

Schools and community groups Working together



The **NRM Education** and **Community Group Action** teams are looking to link [schools and community groups](#). Schools and community groups both undertake projects that improve and enhance our environment. They also advocate to their local communities and policy makers about natural resources. So it seems like partnerships can benefit projects and participants.

Benefits for students and schools

There are many benefits for schools to work with community groups such as Friends of Parks. The outdoor environment provides learning opportunities as well as mental and physical health benefits for students and staff.

Students are exposed to people with local knowledge and experiences and they get hands-on learning outdoors, access to specialist knowledge, and gain skills and knowledge on conservation and bush care techniques. They also learn from role models who are positively influencing their community.

Students gain experience in volunteering and the great work volunteers do to maintain and improve our open spaces. They may be encouraged to volunteer their time or learn they enjoy working outdoors, with people or being active. Students may also visit local parks they might not have visited before.

Schools can access national and conservation parks for free, utilise equipment, which may be supplied by the community group or Natural Resources Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges staff, and connect with a local site.

There are educational links to science, geography, civics and citizenship, English, mathematics, sustainability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Teachers can link onsite learning with pre- and post-visit lessons that add value to traditional classroom lessons and increase the relevancy of classroom learning.

Benefits for community groups

Community groups can provide students with a fun alternative to classroom learning.

The aim is to build a sense of stewardship in students and teachers, helping them connect to their local site. This could lead to new volunteers with students going home and sharing their experiences with family and friends. They may return to the park to show their work to family members, which provides an opportunity to raise awareness within the local community.

Manual tasks are a major component of many conservation projects. Involving schools in projects can add variety to the regular working bee making it a fun experience for all.



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Volunteers get the opportunity to pass knowledge onto students with real life examples on site. And there are more hands on deck providing valuable assistance.

Planning an activity together

Communication helps schools and community groups with preparing and running an event.

Schools need to know:

- the purpose of the work they are doing
- what will be involved
- what students and staff need to bring on the day
- who is responsible for certain activities.

Teachers and staff may not be familiar with the works of the community group so any background information can be helpful in adding value to student and staff understanding and enjoyment.

Schools can sometimes 'adopt a patch' of park, a couple of times a year, many years in a row, to maintain and improve that site. But approval from the land manager must be given prior to undertaking activities.

Schools are encouraged to investigate long-term learning projects, so collaborating with Friends of Parks and other environmental groups can give beneficial learning and on-ground benefits.

The content of the information that a community group is distributing and the type of activity students are participating in needs to be age appropriate. Please liaise with teachers prior to the event to ensure that the material and activities are appropriate for the students.

Timing

Teachers are often time poor and may not be available to talk to community groups at certain times of the day and/or year. A well organised event often requires teachers to plan more than a term (10 weeks) in advance. This planning is essential for good project outcomes.

Community groups often plan their working bee dates at the beginning of the year. It is often not possible for the group to change the date of an activity at short notice. It would be beneficial to both parties to plan a yearly schedule from the onset of the project. Remember that volunteers are volunteering their time.

Photos

Taking photos of students is against most school policies. Prior to taking photos, the community group must have written consent from the relevant student's legal guardian. A simpler way to obtain photos for promotional use is to ask teachers to take photos of students whose guardians have consented to their photograph being taken.

Costs

Many schools have tight budgets; any activities that are free of charge are always appreciated.

Weather

Most schools have strict weather policies that determine students' interaction with the outdoors. On certain days, schools will not be able to work outdoors. In the event of hot weather, lightning and bush fire danger, schools may need to cancel their visit to the park at late notice.

Linking to learnings

Any activities that link to the *Teaching for Effective Learning framework* are highly valued and encouraged. This can be discussed with the teacher in the planning stages.

Schools may also not have access to equipment and may ask to borrow equipment from the community group. Teachers also may not know how to use certain equipment.

Duty of care

When interacting with students, be a positive role model. Show students how to be respectful of everyone and our environment. One tip is to be your 'PG self' i.e. avoid discussing adult topics to or within earshot of children.

Teachers are also important role models. Getting involved in the activities with the students will add value to the learning experience and encourage those students who are not used to getting their hands dirty.

The duty of care for the safety of students, staff and community members is the responsibility of all. In the interest of safety and well-being, community group members need to be responsible for informing staff and students of onsite risks and hazards. And everyone has a role to play in ensuring student behaviour is appropriate. However, teachers need to be informed of students who are not meeting expected behavioural standard as they are responsible for student behaviour and safety.

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