



Building Strong Community Partnerships

“My team of four grade 7 and 8 teachers were participants in A Forest for Every Classroom. As a result of this program, we have built an incredibly strong relationship with the staff of the National Park. The mountain became our classroom and the park service became our expert consultants and in some cases our co-teachers.... It is our goal that our work on the mountain will become increasingly important and our partnership even stronger.”

– Debbie Pelkey, Woodstock Union Middle School

Strong Partnerships

Healthy partnerships are at the core of successful place-based learning initiatives involving public lands stewards, communities and schools. But establishing and managing a partnership can be time consuming and challenging. Good partnerships are adaptive and flexible. They honor the cultures and perspectives of all the stakeholders and cultivate an air of openness. Strong partnerships work, in spite of different perspectives, from common ground. All partnerships succeed or fail depending on the attitudes, energies and relationships of the individuals involved. It is also true that no two partnerships are alike.

Place-based learning and civic engagement partnerships are often quite complex because they involve at least three rings of partnership: informal educational providers such as public lands or nature centers; schools; and the community, which has both municipal and private entities. Engaging local schools can help to build communication linkages, understanding, and public support for the stewardship that land managers are trying to accomplish.

There are many resources available on forming and maintaining partnerships. This chapter summarizes some lessons learned from place-based learning partnership experiences developed by the NPS Conservation Study Institute. More information on building partnerships can be found on the Institute’s website, www.nps.gov/csi.

Appendix C provides you with a worksheet to help guide you in identifying and understanding partners that can assist you with reaching your PBL goals.

BUILD PARTNERSHIPS FOUNDED ON MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

The best place-based learning partnerships are strong because they contain a multitude of different perspectives, life experiences, and points of view. But rather than being characterized by contentiousness, confrontation, and friction, over time they become characterized by dialogue that respects every voice and merges the strengths and skills of each partner. Partners work together from the foundation of commonly held values, well-understood systems of communication and decision making, along with program delivery and evaluation that work for every stakeholder.



Denali National Park and Preserve

At Denali National Park and Preserve long standing conflicts around subsistence use—regulated hunting and trapping within the park and preserve—have been fueled by poor communication and mistrust between the National Park and its surrounding subsistence communities. When the National Park, in partnership with the Murie Science and Learning Center, began working on a project with the local Middle School, new channels of communication and cooperation opened up that have helped mend the relationship between park and community. Educators at the park and the school helped students design and build a wolf exhibit at the Murie Center. The project involved articulating a wolf skeleton from a wolf shot legally by local hunters, preparing a wolf pelt, and building exhibit interpretive signage. Students were proud of their work and they brought parents and friends to the learning center to show it off. Some residents who had never set foot inside park headquarters made the trip north.

These new connections created through the schools had a ripple effect throughout the small community. Through this PBL partnership project, local public perceptions shifted. There was a sense among community members that the National Park cared about local people, their heritage, and diverse points of view, beyond the park boundaries. Now Denali National Park has built into its long range educational plan strong intentions to work with local communities on long-term place-based learning projects.



- Create forums for local governments and other neighbors to discuss mutual problems in order to build trust and establish a starting point from which to grow partnerships.
- Keep an open mind and be flexible.
- Seek areas of common ground and work from there.
- Keep organizational processes transparent and simple—follow the established processes but be willing to adapt them when flexibility is needed.

CONSIDER A WIDE RANGE OF PARTNERS

The possibilities for place-based learning and community engagement partnerships are diverse, including just for starters:

- Schools, pre-K – 12
- University and colleges
- Local and regional businesses and business organizations such as Chambers of Commerce
- Municipal government
- Conservation commissions, planning boards, other municipal groups
- Historical societies
- Teachers associations such as National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) and Unified Arts Teachers
- PTA or PTO
- Senior citizens
- Municipally owned forests and/or parks
- Foresters, farmers, fishermen
- Local environmental organizations such as Audubon
- Hiking, fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, skiing and other outdoor recreation clubs
- Museums, nature centers and educational non-profit organizations
- Developers
- State agencies such as Agency of Natural Resources
- Service organizations such as Rotary and Scouts
- Arts organizations



Teachers are energized and inspired by professional development programs that include a diversity of field experiences.



- Social clubs such as the Purple Hat Ladies
- Land trusts
- Hospitals and health clinics
- Community gardens and gardening clubs

CONSIDER COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

Long-term partnerships must provide benefits to all partners including the public land entity and the community (schools, administrators, civic groups, and businesses, etc.). One-sided partnerships quickly collapse. In fact, place-based learning and civic engagement initiatives are a great way to expand the benefits of park or forest stewardship thinking and long-term care for the resource base well beyond park boundaries to landowners, planning and conservation boards, local officials and resource-based businesses including wood manufacturing and farming enterprises.

- Officials working on the public lands side shouldn't wait for a PBL or CE opportunity to come along before getting involved in local affairs. Look for ways to participate in land

use planning and other conservation activities in your community. Begin building personal working relationships and a shared sense of place and trust before you need them. Practice engagement.

- When the PBL or CE opportunity arises, spend ample up front time scoping, assessing and melding the partnership around clear understandings of each partner's goals and vision.
- Convene meetings in convenient local meeting places, not always on your own turf.
- Offer to bring the coffee, tea and cookies.

UNDERSTAND YOUR PARTNERS' CULTURE

Public land managers and community educators need to walk in their partners' shoes before they can really understand what it might be like to work collaboratively with them. Make the effort to get to know your partner organization's history, vision, mission, and goals. Know your partner's constituencies before you devise a document that describes your working relationship.



- Spend time at your partners' regular meetings. Get to know a member of their board and internalize their history, mission, and vision. Get to know their organization the way they do.
- Seek to understand the nature of your own supporters and volunteers. What draws them to your public land area? What do they want to get out of an experience at your place?
- Make the partnership's program development process both mission driven and market driven. Knowing your partners means understanding their customers, markets and support base.

