IN THE BEGINNING:
Outdoor School was created in a small lumber town in 1957 as a way to connect kids to nature and the natural resources that supported the local economy. By spending a week together out in the woods, they learned about the outdoors as well as how to think critically—like scientists. Outdoor School gave students a chance to learn science in meaningful, hands-on ways, gaining a lifelong appreciation of Oregon’s precious environment along the way.

Teachers, students and communities throughout Oregon soon realized that Outdoor School had something even more special to offer and programs spread statewide in less than ten years. In addition to science literacy, the combination of music, campfire stories, camp nicknames and sharing chores taught kids to be independent, encouraged them to form deep bonds and helped them become better citizens.

For those fortunate enough to attend, Outdoor School is a memory that stays with them for the rest of their lives, deeply connecting them as Oregonians to each other and to this beautiful place.

ON A DEAD-END TRAIL:
In the face of massive statewide budget cuts, Oregon began to lose its rich Outdoor School tradition. Outdoor School programs began disappearing; a painful sacrifice for schools, especially in lower income communities. Even schools that managed to keep their programs struggled, reducing the amount of days dedicated to Outdoor School. At the same time, technology and testing inside the classroom competed for kids’ time and diminished their time outside as well as their connection to the outdoors.

The pressure was on: Oregon was in danger of losing a powerful and unifying tradition. But the history of how this important Oregon legacy would be rescued was about to be written.

OBSTACLES AHEAD:
By the mid-1990s, it seemed as if Oregon’s Outdoor School programs were doomed. State property tax limits were causing massive budget cuts in education. Schools desperately tried to support Outdoor School programs by fundraising themselves, leading to inequality between “richer” districts still able to send their kids, and those that couldn’t scrape together

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enough resources to offer it. Some help came from foundations like the Gray Family Foundation, but it could only fund a fraction of the cost. In the Portland metro area, the regional government began paying for one day of Outdoor School in 2008, through a fee on solid waste. Bills were introduced in the Legislature, only to die.

Reduced to just a couple days in some districts--and gone in many others--Outdoor School limped along. Even with broad public support and hard work by local communities and teachers, the lack of a cohesive, organized statewide commitment to this program was taking its toll.

**BLAZING NEW TRAILS**
Things got worse as the years passed as more and more schools dropped Outdoor School. In the Portland metro region, efforts to restore Outdoor School grow out of a collaborative parks strategy. Outdoor education leaders see Outdoor School as a key link in connecting residents with nature. Metro Councilor Rex Burkholder, an elected regional government official passionate about the cause, brought together a broad group of community leaders to tackle the key challenge of sufficient and stable funding.

This was the turning point: These leaders—from business, education, nonprofits, foundations, as well as government—coming together to create a strategy to protect Oregon's Outdoor School legacy.

**FIRST STEPS IN THE JOURNEY: RESEARCH**
Knowledge is power - these players agreed that to show the value of outdoor education they had to first have good data around public opinions about these programs as well as how they impact children's lives. To reach their legislative or electoral goals for outdoor school, you need to know what the public thinks. They also knew they needed to identify potential champions and trusted messengers as well as likely opponents.

The Gray Family Foundation is a key player. Committed to educating Oregon children about the outdoors and Oregon's heritage, it funds two key research efforts: collecting of national and local studies on the impact of outdoor science education; and opinion research (polling and focus groups) to determine public support for funding proposals. The group also reaches out to community leaders and educators statewide to determine if there is an existing organization with the interest and skills needed to lead the effort to pass legislation and secure funding.

Armed with this research and some brainstorming, a small group creates a three-year action plan designed to push legislation establishing Outdoor School as a state education priority as well as providing sufficient funding so that every child can afford to attend. They go back to the Gray Family Foundation with the plan, backed up with data, public opinion polling and the start of a statewide network. Gray FF is convinced the plan is promising and awards initial funding for the effort. Other funders find the data convincing as well and are impressed with the clear strategy.

