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# Community Action Guide

BUILDING THE CHILDREN & NATURE MOVEMENT  
FROM THE GROUND UP

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Prepared by  
**Civic Results**  
for the  
**Children and Nature Network**

January 2008

The *C&NN Community Action Guide: Building the Children & Nature Movement from the Ground Up* is respectfully dedicated to its principal author, Co-Founder of Civic Results and C&NN Board member, John Parr, an extraordinary leader who, every day of his life, worked to make life better for us all and for the future. For more information about John's legacy and good works, visit the Web sites of Civic Results and the Children & Nature Network.



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Dear Colleague,

In the United States, Canada and overseas, we see growing concern among parents, educators, physicians and others. Children aren't playing outside much anymore—not even in the back yard or the neighborhood park. This change in our relationship with nature has profound implications for the mental, physical and spiritual health of future generations—and for the health of the natural world. Young people need opportunities to experience and learn from nature during their growing years in order to become citizens and future decision makers who will take responsibility for the stewardship of the Earth.

In April 2006, at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., Dr. Cheryl Charles and I called for a national campaign to “Leave No Child Inside.” With a small group of committed colleagues, we created the Children & Nature Network (C&NN), a non-profit organization dedicated to building the movement to reconnect children and nature. Our vision and mission is to give every child in every community a wide range of opportunities to experience nature directly, reconnecting our children with nature’s joys and lessons, its profound physical and mental bounty.

These are not new ideas. For decades, environmental educators, conservationists, and others have worked, often heroically, to bring more children to nature—usually with inadequate support from policymakers. Recently, a number of trends have brought the concerns of these veteran advocates before a broader audience—and have brought new allies to the cause. In a remarkably short time, the idea of a national movement has become a reality. In November 2006, *USA Today* reported in a page-one story: “A back-to-nature movement to reconnect children with the outdoors is burgeoning nationwide.” By June 2007, the movement had been reported in the pages of *The Economist*, and other European-based publications, and had reached the front page of the *Washington Post*. By the end of 2007, *USA Weekly* had published a cover story feature for its weekend supplement, reaching 47.5 million readers through 600 newspapers. The focus of that story was, appropriately, health—a theme that echoed *The Nation’s Health*, the official newspaper of the American Public Health Association, which reported in October, 2007: “For public health workers, the effects of sedentary indoor lifestyles are already evident among children: startling rates of obesity, the onset of one-time adult conditions such as diabetes and a shortened life expectancy. Thankfully, though, the movement to reconnect kids with nature has seen a rejuvenation in the last few years, and experts predict that good health will be a major motivator in bringing families back to nature.”

The movement is growing quickly—but it needs to accelerate. Without simultaneous dedicated action from many more of us, the window of opportunity could close.

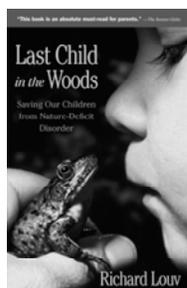
To help meet that challenge, the Children & Nature Network—through the leadership of John Parr and Civic Results and working with many individuals and organizations—created the *C&N Community Action Guide* for local and regional initiatives. You have picked up this *Guide* because you recognize the disconnect between children and the natural environment and you want to do something about it in your own community or region. You are ready to act in your own community—or your effort is already underway. Either way, we hope this *Guide* will be a useful tool to help build the children and nature movement at the local and regional level. The *Guide* describes an action-oriented process to design and implement initiatives to reconnect children and nature. The steps in this *Guide* are based on proven models that work. It draws upon lessons learned in other civic initiatives, especially throughout the United States and Canada.

This *Guide* is a work-in-progress, one tool among many that we all need in order to grow the children and nature movement. Whether your efforts are just getting started or building on existing complementary efforts, your journey will offer its own lessons from which the rest of us can benefit. The Children & Nature Network Web site ([www.cnaturenet.org](http://www.cnaturenet.org)) will continue to serve as a portal where all of us can share successes, stories, tools and resources.

This is an international movement fueled by thousands of localized initiatives. No one size will fit all—this is, after all, a place-based issue, therefore every region will find its own unique approaches. There is much that we can learn from each other as we work for true cultural change. Thanks for your leadership, and for leaving no child inside.