SHARE CONTROL AND DECISION-MAKING

Sharing program control and decision-making can be difficult, but it is essential to long term program sustainability. The partner that feels cut out of the decision-making process won't be a partner for long. Even when financial resources are provided by partners unequally—rarely is there a level playing field when it comes to the availability of

funding resources—every primary partner should be on a par in decision-making. The in-kind contributions of skills, energy and influence in the community are as important as who holds the purse strings.

- Every partner can make a financial contribution—leveraging funds from the outside is easier with 100% participation from the partners. Too much funding reliance from one partner can lead to the program being over-identified with one partner.
- All partners should share responsibilities of program development.
- Give credit to all partners equally, and recognize both funding and in-kind sponsorship regularly.
- Seek community input at all stages of program development.
- Build an evaluation strategy together at the beginning as a means of clarifying objectives of each partner and to ensure that the program will be evaluated for continual improvement over time.

Schools, public agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses all have distinct cultures. Move slowly as you learn about your partner's world!





DEVELOP A COMMON VISION

Developing a common vision and shared set of goals and objectives provides the foundation for all other phases of program development. Having an agreed-upon purpose is useful during times of disagreement, challenge, or stress and can help refocus direction and realign priorities when necessary.

- Make reference to the vision and goals statement frequently. Put it out to the community. It represents a kind of covenant for the partners and for the community at large.
- Consider the vision and goals as works in progress, and revise from time to time.

ACTIVELY SHARE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Don't underestimate the importance of frequent communication—internally among the partners, and externally, with the general public. Communication is a means of accomplishing your objectives effectively within the partnership, and is also an end in itself. Part of the work of place-based learning is simply to get the word in front of the general public often, about the various meanings and values of public land, of stewardship, of civic engagement and local resource values, and of the relationship of the human community to the land.

- Open multiple lines of communication and keep them current: update websites regularly; keep adding and culling names on list serves; communicate with your volunteers.
- Keep an active database of media contacts and use them. Include small newspapers, neighborhood newsletters, “penny savers,” free weeklies, etc. People read them and publishers are often eager for free text.
- Open a place-based learning page on your website. Report success stories in the local paper. Have a student volunteer or teacher write the news release.
- Open lines of communication with constituent groups and establish bridges with stakeholders before you have something on the table for which you want their support and buy-in.

SUSTAIN THE PARTNERSHIP

Ideally, place-base educational approaches bring about long-term, fundamental changes in society. To be successful, they must be sustainable over the long term. Individual programs and partnerships will come and go as some efforts prove successful and others do not. But the general principles of linking students, curriculum and teaching to real places and local institutions remain unchanged. The transformations that place-based learning hopes to bring about within the student body, teachers, school, public land entity and the community are long term goals.

- Strive for flexibility. Building trust in local processes and players is essential to maintaining your and their enthusiasm for the project.
- Try to institutionalize the relationship, so that someone else coming in has to carry through in the same spirit of cooperation.
- Understand that the partnership is here for the long haul. Keep reaching out to the other partner(s) all the time, no matter what stage of the project.
- Work for ownership of the partnership throughout the partner organizations. Buy-in from employees and constituents is important; building the partnership from the ground up pays off.
- The management and administrative framework upon which the partnership is built must provide sufficient flexibility and discretion for staff to explore and pursue a wide variety of options to achieve success.
- Success in one venue can change the course of the partnership and change partners' perspectives in ways not initially envisioned.





Ten Secrets for Cultivating Healthy Partnerships

- Love your own home ground.
- Build your partnership with big aims in mind and out of a sense of what is possible, not out of a sense of what is lacking.
- Never pass up an opportunity to help one of your partners—make them look good.
- Play to your partners' strengths and encourage them to play to yours.
- Don't be afraid of failure—fail often, learn from your mistakes and move on.
- Leave your ego at the door.
- Treat local partners like permanent neighbors, not visitors from out of town.
- Maintain a sense of humor and have fun.
- Celebrate and spread the success around. Offer thanks, thanks, thanks.
- Be patient.



Examples of Partnership Programs

A Trail to Every Classroom

Based on the Forest for Every Classroom model described in Chapter 7, A Trail to Every Classroom was founded in 2003 by the National Park Service in partnership with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and many other implementing partners. The aim of the partnership is to increase volunteerism on Appalachian Trail lands and projects, and build awareness of the trail resource throughout the corridor. Partners include: (Maine): National Park Service (NPS), Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), Maine Appalachian Trail Club, Extension Service, Natural Resources Education Center; (West Virginia): NPS, ATC, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, Mountain Club of Maryland; (North Carolina): NPS, ATC, Nantahala Hiking Club, Carolina Mountain Club, North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching.

Key partnership lesson learned: Keep communication lines open at all times—anyone can speak to anyone. Structure of the partnership needs to be transparent.

For more information: Rita Hennessey, Appalachian National Scenic Trail, National Park Service. www.nps.gov

PLACE

(Place-based Landscape Analysis and Community Education)

A program of Shelburne Farms and the University of Vermont, PLACE provides individual Vermont communities with information and a forum for exploring and understanding the natural and cultural history of their town landscape. Residents then build on this information through place-based learning programming and community visioning. Since its inception in 2001, PLACE has collaborated with a host of local and regional partners to facilitate programs in ten communities. University graduate students study each community intensively, then translate their



learning into a series of presentations, field walks, workshops and brochures.

Key partnership lesson learned: Engage a wide diversity of community organizations as partners. Don't advocate for any specific future condition; let that emerge from open dialogue.

