this meeting with your team, you may or may not have access to students. If your team will not have access to their classroom between this meeting and the next, you can instruct team members to test out a new strategy with their own children, neighbors, an afterschool program that they volunteer at, etc.



Resource Roundup

The FOSS (Full Option Science System) curriculum has Taking Foss Outdoors chapters developed for grades K-5 and 6-8. These guides provide general guidance for taking students outdoors, including choosing a study site, managing time, space, students, and materials, and general teaching strategies. The information contained in these guides can be extremely helpful whether or not you are using the FOSS curriculum.

Watch Part 2 of the Cathance River Education Foundation's "Getting Started with Outdoor Learning" series for short, simple, structured activities you can start doing immediately.



Activity 3 GOAL WORK: Outdoor and Environmental Learning Goal Work (35 minutes)

Purpose: To provide some concrete working time for team members to develop an action plan for achieving their outdoor and environmental learning goal(s) identified in the last session.

Procedure:

1. **Revisit your goals** from the previous gathering and as a group begin to outline some target goals, timelines, action items, and key partners to help you achieve them. You may find it helpful to use this One-Year Action Plan template as a guide to support your process. Here is an example of an action plan in this format.



FACILITATION TIP

Define the purpose of these goals (and revisit the SMART goals framework from Section 2) for your team, if needed. Goals in this sense can include social and emotional goals, health oriented goals, brain break goals, behavioral goals, etc. We recognize that incorporating academic goals into outdoor learning scenarios may take time and increased comfort levels for some educators while others will see the connections right away - and all of those scenarios and comfort levels are okay.



FACILITATION TIP

Start with one or two goals and make sure they are manageable - **it is best to start small and build your team's confidence**, rather than tackling a lofty goal that may lead to burnout. Consider bringing out the asset map you created in a previous session to guide your thinking about what resources you have available in your community to help. You are not alone!

Gathering 5: Planning for Outdoor Learning At Your School

Goal: *To equip educators with a planning process to identify the purpose and logistics for an outdoor activity so they feel confident taking their students outside.*

Pre-Work:

- *Email a reminder to all team members about the gathering, including date, time, location, and Section 4 and 5 Workshop Summaries.*

Gathering 5 Summary:

1. *Outdoor learning tips and tricks reflection (15 minutes)*
2. *Planning for outdoor learning (30 minutes)*
3. *Outdoor and environmental learning goal work (30 minutes)*
4. *Wrap up and Next Steps (15 minutes)*

Length: *Approximately 1.5 hours*

Activity 1: Outdoor Learning Tips and Tricks Reflection (15 minutes)

Purpose: To reflect on a strategy for managing students outside that members of the team attempted to use.

Procedure:

1. Welcome team members back for the **final official session** in this series. Tell team members that today they will be focused on planning resources for outdoor and environmental learning and specifically planning for the goals they've been working towards.

2. Tell team members that you would like to first **reflect on the strategies** for managing students outdoors that they tried from the last session.

3. Go around and ask each team member to **share their experience**, what worked well, and what they still need support with. Focus on commonalities in educators' experiences (i.e. the strategies really helped them focus students' attention, they still need help with managing student risk-taking, etc.). Encourage team members to use the Tips and Tricks library and the other resources from the last gathering as a continued base of knowledge for them to draw from as they work towards getting their students outside.

Activity 2: Planning For Outdoor Learning (30 minutes)

Purpose: For team members to equip themselves with a planning protocol for activities in which they are taking students outside.

Procedure:

1. Tell team members that they will be working together to **develop their own planning protocol and guide** based upon their school's unique features, grounds, and contexts. This planning protocol will help ensure that all team members are keeping in mind the resources they need to teach effectively outside and will also be a way to maintain consistency for students.

2. Using a piece of chart paper or working in Google docs, determine the most important categories for planning. These categories might include the following:
    a. Areas for outdoor learning
    b. Safety
    c. Materials for outdoor learning
    d. Reserving outdoor spaces
    e. Communication with administration

3. Working with your team, create a consistent planning guide and checklist that you all agree to use for your school. You can use this document as a template or create your own! See this example checklist and planning guide for what this might look like.



Resource Roundup

The Bonnyville Environmental Education Center in Vermont has put together a Teaching Outside 101 guide with excellent resources and ideas including safety considerations, sample daily routines and schedules, and ideas and lessons for connecting outdoor learning to different academic subjects such as math, literacy, science, and art. This resource also includes a presentation with a lot of photos for visual learners!



Activity 3: GOAL WORK: Outdoor and Environmental Learning Goal Work (30 minutes)

Purpose: To provide some concrete working time for team members to develop an action plan for achieving their outdoor and environmental learning goal(s) identified in the last session.

Procedure:

1. Revisit your goals from the previous gatherings and as a group continue to outline some target goals, timelines, action items, and key partners to help you achieve them. You may find it helpful to use this One-Year Action Plan template as a guide to support your process.