Richard Louv  
Author, *Last Child in the Woods*  
Chairman, Children & Nature Network



*The members of any community invariably share a set of core values—particularly around the issues of children and nature. They are bonded by hope for themselves, their families, their friends, and the communities within which they live.*



## BUILDING A MOVEMENT TO RECONNECT CHILDREN AND NATURE

***“A back-to-nature movement to reconnect children with the outdoors is burgeoning nationwide.”***

- USA Today, Nov. 2006

***“The movement to reconnect children to the natural world has arisen quickly, spontaneously, and across the usual social, political, and economic dividing lines.”***

- ORION magazine, March/April 2007

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## INTRODUCTION

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The Children and Nature Network (C&NN) was created to encourage and support people and organizations, like you, working toward the goal of reconnecting children and nature. C&NN provides a critical link between researchers, individuals, educators, organizations, businesses and government agencies dedicated to children’s health and well-being. C&NN’s priorities range from developing public awareness through education and outreach, to developing new generations of Natural Leaders®, to supporting the grassroots, to helping to identify the trends and fill the gaps in public understanding of the importance of the people-nature connection for us all. C&NN promotes fundamental institutional, community and cultural change while providing resources for sharing information, strategic initiatives and success stories. This *C&NN Community Action Guide: Building the Children & Nature Movement from the Ground Up* is one such resource.

While the children-and-nature movement is developing a national and international presence, community-based, regional and state campaigns will likely be the most dynamic engines. Such efforts are reaching across communities and professions to bring unlikely allies to the table. Conservation organizations, agencies, homebuilders, teachers, artists, business leaders, physicians and elected officials are developing programs, policies and initiatives to foster change in order to reconnect children with nature.

All communities—from neighborhoods to metropolitan regions to communities of interest that exist without geographic boundaries—consist of a variety of different and separate perspectives. Communities may be divided by political differences, demographic diversity, religious practice, geographic location, education, profession, age, and experience. Yet the members of any community invariably share a set of core values—particularly around the issues of children and nature. They are bonded by hope for themselves, their families, their friends, and the communities within which they live. A shared desire to connect seemingly disparate groups and individuals around the common vision of connecting children

to nature can be used to create positive change for the overall community. The process requires open dialogue, a willingness to set aside disagreements to focus on areas of common purpose, and the establishment of new levels of trust based on understanding and respect for each other. In this *Guide*, steps are outlined to help build bridges across these divides, craft that common vision, and create positive change.

This *C&NN Community Action Guide* was written especially for local C&NN start-up groups. We describe three adaptable phases to target and organize your community; create shared, viable strategic visions and plans; and get started on the continuously improving process of implementation. The three phases are: 1) Engaging Your Community; 2) Developing Strategies & Products; and 3) Implementation. Phase One focuses largely on engaging the interests of the community in a joint strategic planning process. Phase Two involves identified community members in creating a common vision for reconnecting children to nature, ways for achieving that vision, plus detailed action steps for accomplishing specified goals. Phase Three is implementing the action plan, analyzing the results and continually revising the plan and action strategies. Each phase involves increasing the number of people and organizations participating in taking action together that will reverse the negative trends and barriers to reconnecting children with nature.

The key to success with adapting this model is to create an open and credible process from the beginning which involves a diverse coalition of people with the power to implement their own recommendations. Such a process must break down barriers across sectoral lines and build new relationships based on trust and respect. These relationships develop, not by talking, but by working on projects that lead to action. This process involves a combination of long-term planning and moving quickly on specific projects and opportunities. Participants must be empowered with genuine shared-decision making responsibility and must be given the tools to make choices through community-wide consensus. This process helps create new, long-term working relations among public, private and nonprofit sectors.

## **THE COLLABORATIVE METHOD**

Organizations, institutions, individuals and entire communities have increasingly come to understand that, if they wish to accomplish their goals and remain successful, new approaches are needed. A principal characteristic of this environment is the benefit and strength of collaborative processes and the long-term sustainability of efforts that cause the successful integration of multiple voices and points of view. Asking people to “buy-in” and invest their time, energy, experience and skills is challenging—particularly given inherent differences in any group. Conducting and accomplishing the participatory process requires skill and creates an environment of inclusiveness, value and shared vision. The benefits include a team-oriented mindset with the strength of profound promise, inspiration

and motivation. Instructive examples can be found in other national movements with local components such as the Green Build Movement which brings together interesting teams of designers and architects, builders, realtors, ecologists, energy experts, retailers and consumers.