For more information: Walter Poleman, University of Vermont. www.uvm.edu/place/

CO-SEED

Seeding the Community for Learning

CO-SEED is a program of Antioch University New England. It aims to build student achievement and stewardship behavior, community vitality, and local environmental quality through stronger links between schools and communities. Antioch establishes three-way partnerships among the school, a local non-profit or public conservation organization, and Antioch. CO-SEED combines community development with place-based curriculum development in the schools. CO-SEED places half-time community-based educators in

each school system for a three-year period. Local partners recruit in-school educators and support community development and service learning activities.

Key partnership lesson learned: Choosing the right local non-profit partner is critical. Since direct administrative support is limited, look for flexibility, adaptability, and a strong mission fit in the local partner.

For more information contact: Bo Hoppin, Senior Project Manager, CO-SEED, Antioch University New England. www.anei.org



Partnerships thrive on ample planning time in a convivial setting.



Tips From Teachers!



Here's the voice of experience from the teacher and educator perspective:

IDENTIFY PROJECTS THAT ADDRESS REAL COMMUNITY NEEDS

- ★ Plug in to existing community resource monitoring projects (water, stream, air quality, habitat mapping, tracking studies, wetlands, bike paths and trails, etc.), often administered by universities, agencies or NGOs.
- ★ Ask community board members where they need help. Conservation commissions, granges, recreation groups, libraries, historical societies, other schools, rescue services, or retirement homes are just some places to start for possible collaborations on mutual goals.
- ★ Survey community residents, perhaps at a public meeting, about service learning projects that need to be tackled.

WORK WITH MANAGERS AND OWNERS WHOSE LAND IS AFFECTED BY A PROPOSED PROJECT

- ★ Have students write a letter to the manager/owner introducing their interest in learning more about the land.
- ★ Have students meet with professionals to learn about the conditions and needs of the lands.

- ★ Contact conservation districts or other land-based organizations: they work closely with landowners and local officials.
- ★ Develop a model agreement that allows students to understand how to treat land respectfully and that clearly lays out the project objectives.

ALLOW TIME TO COORDINATE WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS

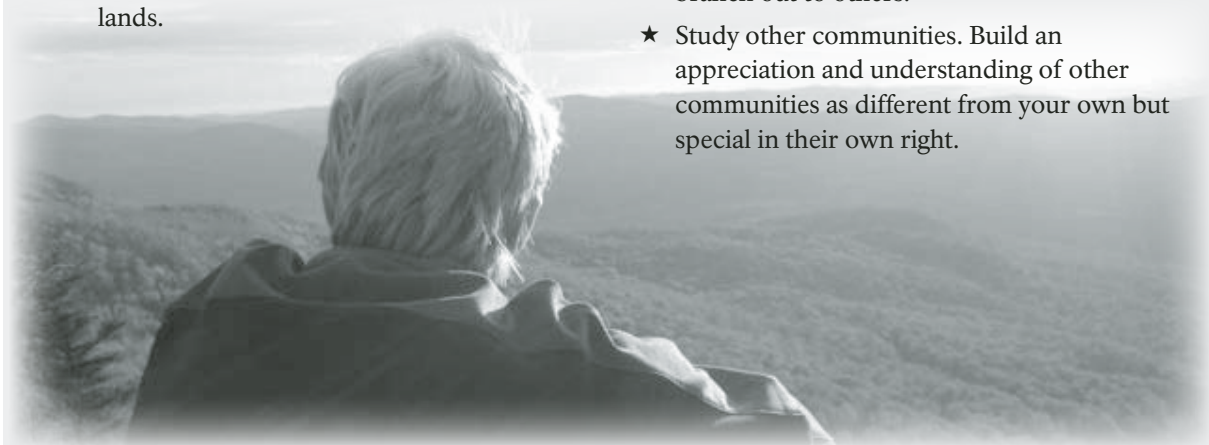
- ★ Use regular school open house events to inform and involve the community.
- ★ Multi-task! For example, talk with parents on the sidelines at a sports game.
- ★ Create a volunteer position for a parent to be your community liaison and coordinator.

ENLIST PARENT SUPPORT

- ★ Hold community events for parents and students or produce an exhibit about a PBL project to share with your community.
- ★ Network with parent/teacher associations.
- ★ Ask parents to help write a quarterly e-newsletter or build a website.

TAKE A SCHOOL DISTRICT-WIDE APPROACH

- ★ Try to connect to one community first, then branch out to others.
- ★ Study other communities. Build an appreciation and understanding of other communities as different from your own but special in their own right.





Sustaining Your Program

“People saw the success of the Champlain School this year. They saw kids speak at meetings, they saw the community connections that happened. People are interested in expanding this program to other Burlington schools.”

– Betsy Rosenbluth, Burlington Vermont Legacy Project

One of the most compelling stories of the staying power of place-based learning and its potential to improve the conservation and management of public lands is the story of Elizabeth Dickens and the stewardship successes on Block Island, Rhode Island. Born in 1877, Dickens lived her entire life on Block Island until her death in 1963, traveling away only occasionally. She lived on a small isolated farm not far from the ocean bluffs on the southwest corners of this small island 25 miles out to sea, and had a great love for the nature of the island, particularly birds. For fifty years she kept meticulous daily records of her bird observations and maintained a mounted bird collection and study skins. Her records and her collection of birds provide a scientifically valuable picture of bird life during the first half of the 20th century in this maritime corner of southern New England.

