

Community Health Initiative Framework

I. Purpose of the Initiative

Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature has developed The Community Health Initiative to apply the resources and expertise of the Partnership in an effort to increase the time children in an urban community spend outdoors. The outcomes will provide both a framework and a pilot study from which lessons can be applied to similar efforts in other communities.

II. Background

In the last two decades, childhood has moved indoors. The average American boy or girl spends just four to seven minutes in unstructured outdoor play each day, and more than seven hours each day in front of an electronic screen. Less time spent outside profoundly impacts the wellness of our nation's kids.

- Childhood obesity rates have more than doubled the last 20 years. One in three American children is overweight or obese; 12 % of Maryland high school students are considered obese¹.
- ADHD is on the rise. The United States has become the largest consumer of ADHD medications in the world.
- More than half of all children in the US are deficient in Vitamin D.
- Stress, anxiety and depression rates among youth are increasing. Pediatric prescriptions for antidepressants have risen dramatically.
- Nearly one in 10 school-aged children has asthma. The percentage of children with asthma is rising more rapidly in preschool-aged children than in any other age group.

Our kids are out of shape, tuned out and stressed out, because they are missing something essential to their health and development: their connection to the natural world.

Research shows that moving and playing outdoors offers enormous benefits, including healthier body weights, stronger muscles and bones, healthy hearts and better eyesight. Time spent outdoors can also help alleviate stress, improve social bonds, and inspire active imaginations.

III. Vision

The primary vision of the Initiative is:

To empower communities to get more families outside resulting in healthier children and a deeper neighborhood responsibility for and relationship with nature.

While the vision is broad, the focus of the Initiative will be on addressing those issues that are within the scope of the Partnership. It is understood that there are many other barriers within urban communities that prevent regular outdoor play and learning and may affect the overall outcome of the Initiative. The action plan will be developed with the support of the community so that the approach is rational, and the expected outcomes are realistic.

¹ Based on students who were greater than the 95th percentile for body mass index based on sex and age specific reference data. From the 2000 CDC growth charts. http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/yrbs/pdf/obesity/md_obesity_combo.pdf

IV. Products

- Pilot project in an urban community implementing actions to increase outdoor activities of children and their families provide options and opportunities for a healthier lifestyle.
- Report detailing the process, barriers, opportunities and lessons learned to provide a framework for duplicating the approach in other communities.
- Documentation in as much as possible, the improvements to health supported by the medical and research communities.

V. Selecting and Working with a Community

A. Selection Criteria

The workgroup felt that the pilot community selected should have some existing capacity that will be enhanced through the efforts of the Initiative. Actions can focus on filling in gaps or expanding existing programs to reach more members of the community. Therefore, the community selection criteria utilizes existing data and knowledge of the Partnership members in identifying potential communities and neighborhoods. The selection of the community is also contingent upon whether the assistance of the Partnership will be accepted and welcomed.

Neighborhoods near the following City parks are under consideration. Final selection will require the support of and to Baltimore City. Park areas under consideration are:

- Patterson Park in East Baltimore;
- Druid Hill Park in North/West Baltimore;
- Gwynns Falls Trail/Leakin Park in West Baltimore.

Each park and surrounding neighborhoods have their challenges and benefits for increasing opportunities for outdoor programs and community involvement. Community support, resources available, and community needs are among the factors that will be considered in the selection process.

The following tools will be also used to inform and guide the community selection process:

- Park Equity Analysis shows areas with relative low proximity to park space (within ½ mile).
- Food Desert Map shows limited access to healthy foods.

The following criteria will be used to inventory community resources:

- Has an existing “kid audience” (Community School, afterschool program, Recreation Center).
- Has the potential to create or expand a community garden.
- Has at least one environmental or community organization focused on nature, outdoor education or local parks.
- Has a community leader interested in working with us.
- Has a population of XXX people or XX households (define the size of the community).
- Safety issues will not be a barrier to participation (e.g. dangerous road, unusually high crime rate).