In January 2007, the Children & Nature Network reported that state and regional campaigns to reconnect children to nature have been created or are forming in at least 22 communities—including Cincinnati, Cleveland, Chicago, the San Francisco Bay Area, and St. Louis—as well as several states, with Connecticut, Colorado, Florida, and Texas among them. By January of 2008, more than 40 local and regional initiatives are underway. These campaigns, which go by such names as “Leave No Child Inside” and “Life’s Better Outside,” often bring unlikely allies together. A host of related initiatives—among them the simple-living, walkable-cities, nature-education, and land-trust movements—have begun to find common cause and collective strength through this issue.

***Caveat:*** Don’t be intimidated by the following process. It was developed to give people who want to start a local children and nature initiative a guide to the types of steps that could be taken. What makes sense for any community will depend on the relationships that already exist, the work that has already been done, and how familiar people are with working together. The steps described here can be thought of as questions that need to be asked, rather than a linear process. See Appendix 1 for an overview of the timeline and steps necessary for creating an effective community initiative.

*Start With Where You Are . . .*

*Educate yourself  
Generate a buzz  
Map your own community*



## PHASE ONE: ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY

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These preparatory activities will help you enhance your grasp of the issues involved with connecting the members of your community in a children and nature initiative.

### START WITH WHERE YOU ARE

**Educate yourself:** Read *Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv and other relevant books and articles that speak to the importance and benefits of connecting children with nature. See the Children & Nature Network Web site ([www.cnaturenet.org](http://www.cnaturenet.org)) for annotated bibliographies of research, articles, news and other resources.

**Generate a buzz – Get people talking:** Have conversations with your own personal networks. Share *Last Child in the Woods*. Find out who else might be interested.

**Map your own community:** Create a long list of contacts and organizations that may have an interest in reconnecting children to nature. Your research and analysis will identify a wide variety of characteristics within the community, contributing to the value of the discussion, the richness of the vision, and the resources available. The participant analysis looks for perspectives based on such elements as specific interests, location in the region, their connection to education or nature, occupation, gender, age, economics, and religious practice.

The following table lists associations, organizations, agencies and groups that are likely to have an interest in the Children & Nature Network concept and may be present in your community. You might consider using this list as the start of a spread sheet you fill out with relevant data from your own community: names of individuals, organizations, contact information. This list is not comprehensive. It is intended simply as a starting point, beginning with some of the most obvious potential allies to others equally important but often overlooked. A few cells are filled in as examples to get you started as you adapt this table to your own community.

## MAP YOUR OWN COMMUNITY

Organization	Why might they be interested?	What might they do?
Environmental Educators	Are pioneers in the field, already working with children. Could use the power of an alliance to accelerate their own efforts.	Know the existing, conventional links between nature and children. Could be partners in seeking funding.
State and Federal Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Parks and Departments of Natural Resources	Already offer numerous programs that help to connect children to nature. Believe connecting children to nature is critical to the future of our natural resources.	Provide special opportunities on public lands. Offer training programs and materials at free or low cost. Provide technical expertise in creating natural areas or in outdoor recreation skills.
Nature Centers, Zoos, Arboreta, Children's Museums, Science Centers		
Land Conservation Organizations	Expands the individuals and foundations that are interested in supporting their work, i.e. people interested in children can become interested in contributing to land conservation efforts.	Work with their traditional donors to create new advocates for initiatives to connect children to nature.
Environmental Advocacy groups		
Parenting & Grandparenting Organizations		
Boys & Girls Clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and other Youth Groups		
Early Childhood Education Centers & Associations		
Schools at all levels	Children are at school all day long. Schools are looking for working methods that address attention and behavioral issues. Schools want to engage families and communities, especially at the elementary level.	Incorporate nature-based experience into school days. Offer opportunities for families to learn about and enjoy the outdoors. Measure and report on changes in performance.
Public Education Districts & Agencies		
Charter and Niche Independent Schools: e.g. Schools of Experiential Learning, Waldorf Schools, Montessori Schools	Schools already working with nature-based, experiential education can use this alliance as marketing outreach for their schools to reach like-minded families.	Can pilot and promote new approaches.