But more important was the work she did in island schools. Every month she taught bird study to all of the school children of Block Island. Everyone knew Miss Dickens as the “Bird Lady” and she commanded a great deal of respect. Her teachings to several generations of Block Island school children ultimately metamorphosed into a strong culture of conservation on the island. Most islander adults of those generations remember their lessons with Miss Dickens, and whether they are selling real estate, mowing the roadsides, constructing homes, or running other island businesses today, their work

is informed by a basic understanding and love of the island’s special nature—and its birds. Block Island, thanks in part to Miss Dickens and to the collective work of many of its committed citizens, is an innovator and leader in conservation action in New England. Nearly 40% of the island is protected. The Block Island Conservancy and land bank make use of an innovative land transfer program—the first in the state—to raise money for conservation projects.

Miss Dickens’ education legacy lives on in the Block Island schools. Taking their cue from the Elizabeth Dickens story, The Nature Conservancy today helps fund a place-based educator who leads students in natural history and local conservation programs, including a focus on Conservancy land. TNC staff cite a very high return on this modest investment in the form of strong local support for land conservation.

Promoting Your Program

Place-based learning and civic engagement initiatives are news stories that need to get out—great stories, in fact, that the media will help you tell. All the ingredients are there for success with the media: stunning landscape visuals, landmarks, gardens or historical icons, students and volunteers working together, civic pride at work, and engaging stories of cooperating agencies. Don’t forget that you are inventing a new paradigm for conservation.



Promoting your program is not only a means of building support and attracting resources—new partners, volunteers, money, materials, and ideas—it is also a way to give voice to a new conservation paradigm that connects the community lands, cultural resources and diverse audiences you are protecting and serving. By promoting your program you give life to the stewardship concepts and relationships you are practicing. Stewardship—the word and practice—is still relatively unknown and certainly not a part of public and popular lexicon. Promoting your program is a way to build a new framework and eventually a practice—a way to grow the much wider audience needed to support the stewardship challenge.

Unfortunately, working with the media—doing the outreach necessary to get your story told—might be the last thing you want to think about when you are planning a place-based initiative. But media outreach, just like post-op evaluation, needs to be planned up front. If you don't have the resources for it, then find a partner or skilled volunteer who does. Think of promotion as an end—not only as a means to an end—and keep the end in mind. Fortunately, if you do your homework, you will find a receptive audience of daily newspaper reporters, the editors of weekly papers, free-lance writers, radio talk show hosts and TV anchors. Place-based learning ventures make good copy.

Develop a Media Plan

Developing a plan can be as simple as undertaking due diligence in six key areas:

IDENTIFY YOUR MEDIA GOALS

What resources do you need the media to help connect you to? Volunteers? Support from the city council or school board? Visibility? More funding? Do you need to recognize donors, foundation funders, and partners? The goals of your media outreach work can be as broad as growing a wider audience and expanding general public knowledge of your initiative and partnership, or as specific as recognizing one particularly important volunteer or foundation, or reaching one very

important audience. Your goals shape the form of your approach—the strategies, media types and messages you use to accomplish your goals.

IDENTIFY YOUR KEY AUDIENCES

Know who you are trying to reach. Stewardship of public lands needs broad scale public support. That might be best achieved through national media chains—large daily newspapers, National Public Radio, press club speeches, magazines with national circulations, web pages, books, etc. A place-based initiative, on the other hand, focused on one or several communities, demands a very different approach. The audience is local, diverse, and probably relatively smaller. With care, such an audience can be reached effectively through targeted newsletters, e-notes, local radio and TV stories, press releases in regional dailies and small local weekly newspapers. If key audiences are local—small businesses, schools, local civic boards—then media outreach can be very targeted. Thanks to the involvement of your partners, the analysis required to know your audiences doesn't have to be costly or time consuming. Chances are very good that your partners know their audiences and know already how to reach them. Successfully communicating your messages to a local audience is a way to reach a global audience too. Who knows? Your story could be picked up by national media.

IDENTIFY YOUR MAIN MESSAGES

Tailoring your message means that you understand how your mission, expressed in certain ways, resonates with your audiences and markets. Cutting out the jargon is a must for any audience. You are reaching for a mission/market fusion. Use language, images, and tangible examples of what you do in ways that can excite the audience you're targeting to action. Mission can be greatly enhanced by understanding your market and responding to it in the right way. How big is your message? How small? Frame large ideas with small concrete, local examples, real places and real people. That's how people will relate to it—while grasping the bigger idea. Document your meetings with notes, photos and good quotations; begin



writing your history as soon as it happens. A brief history of your initiative is helpful in the press kit, and often required by funders.

NOTE THE RESOURCES YOU HAVE AND THE RESOURCES YOU NEED

Conduct a media inventory: What skills do you and your partners possess and what relationships within the media are existing? What materials do you have on hand describing the initiative? Do you have a press kit (a packet of materials designed to introduce the media to your project)? Do you need a press kit? Is there a video showing what you do that can be distributed to public access cable stations or local, regional TV? An internal audit that includes a media skills inventory will tell you what to seek in your partnerships, in the schools, and in the community to fill the gaps. Don't miss the chance to turn media work into opportunities for students and teachers to tell your shared story. A student voice or the voice of a volunteer, civic leader, or business owner who can talk about the initiative from his or her perspective strengthens the story's appeal to the media and community. Get others to tell your story. Develop a list of validators who can beat your drum for you. Assign one member of your management team as the primary media contact. This person does not have to be the single provider of stories, news releases and interviews; however, he or she serves as coordinator, facilitator, and manager, ensuring that the key messages get out consistently and frequently. Ideally, the "brand" for the partnerships, mission, outcomes, and the deeper stewardship message will build.

TIMELINE, WORK PLAN, AND BUDGET

Build into your overall project a timeline, work plan, and budget. Create an ad hoc planning committee representing broad stakeholder interests, and open up the budget process to build buy-in. Use budget and planning formats that are consistent with your lead organization. Projects often take longer than expected, so be realistic about timeframes. Consider the planning cycle for the partner(s) school year and plan accordingly.