*Lesson learned:* Research is an essential investment to help form strategic direction and areas of opportunity. Identifying foundations or nonprofit organizations with shared values may be an avenue to securing initial funding for this purpose.

*Lesson learned:* Taking on a project like creating a new state program is a big task. Be planful. Engage others. Understand the politics—who will support, who will oppose—and why.

**GETTING ORGANIZED: CREATING STRUCTURE**
According to their polling and focus groups, the idea of sending every Oregon student to Outdoor School is popular.
Lesson learned: Scan your environment; look for allies and possible “homes” for the effort.

Build a single-issue coalition with advocates of career education, natural resources, environmental education and protection, and children’s health. An allied organization can provide fiscal sponsorship or host effort as a project.

Lesson learned: foundations can fund campaigns but the rules are strict. Partnering with 501©3 groups and setting up parallel organizations to do education, research and grassroots outreach are legal and effective strategies to use tax-deductible donations.

THE OOEC STEERING COMMITTEE

The steering committee was the public face of the effort and members were deliberately chosen to demonstrate broad geographic and ideological support for the Outdoor School for All effort—the OOEC included recognized representatives from business, foundations, communities of color, tribes, religious, natural resources (fishers, loggers, farmers), education and more. Giving members meaningful ways to contribute, including clear roles and tasks, as well as meeting regularly to keep them up to date and engaged, is essential for using this powerful group well.

Lesson learned: A broad, nonpartisan base of support is essential. Plan carefully and outreach broadly to avoid being stereotyped (in this case as a “liberal-leaning environmental or urbanite” organization).

THE IMPORTANCE OF WORDS

Like many states, Oregon's rural and urban communities often see themselves on opposite sides of issues. Partisan bickering can be intense. Oregon has seen huge losses in historical economic sectors including logging, fishing and farming. These tensions are often expressed as a conflict of the economy (read “rural, natural resource-based jobs”) versus the environment. The OOEC spent considerable effort researching and figuring out how to talk about Outdoor School without using words that might alarm some sectors of society or create opposition—at the Legislature and the ballot box. Using a professional opinion researcher (Adam Davis—DHM Research, in this case) was incredibly powerful and helpful in understanding how people from different backgrounds and perspectives perceived terms and images.

Lesson learned: Words matter. All Outdoor School for All and OOEC materials deliberately used words like “nature and natural resources” instead of “environment” and “outdoor education” instead of “environmental education.”

Lesson learned: Focus on outcomes such as improvements in grades, graduation rates and behavior as well as emphasizing things we all wish for our children—critical thinking, independence, confidence and the ability to collaborate with others.

PIONEERING THE LEGISLATIVE EFFORT

A strong foundation in research, combined with thoughtful and strategic messaging and branding, led to financial support from organizations that shared concerns about the disconnect from nature, including Oregon Forest Resources Institute, the Oregon Community Foundation and others. With their support, the OOEC hired a coordinator (to build grassroots support statewide) as well as a lobbyist (to build support within the Legislature).

Protecting Oregon's natural resources and natural beauty, hands-on science education and healthier, more successful kids—what's not to love? OOEC recruits four legislators (two Republican and two Democrats—representing rural as well as urban districts) as co-sponsors for Senate Bill 439, creating for the first time a State Outdoor School program. The bill also calls for funding—enough to send every student to a full week of Outdoor School in fifth or sixth grade. While the bill that ultimately passed didn't include funding (anticipated by the OOEC action plan that included a citizen initiative), SB439 created the program structure, setting outcomes, designating the responsible state agency and requiring a citizen advisory committee to oversee implementation. Passage was almost unanimous with 88 yeses and 1 no. In an era of bitter partisan divides, this shows the incredible appeal of outdoor education.