Teacher Associations & Unions		
Universities, Community Colleges with Teacher Certification Programs		
Other Community Groups Working With Children - e.g. Earthcorps, Children at Risk Programs		
Community Parks & Recreation Divisions		
Urban Gardens		
Outdoor Restoration Volunteer Organizations		
Pediatricians and Other Traditional Health Care Providers		
Holistic Health Care Providers - Local, State, Federal		
Public Health Agencies - Local, State, Federal		
Public Environmental Agencies - Local, State, Federal		
Outdoor Products Manufacturers and Retailers		
Outdoor Recreation Industries and Associations- e.g. Tourism, Skiing, Fishing, Hunting		
Communities of Faith		
Real Estate Agents and Associations		
Homebuilders Associations	Currently sensitized to sustainability - e.g., the Greenbuild Movement. Interested in quality of life amenities because market research shows people want trails and open space.	Financial support. A practical business voice for the movement. Ally for supporting incorporation of natural space in new planned developments, criteria for GreenBuild.
Land Developers	A possible marketing niche - e.g. adapt golf course model that is open to children in new developments to enhance property value.	Financial support. Political contacts. Practical models.
General Media - Education & Environment Writers; Syndicated Columnists		
Foundations - especially those with local grant-making priorities		
High Profile Elected Officials or Local Personalities		

## CREATE CONNECTIONS

Meet with and interview a number of leaders in the community from the potential partnering organizations you have identified in your mapping. Prior to interviews, be sure that you have provided the leader with preparatory materials such as a summary of the need for such an initiative, Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods*, or at least an introductory e-mail with a link to the Children & Nature Network Web site ([www.cnaturenet.org](http://www.cnaturenet.org)). Use these interviews to build your knowledge base about what is happening in your community and who might have a natural affinity for this issue. As you conduct these interviews, natural champions will emerge with the passion for the issue and skill set you need. Some or all of these champions will become your small group of community leaders who will perform the functions of the Initiating Committee (IC). Be sure to follow up this initial interview with appropriate communications—a summary of your interview and meeting notes, thank you e-mails, notes or calls.

**Here are a few sample questions to use in interviews. Be sure to document your questions and the responses of those you interview.**

- Discuss C&NN concepts.
  - Spending time in nature can:*
    - Reduce stress
    - Make children more focused
    - Enhance children's emotional and social development
    - Improve school performance
    - Enhance creativity, problem solving ability, self esteem and self control
    - Improve cognitive ability
    - Improve health
- If relevant, ask how the interviewee was introduced to the C&NN concepts.
- If appropriate, explore the interviewee's childhood memories and connections with nature as well as his or her current observations about children and nature.
- Discuss any direct and indirect relationships between their special interests and children's current disconnect with nature—for example, the impact of this disconnect on their organization or issues of interest, how their organization might positively impact this disconnect, their view of potential benefits to their organization or issues of interest from restoring the children-nature connection, and any initial ideas for actions.
- Ask the interviewee to identify other recognized community leaders who might have a natural affinity for this issue.
- Review organizations in the community to help establish connections, open doors, and identify allies.
- What champions for this issue might be within these organizations?
- What is their contact information?

- Can you make an introductory call to explore their potential interest in children and nature issues?

Keep track of the name and contact information for every individual identified through this inquiry and interview process. If possible, start and maintain a database from the beginning. These individuals are your key people to involve and this group will continuously evolve and grow over time. Some of these individuals may become key members of the Initiating Committee (IC), described below.