Ten Tips to Implementing a Media Plan Successfully

(From *Sharing Your National Service Story, A Guide to Working with the Media*, www.nationalservice.gov)



- 1) Read through and familiarize yourself with the newspapers in your area to learn what is available and determine which ones, as well as which reporters, you should target.
- 2) Focus your news release on what is unique about your place-based initiative.
- 3) B-roll—a compilation of video footage of your program in action, from special events, to outdoor classrooms, to community service engagements, can be a great way to build interest among local TV studios.
- 4) Websites are constantly updated and have different rules on access to archived stories. It is best to copy the articles into a document to save them and insure that you have accurate documentation of all media coverage.
- 5) Hosting an event, hanging a banner, or inviting reporters to witness a volunteer activity are all good ways to provide a visual for television cameras.
- 6) Determining the resources you have available for media efforts will help you build on existing tools and opportunities, and set realistic goals.
- 7) Once you have determined goals, opportunities and resources, you can set a strategy and adhere to a timeline.
- 8) Volunteers, community leaders, and others who have seen the benefits your program provides first hand are among your most valuable resources.
- 9) If your target audience includes members of minority communities, remember to identify reporters and media outlets that cover those communities as well.
- 10) If you are successful at "staying on message" you will be able to determine the shape of the news coverage.



IDENTIFY MEDIA TYPES

First, identify the special opportunities for media contact, and then create a database of contact media organizations and names. There are many opportunities for media coverage. A kickoff press conference, first field trips, special speakers for workshops, an end-of-year celebration, the announcement of a foundation grant, the completion of a student community service project, each represents an opportunity to involve the media. If you don't build media outreach into the work plan, it's probably not going to happen except by chance. Media outreach doesn't need to be expensive. The important thing is to match your efforts to the hoped-for outcomes.

Facilitating Effective Meetings Among Diverse Participants

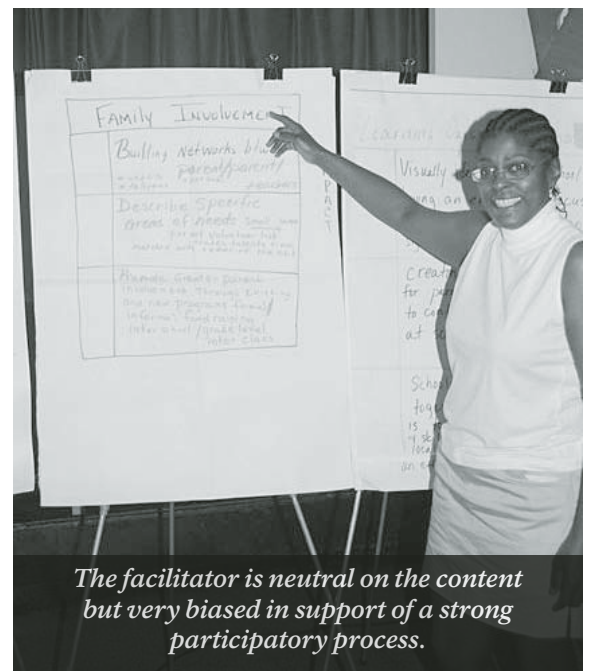
As you grow and sustain your PBL and CE program over time, you will increasingly find yourself reaching out to diverse populations and enlisting their involvement in meaningful roles in the projects. These local residents may come from across socio-economic, racial and other boundaries, and may never have collaborated together before. It will be important to build a culture of respect and acceptance for the contributions of each person and group. This will include sensitivity to the location and timing of meetings, as well as the development of solid meeting facilitation skills. Creativity and full-group involvement often hinge on a safe, secure, non-judgmental environment. The following is basic information about group facilitation skills to help you to create this environment.

YOUR PRESENCE AS A FACILITATOR

- Act in a respectful manner.
- Listen actively and well, with genuine interest and an openness to others' ideas.
- Act warm, positive and enthusiastic.
- Remember that your facial expressions and body posture tell a story; keep an open, positive expression and pose, and make eye contact with participants.
- Be relaxed. Wear clothes you feel comfortable in.

YOUR ROLE AS A FACILITATOR

- Work as a team with your scribe, and support each other's efforts.
- Help participants feel comfortable, welcome, and included.
- Involve everyone—balance the group's participation.
- Enable the sharing of ideas among group members.
- Seek diversity—welcome different opinions.
- Recognize the validity of all points of view (this is especially difficult, but vital, when you privately disagree with the speaker).
- Act non-judgmental—treat group members' ideas without bias (positive or negative).
- Do not criticize or praise any particular idea.
- Draw people's thoughts out.
- Try not to single anyone out or embarrass anyone.
- Listen actively—show interest in everyone's statements and opinions.
- Manage the process—focus and re-focus the conversation to the tasks at hand.
- Stay on schedule. Ensure high priority tasks are met.



The facilitator is neutral on the content but very biased in support of a strong participatory process.



YOUR TASKS AS A FACILITATOR

Focus on the Content

- Start by being sure everyone is clear about what task you're setting out as a group to do.
- Gently but continually focus and re-focus the discussion to keep people on the subject.
- Ensure that the scribe records people's thoughts as you heard them, capturing the detail of each person's comments. If in doubt, check with the speaker to see if the scribe heard/wrote it appropriately and accurately.
- Ensure that the scribe writes down the key points of each person's contribution. This reinforces their sense of being heard and valued, and increases the chances that their ideas will be used in the planning process.