Activity 4: Wrap Up and Next Steps (15 minutes)

Purpose: To debrief and provide feedback on this learning journey and identify ways to keep momentum for outdoor learning at your school and in your community.

Procedure:

1. Tell team members that this is the last official gathering for this group and ask for **overall thoughts and feedback** on how they are feeling about outdoor learning now.

2. Ask team members if they are interested in continuing to gather to discuss outdoor learning at your school, make progress towards goals identified in this group, etc. Come to an agreement about what makes sense for your school and the structures that will need to be in place to facilitate this (for example - who will be the coordinator of gathering times, how you will communicate, how often you will meet, etc.).

3. **Celebrate what you've accomplished** so far and thank team members for their time and commitment to exploring outdoor learning at your school!



FACILITATION TIP

During the first part of Activity 4, you may want to pull out the chart paper with the goals from the first session for your team to reflect on.



FACILITATION TIP

One way to keep momentum going is by setting up an Outdoor Learning Group Chat on a communication platform that your team members regularly use (this could be a google chat group, closed Facebook group, group text, etc.) You can encourage team members to check in with each other about their progress on outdoor learning with their students and share both big and small accomplishments.

Wrap Up

Congratulations for reaching the end of this Facilitation Guide! You deserve huge kudos for taking on this challenge and leading your team through the process of envisioning how outdoor and environmental learning can support students at your school.

Every school is different. Some of you may be ready to continue to meet on a regular schedule and really dive into outdoor learning and tackle your goals, while other schools and teams may need to take a pause in this conversation to deal with other pressing issues or needs. Either is totally fine! However, if you do decide your team needs a break, make a plan to revisit outdoor learning in the future (i.e. "*I'm hearing that we're not ready right now to continue this conversation regularly, but I'm going to check in with you all in two months to revisit the idea of how to continue to make progress on our outdoor learning goals*").

Teach ME Outside will continue to develop modules and resources to support educators, so stay tuned! And please be in touch if there are specific needs or ideas you have to support you. Visit teachmeoutside.org for the latest updates.



Resource Roundup

Continued professional learning is a critical part of continuing to develop outdoor and environmental learning knowledge, confidence, and skills and is a great way to network with others throughout Maine, the country, and the world who are committed to this type of education and to be inspired by projects from all over. The Teach ME Outside "Advance Your Practice" page has a list of organizations who are providing really high quality professional learning opportunities, vetted and recommended by Maine educator leaders in outdoor and environmental learning. The Maine EE and Outdoor Learning Resource Directory also contains information about organizations who are providing professional learning. There are tons of great offerings - whether members of your team want to dive deeper into content areas related to gardening, aquaculture, forestry, etc. or want to explore how to tie outdoor and environmental learning to social justice issues, or think about ways to explore climate change education! Just filter and search for "Professional Learning" under the "Services Offered" filter.

Handouts and Resources

Introduction and Pre-Work
Community Member Template Email
Sample Recruitment Email for Colleagues
Katahdin Schools Case Study.pdf
Portland Public Schools — Green Schoolyards America.pdf
Stanford Study-k-12_student_key_findings.pdf
CNN_AcademicOutcomes
NAAEE k-12_messaging_guide_final.pdf
Teach ME Outside - video
Maine Environmental Education Association
Nature Based Education Consortium | Maine
Teach ME Outside - Home
Individual Learning Journey Guide

Gathering 1: Group Norms, Introduction, and Why Should I Teach Outside?
Welcome Initial Email
Native-Land.ca | Our home on native land
Sample Group Agreements
Example Land Acknowledgement
Teach ME Outside - video
The Surprising Benefits of Teaching a Class Outside.pdf
Teaching Outside Initial Worksheet

Gathering 2: Case Studies of Teaching Students Outside in Maine
TMO - Communicate Your Work
Case Studies Webpage

Gathering 3: School Space and Community Support Inventory
Asset Mapping Cards.docx
TMO - Discover Partners in Your Community
Boston Schoolyard Initiative | Home
BostonSchoolYardDesignGuide.pdf
BostonSchoolYardOutdoorClassroom.pdf
BostonSchoolyards-Student_survey.pdf
BostonSchoolYards-Student_Mapping_Activity.pdf

Gathering 4: Managing Students Outside
Outdoor Learning Series Episode 1: Stepping Out The Door
Maine Outdoor Learning - Tips and Tricks
Taking FOSS Outdoors
Taking FOSS Outdoors_Elementary.pdf
Taking FOSS Outdoors_MiddleSchool.pdf
Outdoor Learning Series Episode 2: Short, Simple, Structured Activities
One-Year-Action-Plan.docx

Gathering 5: Planning for Teaching Outside at your School
TMO - Outdoor Learning Planning Guide and Checklist
TMO - Example Outdoor Learning Planning Guide and Checklist
One-Year-Action-Plan.docx
TMO - Advance Your Practice
TMO - Discover Partners in Your Community