Lesson learned: First goal is to establish Outdoor School (outdoor education) as a State priority;

Lesson learned: Getting bipartisan, geographically diverse support for legislation is super-critical;

Lesson learned: using the legislative process to engage partners and fine-tune the proposed program does three things:

- brings important allies into a place of ownership and support (e.g., state agency tasked with implementation, legislators become champions of a good, and popular idea);
- opportunity to fix potential problems (more eyes and ideas on how best to do this); and
- keeps any follow-up legislation or ballot measure simply about funding—yes or no—instead of a
thousand details--any one of which might strike a legislator or voter as a reason to vote no.

MOVING TO CAMPAIGN MODE…

Like 25 other states, Oregon has a process whereby initiatives can be placed on the ballot by petition. This is a way for citizens or organizations to put ideas before the voters when the Legislature can’t or won’t act. The OOEC three-year action plan anticipated having to go to the ballot directly and its original proposal to the Gray Family Foundation included seed funding for a petition drive. In fall of 2015, the Steering Committee voted to launch a campaign to fund Outdoor School for All.

This required creating a new organization—the Outdoor School for All Campaign, with its own steering committee focused on fundraising, gaining endorsements and bringing in organizations with strong grassroots support.

Running a statewide campaign is a big undertaking, including; raising lots of money, recruiting volunteers, hiring competent and experienced staff and building a campaign committee that is committed and hard working. Nonprofit partners can help by educating their supporters and urging them to get involved but the bulk of the work will be done by the campaign, including overseeing signature collection, dealing with opposition, working with the media, etc.

Lesson learned: Be prepared. Campaigning is hard work with immoveable deadlines (like election days!). Have a plan. Engage professional help. Be sure your team includes people who can and will raise and give money.

Lesson learned: Putting important ideas on the ballot is hard, but it allows you to control the content.

Lesson learned: recruit and rely on partners. In Oregon, the Audubon Society of Portland and The Nature Conservancy played huge roles in the ballot measure campaign, bringing their campaign and organizing experience as well as access to donors. their Executive Directors’ buy-in was critical to their engagement.

Lesson learned: Keep lists! The people who support outdoor education, who wrote letters to their representative, who testified, volunteered, are members of partner groups...they are all potential signature gatherers, fundraisers, donors and voters. Get their names, addresses, phone numbers and emails—and stay in touch with them and ask them to help!

PREPARE TO FOLLOW UP

The short story is that the Outdoor School for All measure passed overwhelmingly, carrying 34 of Oregon’s 36 counties with 67% of the vote. During a time of bitter partisanship, giving our kids this special experience has broad support—in rural as well as urban communities, from Republicans as well as Democrats, from business people and activists. Depending on your state or local situation though, it is critically important that you understand what happens after you win. In Oregon, this meant making sure to have the resources to lobby the Legislature to appropriate the funds approved by the voters (tough fiscal times means even a landslide doesn’t guarantee a result) as well as the ability to work with the implementing agency to deliver the program well and on-time.

Lesson learned: The OOEC served its role well: building public support for Outdoor School. When the campaign was over, we relied on key partners (who’ve been with us all along) to follow up:

Friends of Outdoor School teamed up with the Gray Family Foundation to hire a lobbyist to advocate at the Legislature for full funding.

The OSFA campaign continued to raise funds and rally grassroots support, as well.

Many organizations and individuals activated and excited by the OSFA effort jumped at the chance to advise implementing agency on just how to deliver quality Outdoor School programs.

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OUTDOOR SCHOOL OR ALL CAMPAIGN TIMELINE (BY YEAR)

1 Conduct public opinion research and outreach to conservation education community across the state

2 Develop 3-year plan and pitch to major funders. Form statewide coalition

3 Write legislation, find co-sponsors to introduce legislation. Activate base and hire lobbyist to lobby for passage of bill.

4 Qualify measure for ballot through gathering signatures. Raise funds and run campaign.

5 Hire lobbyist and keep supporter network active in advocating for full funding of bill.

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