

What is one thing you wish you had known about the internal workings of your school or district before starting your RREV innovation?

I wish I'd had a better understanding of the overlying paradox: that while we can care collectively and deeply about the need for all children to have meaningful outdoor experiences, that the grind of curriculum, in the name of standardized testing, can take precedence over what's best for children, regardless of how deeply we care for their needs.

There will be things beyond your control. Manage what you can. Find work arounds and solutions when you hear the word "no". Seek out the positive change makers that continue to hold on to the idealism that brought them to public education in the first place. They exist. You might have to do and learn new skills to make it happen yourself if you don't want to wait.

Grant vs award protocols and how to educate the central office how to work with our team to make great things happen for students.

I wish I knew the "huge" worry about liability. Administration was soooooo worried that something might happen that they hindered what could happen.

A smooth way to communicate and manage spending between members of the RREV team, school admin assistants, and money managers at central office. Lots of cooks in the kitchen.

The administration and the teaching staff are going to change continually through the years; Make sure the introduction of outdoor resources becomes part of new staff training

What is the most valuable lesson you learned as a result of implementing your RREV innovation?

I've learned of the power of making connections...in being the "butterfly" that gets to float around the district, learning of needs and connecting those in need with the solutions that are available to them. Listening, forming relationships, being the eyes and ears, and then reaching out to connect people.

Outdoor education is good for all ability levels. While my target audience was those hands-on learners, I also saw great strides with the upper 10% who had little experience outdoors. With rigorous AP schedules, music lessons, athletics, and volunteering, the over achievers were so focused, they rarely had time for fun. It was a revelation for them that being serious wasn't the only way to learn.

I think that when an idea has value and people can see the worth they are eager to help you in many different ways. That includes students, faculty, admin, business leaders, community members. When the mission was explained we had so many individuals volunteer their time, expertise, materials, and equipment. This was a monumental help and I had never felt that kind of support for a dream or project in education.

How to pull a huge project together, manage the people and initiatives, and problem solve on the go.

If you have a vision that you passionately share with others, are motivated, engaged, and continue to communicate and collaborate with others (you can't do it all by yourself!) you can bring an idea into reality.

This is not specific to RREV but children are going to be children (loud, fast, excited) and adults are going to be wary (scared of getting lost, scared of ticks, scared of not having a perfectly orchestrated lesson); allow for all of this and continue onward.

What are your top 3–5 tips for educators beginning outdoor learning?

You do NOT need to know everything or even anything (bird, moss, tree, cloud, rock identification, etc). Learn together. That's actually the best role model for life-long learning!

1. Prepare your kiddos - this ranges from behavior expectations, consequences, daily goals, hand signals, etc.
2. Establish routines - who brings the gear? where will you meet? How will you enter/exit the building? What happens in an emergency? etc.
3. Just do it!!! - Tiny steps will build confidence and enthusiasm in the classroom.

Have a vision, share and refine it with students, colleagues and team members, make a plan and pragmatically adjust it along the way. Schedule time and money for certifications and engage other colleagues in leveling up (certifications and learning from other experienced educators) to safely learn with students outside.

1. Take stock of your resources. What equipment is needed?
What do you have available to you without transportation?
Who is a resource in your building? Can they help you facilitate your plan?
2. Be patient. It will take some time to build infrastructure and support.
3. Seek community support. There are people out there that believe in your mission.
4. Find the financial start up. Then take care of what you have. It has to last.
5. STUDENTS WANT and DESERVE to spend time learning outside. Full stop.

Invest in gear so kids can go out! Start with staff that are excited about being outside, and figure out a way for kids to go out with teachers that are excited if other teachers really don't want to. Collaborate with community organizations.

1. It may feel like an emergency when children are stuck inside on a beautiful day. It still feels like an emergency to me on a regular basis. But remembering "go slow to go fast," and being patient about the solutions needed to make that move outside, will help you stay the course.
2. Outdoor learning doesn't need to be fancy. You don't need a high-end pavilion to take kids outside. And you don't need to have a fully-integrated unit with standards and assessments and all the whistles and bells. Start simple (who doesn't love reading in the sunshine?) and see where you go from there!

3. Connect with others, formally and informally. There's power in numbers. Sharing ideas, collaborating on curriculum, and going outside together are all great ways to get started and get braver about trying something new.
4. It's okay to be uncomfortable. As I've been heard to say..."you know what's worse than being cold/hot/wet? Being stuck INSIDE all day."
5. Never underestimate how much families want to be involved in creating outdoor spaces, and how many resources and skills they have to lend

What are your top three resources that support successful outdoor learning?

The network you build, examples of how other people have succeeded, trusted colleagues, administrators, staff, and supporters that can give you honest feedback and have your back.