## CREATE THE INITIATING COMMITTEE

The Initiating Committee (IC) is made up of five to fifteen community leaders. These leaders are selected from researching and interviewing the relevant members of your community who emerged during your mapping process. Members of the IC should reflect the diversity of the community and provide credibility to the process by their involvement. Their primary responsibility is organizational development. This small working group will focus on several discrete and important tasks: defining the scope of the project, refining the process, identifying a diverse group of stakeholders to come together and do the work or be catalysts for implementation of the results, beginning necessary and useful research, and providing the structure to support the work that follows. The Initiating Committee should be drawn at least partly, but not exclusively, from those already engaged in issues traditionally associated with community, health, environment and education. All members should have a natural affinity for and deep personal commitment to reconnecting children with nature. While many of the individuals that emerge through the creation of the Initiating Committee may feel aligned with the C&NN Network, they may not have the resources or time to devote to serving on a planning committee. These people and the organizations they represent may be invited down the road to participate as attendees at a visioning session, participants in implementing strategies, or as occasional volunteers, donors, or advisors.

## QUALITIES OF A MEMBER OF THE INITIATING COMMITTEE (IC)

As you identify the individuals whom you will ask to serve on the IC, it will be helpful to keep in mind the following leadership personalities, skills and background identified by Malcolm Gladwell in his bestseller, *The Tipping Point* (Little Brown, 2000). These types of individuals are those that he defines as being necessary to the chemistry of turning an approach into a movement that can actually lead to change. **Both your initial round of interviewees and the smaller IC that emerges should include at least one person that fits into each of the three categories:**

**1) Integrators or Innovators:** These individuals, also called mavens, are catalysts who collect massive amounts of information and share it, not necessarily to persuade but to educate and help. They are information

brokers, sharing and trading what they know. They see the connection between multiple issues, have already begun to create a clear vision of the future and they share their knowledge and perspectives. For example – “You can’t have a vibrant economy without focusing on environmental issues such as preservation of open space and social issues such as affordable housing.”

**2) Connectors:** These boundary crossers are social glue. They know a lot of people, introduce approaches and ideas to diverse networks, and recruit others to use new approaches. These are people “whom all of us can reach in a few steps because they manage to occupy many different works and subcultures and niches.”

**3) Motivators or Salesman:** Once strategies and potential solutions have been identified, these are people who have powerful and persuasive personalities, can draw others into engagement on their own terms for an interaction, and convert others to take action.

Two crucial attributes of the Initiating Committee (IC) are diversity and credibility. Any community member should be able to look at the Initiating Committee and say, “Yes, my perspective was there from the beginning.” The IC should also include a handful of dedicated and reliable volunteers, for whom this is their central community activity. This group will have more time to devote to doing the work in advance of a time in which your community’s children and nature initiative might have an organization with paid staff, e.g., they can help with events, be trained to serve as ambassadors, give presentations.

You will work with this Initiating Committee to further refine the precise definition of the “community” for this effort. Determining the scope of your children and nature initiative is an essential element in the entire process. A specific definition of the initiative’s scope will allow the IC to ensure that the stakeholder group accurately reflects the diverse interests and perspectives that are active with the issues under consideration or have a stake in the outcome of the process.

The IC will analyze the defined scope and identify all of the significant interests and perspectives that can combine to make your local children and nature initiative unique and relevant for your community or region. A group of 40 to 60 stakeholders who are selected and invited for their interest in this issue could come from throughout the community. In a real way it is through these broader stakeholders that the entire community will be empowered to envision and implement their desired future. Key to the success of this and collaborative efforts like it is the inclusion of participants who reflect the broad diversity of the community. This involves identifying and recruiting individuals who share broad goals for the community but who may bring widely different lifestyles, experiences and relative priorities.

The IC can study the steps suggested in this *C&NN Community Action Guide* and fine-tune them into a program that fits your unique community and your desired outcomes.

## MODEL IC COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

During this “planning to plan” phase we recommend the establishment of four functional areas, groups or committees to help support the process:

- **Coordination** to manage the process. This group will be the glue between the pieces. This group may initially serve the staffing functions identified at the outset.
- **Outreach** or Communications to organize and maintain two-way communication with the larger community. This group creates an outreach strategy to inform the entire community within the region about the process and enables input back to the participants from interested community members. A communications strategy could include but not be limited to the following activities: an interactive Web site to inform and build community; introductory Power Point presentations for sharing; articles and press releases; a kit for any interested citizen, activist, journalist, funder, etc.; a speakers bureau for communicating about the children and nature movement and your local initiative; surveys of community members regarding their priority concerns and hopes for the future; community meetings as a way to brief large numbers of community members about the project, the process and the need for their input; and assistance to complete and implement a meaningful action plan.
- **Resource Development** to seek out and acquire the resources needed not only to complete the plan but to implement it. Resources can include money, time, space and other in-kind donations.
- **Research** to gather information about existing plans, programs and activities and the current status of children’s relationships to nature in the community. This group takes the lead to provide basic data on the community and the status of past and current initiatives plus addresses any other research tasks identified by the participants. The group should look at the short and long-term “metrics” to be collected, which will be used to speak to success and the accomplishment of the goals set by the IC.

At the outset, these functions may be undertaken by an individual or the IC as a whole. As the children and nature initiative in your community matures, these functions may evolve into assigned committees. The actual number and function of the support committees that are appropriate for your unique initiative will be determined by your IC. Committees can have new members added after the broader Stakeholder Group has been enlisted. The first job of these groups or committees will be to prepare for the kick-off event and steps that follow during the stakeholder process. The committees serve the process and participants as they create a vision

and strategic action plan. At some point, often after the kick-off event, the IC may evolve into a more permanent steering committee drawn strategically from the larger pool of associated individuals and organizations that are defined during the earlier phase. Products for which the IC may be responsible in preparation for stakeholder planning may include the following:

- IC definition and timeline
- Kick-off invitation
- Kick-off agenda
- Preparatory materials for distribution in advance of kick off
- Registration packets for kick-off event
- Name tags
- Roster of participants
- Agenda
- Project name and logo
- Research papers – Analysis of current trends, realities and activities; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- Initial Web site

## **IDENTIFYING AND RECRUITING THE STAKEHOLDER GROUP**

The planning work will be done by a Stakeholder Group of 40 – 70 people who reflect the diversity of the community.

A thorough analysis of the interests and perspectives that exist within the community will be created. This analysis will identify a wide variety of characteristics of community members that will contribute to the value of the discussion, the richness of the vision, and the resources for implementation of the strategies. The participant analysis will look for perspectives based on such elements as specific interests, location in the region, occupation, gender, age, economic condition, religious practice, and any other descriptive elements identified by the IC. Refer to the table on pages 12 – 14 for suggestions of groups and organizations to consider for prospective participants.

The next step is to recruit individual participants—the stakeholders—who can bring those interests and perspectives to the table. This goes beyond identifying possible participants to reaching out to them to determine their willingness to participate.

## **MODEL INITIATING COMMITTEE PROCESS AND INITIAL TIME FRAME**

The Initiating Committee will meet up to three times over a 6 to 9 week period. In between meetings, tasks such as the following will occur: agenda setting; development of discussion-focusing documents and proposals; note-taking; follow up work such as issuing invitations; and other organizational tasks. These will be

performed by an individual or individuals within the Coordination group or committee. Each of the other committees will carry out appropriate tasks as requested. The full IC meetings will be structured to accomplish the following tasks:

- ***Meeting One***
  - Review roles and responsibilities.
  - Outline the process, and discuss the purpose of the children and nature initiative and potential desired outcomes.
  - Consider establishment of support committees:
    - Coordination Committee
    - Outreach Committee
    - Resource Development Committee
    - Research Committee
  - Define the scope of work and the community of interests for the project.
  - Develop project name, logo.
  - Begin stakeholder analysis — identify interests and perspectives to be included.
- ***Meeting Two***
  - Review interests and perspectives to ensure comprehensive representation.
  - Identify individual participants who can bring those interests and perspectives. (This began in the interview process).
  - Identify gaps in representation.
  - Review and refine the process steps.
  - Initiate support committee work.
  - Begin planning of kick-off event.
  - Establish the date for the kick-off event by taking into consideration at least two factors. You want to be sure that a critical mass of individuals who are essential to your forward momentum have the time available before you finalize the dates. You will also want to scan the community calendar to make sure that there are no events at the same time that will compete with you for your target audience.
  - Begin general discussion about evolution of the IC into a Steering Committee that draws from the larger community and carries forward the ideas that emerged in the kick-off event.
- ***Meeting Three***
  - Finalize stakeholder list.
  - Approve invitation.
  - Select project chairs for the initiative.
  - Finalize kick-off planning
  - Finalize draft proposal for composition and functions of a Steering Committee.
  - Refine process steps.
  - Select meeting locations, time of day, day of week.