The following criteria will be used to assess “need”:

- Has a moderate/high incidence of health issues related to sedentary lifestyles (e.g. diabetes).

B. Guiding Principles for Working With a Community

Similar efforts have been initiated in other cities across the country. Lessons learned need to be acknowledged and heeded as the Initiative moves forward. The following are some of the guiding principles for working in a community:²

- Learn the history of the community you are working in. Understand how it was developed, which indigenous communities lived there before, and what policies and culture shaped it and changed it.
- If you are not from the community you are working in, spend more time actively listening than talking.
- Consider all ideas with an open mind. Give credit where credit is due. Learn from prior experiences.
- Seek out established leaders and support them.
- Accept criticism graciously and thoughtfully.
- Find mentors you trust to help guide you in your work.
- Engage the community early and often.
- Process is as important as results.

VI. Assumptions

Several assumptions provide the foundation for the development of the initial framework. These assumptions are based on the experience of the workgroup as well as reports and studies documenting trends and correlations between children's' health and interaction with nature through physical activity. Those assumptions are:

- Getting kids outside and interacting with nature is beneficial to their health.
- Children do not interact with nature because of attitudinal barriers (lack of desire/interest, competing priorities, safety issues, etc).
- Participation in gardening activities will increase interest in spending more time outdoors and provide a direct association with and access to healthy foods.
- Providing direct communication, workshops and opportunities with and for parents and community leaders will increase the amount of time children and families spend outdoors.

VII. Setting Goals/Action Items/Metrics

The goals were developed to focus the work of the Initiative with the understanding that not all of the community issues could be addressed. However, the initial actions will involve meeting with the community to determine the best approach to engage the community members, to identify barriers to meeting the goals, and to determine what actions can be taken through this Initiative to address those barriers.

The goals listed have been developed to be strategic, measurable, action-oriented, relevant and time bound. These goals will be refined and further defined through working with a selected community and its community leaders. The primary goals focus on:

- Increasing the opportunities for and the amount of time families spend outside; and,
- Improving access to and awareness of healthy foods through gardening efforts that build self-sufficiency and sustainable practices while further contributing to families' connection to nature and time outdoors.

² Adapted from lessons learned by Patrick Crouch who manages a [2.5 acre organic farm](#) in Detroit.

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The goals are followed by methods of measurement to provide accountability to the Partnership and the community along with a means of determining progress and evaluating the future direction. Both short term and long term actions are also identified, where applicable, and may be adjusted as the Initiative matures.

Goal 1 - Increase Interaction of Families with Nature

Sub-goals

1. Increase number of families connecting with nature/outdoor experiences; and,
2. Increase amount of time families are connecting with nature/outdoor experiences; and
3. Increase the number of physicians prescribing/recommending nature play and outdoor activities

Method of measurement

1. Self-Reporting
 - a. Conduct focus groups with participating families.
 - b. Conduct pre and post surveys with participating families.
 - c. Use “story telling” as a tool to convey anecdotal success stories.
2. Reported number of programs offered in the community
 - a. Use calendar of events from community organizations.
 - b. Encourage community organizations and participating families to self-report.
3. Participation in programs
 - a. Collect participant sign in sheets.
 - b. Work with partners to track program attendance.
 - c. Conduct post-survey of participating families in community.

Actions:

Short term

1. Survey households to determine the barriers to spending time outdoors.
2. Inventory existing programs in community and explore opportunities to collaborate with other partners.
3. Provide two educational programs to physicians and pediatricians within the community on the health benefits of being outdoors to include information on local parks.
4. Support or initiate Prescription for Nature and Docs in the Park programs.
5. Develop a relationship with local park(s) and other nature-related resources to engage them in connecting with members of the selected community.
6. Identify “nontraditional” educators within the community (volunteers, clergy, youth leaders), and determine ways they can assist in getting more families outdoors interacting with nature (e.g., as mentors, etc.).