Guide the Process

- Clearly understand the agenda and the expectations of each small-group process, so those expectations will be met.
- Know the time and your agenda and honor them both. You might want to assign a timekeeper from within your group. The lead facilitator should also be keeping time and reminding each small group of the time constraints.
- Let your group know the agenda and the priorities for the group, and be sure they understand the process you will use, so that they may work with and not against you.
- Make sure people understand and agree with the "ground rules" for small group behavior, and then, when necessary, gently remind people to abide by them.
- Only speak as much as is absolutely necessary. A facilitator is not a performer, but a servant to the group. Ideally, you will be "invisible," just guiding the process, so that the focus will be on the content of the discussion, not on you.
- Keep control of the group in a subtle way. Let conversations flow, but within the boundaries, so you stay on the topic.
- Stay aware of the energy level of the group. Watch for such non-verbal clues as facial

Tips From Teachers!



Here's the voice of experience from the teacher and educator perspective:

BUILD PROJECTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

- ★ Use a team teaching approach.
- ★ Focus on a given year, but with an eye on the future.
- ★ Create a club to sustain a multi-year project: eg. a schoolyard garden.
- ★ Conduct student research each year and hold a symposium every few years.
- ★ Develop revolving projects that students check in on every year or every few years (natural inventory or monitoring, for example).
- ★ Have a school-wide focus on one subject or theme (eg: a bio-blitz, one day natural inventory of the school yard or a year-long focus on water).
- ★ Take one step each year toward a long term goal (eg: water quality monitoring).

DEVELOP A DIVERSE FUNDING BASE FOR PBL PROJECTS

- ★ Involve students in all fundraising activities.
- ★ Seek in-kind contributions from businesses and individuals.
- ★ Use free resources: county foresters, public land managers and interpreters.
- ★ Use town resources – donations from businesses and time from people.
- ★ Seek grant-writing assistance from a local expert.
- ★ Seek out model grants from others who have tried this approach.
- ★ Build administrative/board buy-in by getting on their agendas and educating them about your work.
- ★ Seek businesses that match whatever funds your students can raise
- ★ Make earning funds a fun, whole school effort.



expressions, posture, involvement, tone of voice, and respond to these clues appropriately.

- During discussion portions of the event, help the group to come to agreement when possible, and have all conclusions truly reflect the consensus of the group, and not simply the majority opinion.
- Relax and enjoy the people and the process.

HINTS FOR FACILITATORS ON PRESENTING MATERIAL

Remain neutral about the material

The facilitator should never be an advocate for a project or point of view.

Help the group to understand

Remember, you have been preparing in advance for this session. This is their first opportunity to listen to and understand the concepts.

Be prepared

A group will respond positively if it is clear that you understand the material and can deal with it with skill and confidence.

Don't play the "expert"

Let the group know that your job as facilitator is to moderate and guide the discussion, not to lead them to any pre-established conclusion. You have no more "correct answers" than they do.



Look for diverse ways to communicate your message.

HINTS FOR FACILITATORS ON ENCOURAGING INVOLVEMENT

Bring enthusiasm with you

Prepare for facilitating by doing activities that energize you beforehand—for example, before facilitating a meeting, play ball with your children, sing along with your favorite song, exercise, enjoy a cup of coffee—whatever makes you feel positive and energetic.

Make sure you are involved

If you are enthusiastic and involved in the process, it is more likely that participants will be too.

Remain neutral about the material, but positive about the process

Although you must remain neutral about the material—the facilitator should never be an advocate for a project or point of view—you should exude confidence about the process. Assure people that their hard work will pay off.

De-personalize the issues

Avoid referring to concepts as belonging to the person who suggested them. Once they are on the flip chart, they belong to the full group, and everyone should feel free to add to them. Keep the focus on the exchange of ideas and not on the people.

Welcome variety, diversity, disagreement

Some of the best projects come when two seemingly opposite concepts come together into a new idea.

Let ideas grow

As a facilitator, your role is to assist the sharing/growing process. As the group tests their ideas, bouncing them off each other, they will refine and develop their ideas. An idea that started out plain and simple can become vibrant and creative with discussion and input from the full group.

Be positive, appreciative, and accepting

Thank people for sharing their thoughts or feelings with the group. More than anything else, this encourages involvement.



Place-based Learning Program Evaluation

“The most exciting thing for me is that evaluation means continual learning.”

—Lyn Carranza, National Park Service

“Why should we do [evaluation]? It’s good business. In very practical terms, it prepares you for opportunity.”

—Flip Hagood, Student Conservation Association

Why Evaluate?

Place-based learning and civic engagement is a community enterprise that brings together natural resource educators, teachers, students, school administrators, civic organizations, businesses and citizens to achieve a range of integrated objectives—most of which can only be accomplished in the long term, with sustained effort. Each stakeholder is likely to have his or her own unique set of objectives for the PBL and CE enterprise. Evaluation is vital because it allows the partners together to gauge their progress and to make strategic program changes where needed over time. But with multiple partners who may have different outcome priorities, including civic engagement, environmental stewardship and scholastic achievement, deciding how to evaluate, what to measure and how, can be complicated. The bottom line is that the partners need to know if their program investments are cost effective and accomplishing what they set out to accomplish. Each needs to take an active role in evaluation.

Evaluation has a bad rap. Too often it is done only because a funder or administrator requires it, or because it is what has been done before.

Evaluation can have the feel of a performance audit designed to punish mistakes rather than a learning exercise designed to ensure progress, improvement, and success. Because this is so, the hard questions of evaluation are not always asked. Evaluation, especially in a place-based community context, ought to be considered a community learning exercise, and time devoted to developing understanding, celebrating success, and making positive change. Evaluation in this real life context can be viewed as a reflective, practical and non-stressful decision-making tool. The standard to achieve in all PBL programming is to make evaluation a routine and useful aspect of all educational program development.