1. Outdoor Education Toolkit - <https://ophea.net/outdoor-education-toolkit>
2. BEETLES - <https://beetlesproject.org/resources/for-field-instructors/>
3. Out Teach - <https://oercommons.org/hubs/Out-Teach>

Gear and materials are easy to access, year long PD that was offered to help teachers feel more comfortable, and maintained spaces to us.

The Maine DoE's Wabanaki Studies site

The MEEA

The Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

A supportive community of experienced individuals, access to outdoor learning sites on and off our campus, and transportation. I understand that the last one is really hard to pull off.

Gulf of Maine Research Institute, Maine Environmental Education Association, Downeast Chapter of the Maine Audubon Society, Friends of Acadia (I know that is FOUR) plus Island Institute, Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance and National Resource Council of Maine

What are your top 3–5 strategies for managing student groups in outdoor settings?

1. Clear expectations that mirror what kids are familiar with for indoor learning experiences
2. Predictable routines...balanced with a bit of spontaneity "STOP WRITING! Did you just hear that pileated woodpecker?"
3. A subtle and graceful willingness to let go of the idea that all will go as smoothly as it does inside (kids will get distracted by geese flying overhead; papers will get wet and wrinkly..and that's OKAY)

Team building builds trust and rapport. The group comes before any individual. Inclusivity. Honest talk.

The AMC credo of and Outdoor Leaders Responsibility include:

Minimize Risk

Minimize Impact

Maximize Learning

Maximize Enjoyment

Pre-Planning, risk analysis, engaging students in the planning, being prepared, empower students to take on leadership roles mentoring and teaching their peers and sharing in the responsibility for a successful trip.

1. Clear expectations - and know that you are going to have to stop a lesson and come back in at some point to reinforce the expectations.
2. Limit unstructured time - this is when trouble usually occurs
3. Move around and check in frequently with all students

Relationships with students, outdoor classroom spaces that help students see that it is different than recess, norms and expectations developed and reviewed regularly...and playing games.

Plan ahead - Plan ahead - Plan ahead;

Bring extra pencils (if they are using pencils);

Bring extra anything so no one is empty handed;

Have cool stuff to work with (hand lenses, hand held microscopes, binoculars, small journals, soil thermometers);

Practice in the classroom first with the stuff;

What advice would you give to educators seeking financial support for outdoor gear?

Solicit donations, Grant writing, Gear shares, Fundraising. Don't be afraid to ask. They can only say no.

Two words: MEEA Mini-Grant. Also, don't be afraid to ask companies--big online ones, or small local ones--for a discount or donation

Have elevator pitches and quotes ready for quick grant request turnarounds, look to leverage multiple small grants or combine resources with other teachers to accomplish larger more expensive projects. Review list serves and join related professional organizations in your field.

Beg, borrow, and steal gear, but also spend time thinking of how and who will organize.

Start small - MEEA \$1500 or start an Amazon wish list

Tie your requests to the Standards, could be Next Generation Science Standards, but could be Math, ELA, Art etc as well

What are your top 3–5 “must-have” resources before taking students outside for the first time?

1. A walkie-talkie, or other dependable method for communicating with the indoors
2. A small, portable dry-erase board
3. Seating of some kind...anything from fancy camp chairs from LL Bean to stumps cut by the HS Forestry class to gallon-size baggies with some kind of stuffing.
4. But really, as long as you're comfortable and spontaneous, it doesn't take much at all! Just make sure that you, as the leader, have the gear you need to outlast the kids.

Proper Clothing and Outerwear. Footwear is really important. You are limited in Maine's climate without it. Cold and wet. Socioeconomics will limit so having it in class is important.

Wilderness First Aid and kit and the training to use it.

Planning, Mapping, and supervision/qualified chaperones. You will need more eyes on students in outdoor settings.

Food/Water/Fire/Shelter in their many forms depending on the trip. That could be a day on the bus, a day hike or a multi day canoe trip.

Safety training depending on your activity, communication plan, clear expectations, a way to communicate, if possible another adult.

1. Whistle/hand bell - some sort of signaling devices to disperse and retrieve students
2. Walkie talkies - immediate access to admin/nurse/etc.
3. Clipboards or small dry erase boards - solid surface for writing

time, extra adult if leaving campus, bandanas

1. A way to get their attention besides yelling (a whistle works);
2. A Pre-Lesson so that you move outdoors with a shared goal
3. Apparel to loan that keeps kids warmish and dryish (rain ponchos, extra sweatshirts)
4. A Post-Lesson (could be all of 5 minutes) to tie together observations
5. A sense of humor because the unexpected is bound to happen.