Long Term

1. Work with local parks(s)/nature-related resources to identify, develop and offer programs of interest to the community.
2. Bring resources to the community such as natural resources experts and EE providers (agencies, organizations, nature centers, park naturalists, etc.) to help prepare the “nontraditional” educators to lead activities for youth and families in outdoor settings [may get some tips from MAEOE’s capacity building project – could offer angler education programs, teach outdoor skills, and more).

Goal 2- Improve awareness of, use of and access to Healthy Food³

Sub-goals

1. Increase participation in community gardening by x %
2. Engage urban farmers, growers, local producers to create opportunities for education/field trips

Method of measurement

1. Increase in the number of garden plots.
2. Increase in the number of community gardens.
3. Record the number of gardening and food preparation workshops/classes.
4. Collect data on the number of urban farmers, growers, local producers working directly with community.
5. Collect data on the number of community members/ participating in field trips, local markets, etc.
6. Increase in the availability of health foods for the community, as reported by local market sales.

Actions:

Short term

1. Survey the community to determine experience with and barriers to gardening or participating in community gardening.
2. Work with the Community and City staff to identify opportunities for enlarging or providing additional garden areas.
3. Provide a series of gardening workshops in spring.
4. Determine interests and needs of the community regarding nutrition, food preparation, use, storage (home canning / freezing) and provide appropriate workshops on these and other topics as needed.
5. Interview community members regarding their shopping habits, attitude toward food choices and markets they use for healthy foods.
6. Inventory all of the urban markets providing fresh produce and healthy foods to the community (identify the availability of healthy foods to the community).
7. Schedule one or two field trips to an urban farm for community members.

Long term

1. Determine interests and needs of the community regarding nutrition, food preparation, use, storage (home canning / freezing) and provide appropriate workshops on these and other topics as needed.

VIII. Future Actions

The intent of this Initiative is to gain a better understanding of the barriers to and best approaches for increasing the connection of urban communities with nature and the outdoors. The long term investment of this Initiative will

³ *Healthy food is defined as fresh or frozen fruits, vegetables, lean meats, whole grains, etc consistent with the Harvard Healthy Eating Plate. <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/pyramid/> The Community Health Initiative is focused on access to fresh fruits and vegetables.*

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result in improved physical health of the members of those communities involved. The experiences, lessons learned from the actions taken and the results will be shared and made available for review in a myriad of ways:

- A. Develop an annual report for broad distribution.
- B. Expand the programs to other communities beyond the initial pilot.
- C. Develop forums and approaches for mentoring or sharing experiences between communities
- D. Develop a blueprint/framework document to support replication in other communities.

IX. Timeline and getting started

Immediately following the January Leadership meeting:

- A. Finalize the community selection and the implementation Team.
- B. Meet with community leaders to refine objectives and set initial actions
- C. Identify actions to be taken with in the first year.
- D. Contact additional partners and seek input, involvement, or support such as:
 - a. The Maryland Extension Service (i.e. Master Gardeners)
 - b. Baltimore City Recreation and Parks
 - c. Greater Baltimore Children and Nature (GBCAN)
 - d. Local physicians
 - e. Others based on community selected.
- E. Based on workplan and potential funding source requirements, identify potential funding opportunities and determine responsible entity for acquiring and managing funding

X. Suggested Process for Moving Forward

- A. The Initiative would be jointly led by DNR and NWF.
- B. CIN Partner organizations and partners engaged in the Initiative would lead specific goal and action components.
- C. Management would be through a Team approach involving the organizations leading actions or goals along with community leaders/members.
- D. Partner organizations would provide support for all activities as needed and available.
- E. Progress will be reported through current CIN quarterly/annual progress reporting or as appropriate.
- F. Elevate three communities for consideration by the Partnership for Children in Nature Leadership Team.
- G. Identify selected community and begin work to investigate potential barriers, involve community in planning, and identify partners for implementation.

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