If designed and implemented well, evaluation:

- Ensures and demonstrates that place-based approaches stay effective;
- Ensures that programs remain innovative;
- Provides results that can be shared to build public support;
- Provides results that can be used to build citizen participation and promote civic dialogue between educators and community partners and stakeholders;



- Provides partners with opportunities to identify shared values and ideals;
- Helps ensure continual learning;
- Is inclusive and engages all stakeholders;
- Uses a range of tools besides post-project surveys and questionnaires, including face-to-face dialogue that offers an exchange of open-ended questions prior to designing new, or improving existing, programs.
- Strengthens collaboration with communities.

Steps to Successful Program Evaluation

1) Build a Plan for Evaluation into the Program Up Front

Building a plan for evaluation at the start of program development focuses all the stakeholders on the desired outcomes of the program and



Evaluation sustains program health and opens doors for new ideas.

into a discussion of what the program is trying to achieve and what evaluation questions need to be asked. Evaluation methods should be decided only after evaluation questions are identified. Building a plan for evaluation up front helps keep the program outcome driven rather than activity driven. It also helps clarify stakeholder values and common ground. Seek input from all stakeholders. For the forest service educator or manager of public lands, for instance, PBL's impact on students' level of community volunteerism or environmental literacy, their knowledge of ecological and stewardship concepts, and the level of direct community involvement in public lands stewardship work may be more important than measuring their academic achievement in meeting state or national learning standards.

2) Develop a Logic Model

Develop a simple logic model for your program that links program inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes in a systematic fashion. Choose the indicators you need to measure over the long term to gauge your success. The logic model is a straight forward tool for tying together the key theories and assumptions supporting the logic of the proposed program. In other words, if the program doesn't logically connect the right means to the right ends, you don't have a worthwhile program ... yet. Logic models help identify the entire set of inputs needed, which can be a major aid to budgeting both time and money. Logic models link particular activities planned to their intended outcomes. They specify desired cause and effect relationships. (See Appendix E: FFEC Logic Model.)

3) Collect Data Through a Variety of Methods

Collect data that triangulates by using multiple stakeholders and several methods, both during the formative aspects of the program, say at a pilot stage, or even before rollout, and also at the end of a program cycle. Triangulation builds confidence that you are where you think you are. Rather than relying on evaluation that uses one metric, one approach, or one survey, build several methods: some quantitative, others qualitative. "Formative" evaluation conducted during the development and implementation of the program



leads to information that can improve the how-tos and for-whoms of the program—the nuts and bolts of delivery. Ask open ended, not deterministic, questions: how is this program working for you? The program itself is the unit of assessment. Be market driven and mission driven. Know your audience and its desires before you design a program for them.

“Summative” evaluation determines the effectiveness of the whole enterprise. The unit of analysis is the individual, community, park, society, or whoever you are trying to change by growing new knowledge, engaging in action, or inspiring.

4) Analyze, Interpret and Share

Something actually must be done with the data collected by the program evaluators. Quantitative data must be turned into charts, graphs, tables or reports that interpret the findings and point the way toward informed changes—either doing something different, doing more of the same thing, doing less of the same thing, doing the same amount of the same thing, or stopping altogether. Qualitative data needs to be reviewed, summarized, reflected upon, and coded so that trends can be detected and communicated. Sharing the results of evaluation is potentially the most powerful aspect of the evaluation process. It shows that the partners understand and value each other’s perspectives and contributions, value the investments made by the other partners, foundations, businesses, individuals and other funders, and put stock in learning by evaluation. Evaluation, shared in a community setting, also sets the stage for action—for building support and growing a program that, in most cases, will prove to have positive effects on the land and people.

5) Act

Evaluation is an exercise in futility unless there is commitment to use the evaluation process to act. Don’t be afraid to ask hard questions and act on the results, whatever they show. Place-based learning approaches need to be designed and implemented for the long-term. Evaluation and adjustment help insure adaptability and sustainability.

Who Should Conduct the Evaluation?

Should the evaluation be conducted by top administrators or frontline educators? Should it be handed off to professional education evaluators or delegated to particular community stakeholders or a subcommittee of all of these players?

The answer is all of the above. Who evaluates depends on the type of information needed, the evaluation questions, and the type of evaluation being conducted (formative or summative). The form of the evaluation and who conducts it should follow the functions that evaluation needs to fulfill.

The National Park Service has embraced a park-wide long-range objective of developing a culture of evaluation within which everyone acquires the habits and tools of learning and acting routinely through evaluation processes. Evaluation needs to be vertically integrated so that it can be conducted from the center or from the grassroots with buy-in at both administrative and program delivery levels, depending on the need. The size and complexity of

Personal reflection is an important step in evaluation.





the need will dictate the level of professional support required. Over time organizations need to develop the capacity of all staff to evaluate.

Keep it simple and straightforward. Often the simplest approach is the most elegant. Evaluation is ultimately about reflective practice and discernment. The careful and deliberate

involvement of all stakeholders at the beginning of planning an evaluation strategy, based on the most important questions and the most transparent methods, will yield the best results. Participants should take care to steer clear of jargon and technical language in evaluation questions, processes and interpretation.





Learning from Experience

“The teacher workshops model community-knitting set in place, sharing of ideas, and collaborative work in a supportive environment. How could teachers fail to launch successfully into our teaching with this as our springboard?”

– FFEC Participant 2007-08

The work of this manual is based on our experience in the development of A Forest for Every Classroom. Below is an overview that illustrates how the process outlined above was used in developing the FFEC program. Additional examples of PBL case studies can be found in Appendix zz.

Case Study: A Forest for Every Classroom—Learning to Make Choices for the Future

In 1999, inspired by a common vision of students learning from and caring for public lands, Marsh-Billings Rockefeller NHP, and the NPS Conservation Study Institute joined forces with Shelburne Farms and the Northeast Natural Resource Center of the National Wildlife Federation, and the Forest Service at the Green Mountain National Forest to create *A Forest For Every Classroom (FFEC): Learning to Make Choices for the Future*.

FFEC is a model for how collaboration can increase the effectiveness of parks and partner organizations and government to enhance civic engagement, serve communities, and protect public lands. A year-long professional development program for educators that focuses on the creation of place-based, service learning curricula, FFEC combines the concepts of ecology, sense of place, stewardship

and civic engagement. This sustained professional development program brings teachers into direct interaction with researchers and resource management professionals over the course of a year. It is founded on the belief that if today’s students are to become tomorrow’s responsible decision makers, they must understand local ecosystems and cultural heritage, and they must have educational opportunities that provide on-the-ground experience practicing stewardship and citizenship in their parks and communities.

By strengthening relationships between public lands, schools, and communities, FFEC has built social capital at the local level. Each of the partners believes FFEC has helped it achieve its educational goals while gaining credibility and goodwill for the organization.

BUILDING THE PROGRAM

To create a program that was responsive to the needs of local communities, resource managers, and teachers, *FFEC* partners initially solicited input from community members, teachers, and forestry professionals on the concepts and experiences that students should have in a curriculum about forest stewardship. In Vermont, each of the four agencies and organizations that came together to develop and facilitate FFEC had a major stake in the future of the Vermont landscape.



PROGRAM ELEMENTS

“This experience has renewed and re-energized me. . . . The ultimate benefit has been the energy, enthusiasm, and knowledge. . . which is being transferred to my students.”

– FFEC Participant, 2002

FFEC has four main elements:

- 1) A workshop series immerses teachers in multi-dimensional field studies of the forested landscape.
- 2) Workshops culminate in a week-long summer institute.
- 3) FFEC created a participant teacher listserv so that support for teachers continues after the year is completed.
- 4) A small grants program provides teachers with extra resources for tools, materials and expertise they may need to enhance work beyond the classroom.

The workshops are designed to help teachers create interdisciplinary curricula connecting their students to the public forestlands in their communities. The program also encourages educators to find ways to integrate basic citizenship skills and service learning into their curriculum.

FUNDING

FFEC is supported through a combination of public and private funds. Each of the partners has been able to deliver funds at an opportune time to ensure financial support. The NPS has used Challenge Cost Share funding as one of its contributions to FFEC, and the USFS has regularly contributed funds vital to the program’s success. In addition, numerous private foundations have supported FFEC.

EVALUATING FFEC

FFEC and its partners are part of the Place-based Education Evaluation Collaborative (PEEC), an effort that links multiple innovative place-based initiatives in order to assess the quality of each program. Participation in PEEC has allowed each partner an unusual opportunity to look beyond their own programs to learn from others. PEEC’s evaluation in early 2004 stated that FFEC:

- Demonstrates best practices in place-based learning;
- Cultivates an understanding of public lands and the local community;
- Offers diverse and balanced perspectives about public lands issues;
- Develops relationships with teachers through sustained professional support;
- Fosters connections between the school, community, and resource specialists;
- Enhances the role of public and private organizations as community resources; and
- Fosters students as active participants in the care of public lands through service learning projects.

SHARING THE SUCCESS OF FFEC: PROGRAM DISSEMINATION

Program dissemination is an important objective of the FFEC partners. One of the strengths of collaboration is that each partner has its own set of professional networks – many of which overlap. Partners have been able to introduce the FFEC model directly and efficiently through these professional networks via conferences, web pages, leadership councils, and informal peer learning networks. Adaptations and replications are now in progress along the shores of Lake Champlain (A Watershed for Every Classroom), through the National Park Service along the length of the Appalachian Trail (A Trail to Every Classroom), and through the Forest Service in New Hampshire, Texas and in the Northern Region, including Montana, North Dakota and Idaho. For more information about replicating FFEC in your region, contact any of the FFEC partners.



One Teacher's Story

From a teacher's perspective, long term access to local experts, natural landscape resources, and to meaningful student project opportunities in the community can make the difference in giving students real educational growth opportunities. At the Hartford Middle School in Vermont, 7th and 8th grade science teacher Michael Quinn has looked to place-based learning partnerships that connect him with like-minded teachers, local land managers and the local conservation commission to design meaningful experiences for his students.

According to Quinn, "It can be difficult to try to combine standards-based learning objectives and our conventional approaches to meeting these, with non-traditional investigations out in the communities where students live and learn. It helps when teachers, whether they are brand new to the profession or experienced, can plug themselves into a program. They need the structure that a place-based initiative can provide, whether that means workshops out in the community run by professional educators and supported by forest management experts brought in for the day, or new place-based curricula designed collaboratively by local citizens, teachers and students."

"Place-based approaches recognize that learning is way more than words on a page," said Quinn. "It's water moving around our boots, it's mud and cold. It's all these sensory dimensions in the real world we're part

of. If it's rivers kids are learning about, then standing in one and turning over stones to find stoneflies, for instance, teaches in new ways that connect them. They gain new respect for the river. They have opportunities to see themselves as a part of something that has a long history and a long future. They become more hopeful. Through the experience they learn to become stewards."

Quinn has been a part of numerous student projects in his community over the years. On occasion his students have made real contributions to community understanding that sometimes extend beyond the local. In one project, his 7th and 8th graders inventoried and mapped vernal pools for the local conservation commission. One of Quinn's students, twelve year-old Emily Scribner, conducted an inventory

of the invasive, non-native Rusty Crayfish in a section of the White River that flows near her school. Scribner's work got the notice of state biologists who were unaware of the extent to which the invasive species had displaced the native species of crayfish. Now other schools have begun monitoring their rivers for Rusty Crayfish.

According to Quinn, "place-based approaches need to work for everyone who shares a love of their community: landowners, town officials, teachers and students. It's working here because students are developing understanding, love and enthusiasm for the places we all call home. That's what we hope to instill in our students."