## INVITING THE STAKEHOLDERS TO A KICK-OFF EVENT

We recommend that your community's children and nature initiative officially launch with a major kick-off event. At minimum, it should involve the stakeholders identified by the IC. It may also be combined with a large-scale public awareness event to reach the community at large. As soon as a date for the kick-off event is selected, informal, teaser postcards or e-mails should go to your invitation list asking them to hold the date. Participants should be formally invited to the kick-off no later than 6 weeks prior to the event and ideally as many as 10 weeks in advance. You will be able to continue to work on the details of the event, but it is important that your targeted audience clear their calendars. The formal invitation should itself be a reflection of the non-partisan diversity you hope to achieve at the event and should be issued from the leaders of at least two or three partnering organizations. Hopefully these leaders will be members of the IC. If you are successful in generating the enthusiastic support of a highly regarded leader in your community during your outreach, you may ask him or her to serve in an honorary capacity and issue the invitation as well. The invitation itself should include the following components adapted to your community:

- Summary introductory paragraph that includes the name of the event, the time, place, and purpose;
- List of planning committee and any funders;
- Contextual paragraph about the issue and its relevance to your community;
- More on the desired outcome of the kick-off event and the preliminary agenda;
- Description of the types of people who will be invited;
- Link to the national Children & Nature Network (C&NN) Web site ([www.cnaturenet.org](http://www.cnaturenet.org)) and your own, if you have already established one for your local or regional initiative; and
- RSVP deadlines and phone number, including where to go and who to call for more information.

You will want to consider whether to issue hard copy invitations or to rely on e-mail. E-mails save on paper but can be less reliable and lose some personal touch. Should you go the hard copy route, you might consider creating letterhead that can be used for other purposes. You'll want to be sure that the paper is recycled and the copy reflective of the sensibilities of the C&NN mission.

You will need to follow up on these invitations with at least two rounds of phone calls, one shortly after the invitations should have been received and another within 3–4 weeks of the event. The IC may want to split this list up in a way that spreads out the responsibility and maximizes the opportunity for individuals to call others with whom they are familiar.

## ESTABLISH GROUND RULES & GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES FOR YOUR CHILDREN & NATURE INITIATIVE

A key task of the IC will be to help guide the conduct of your community's children and nature initiative and to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all participants. These ground rules and principles ultimately are presented to the broader Stakeholder Group for their additions and refinements.

Some sample ground rules and governance principles that could be included in the planning process and made clear to the group from the beginning:

- All of the participants will come to the table as peers, whether or not some participants may wield relatively greater power in the community. At this table, everyone is equally important and equally valuable as a contributor.
- All participants are responsible for the success or lack of success of the children and nature initiative (shared ownership).
- Personal agendas and past relationships are left outside the room so that the focus can be on common values and future success (personal responsibility).
- Leadership is welcomed no matter from where in the community it emerges.
- The plan that is created will have sufficient detail that it is immediately understandable and credible to those community members who are not in the room.
- Participants will commit to stick with it even through difficult periods in the process.
- The process will use consensus to reach the desired outcomes and make critical decisions.

### WHAT DOES CONSENSUS LOOK LIKE?

**Consensus:** “A group decision (which some members may not feel is the best decision, but which they can all live with, support, and commit themselves not to undermine), arrived at without voting, through a process whereby the issues are fully aired, all members feel they have been adequately heard, in which everyone has equal power and responsibility, and different degrees of influence by virtue of stubbornness or charisma are avoided so that all are satisfied with the process.”

M. Scott Peck, in *A World Waiting to Be Born* (Bantam, 1993)

The simple question to ask: “Can you live with this?” Following these ground rules and governance principles will help ensure widespread ownership of and commitment to the outcome. The participants in such a course of action will confront great challenges, will engage in intense dialogue, will agree and disagree, but in the end, they will coalesce around a consensus vision and plan that embraces their common values and provides a map to a desirable future for the entire community where everyone is equally invested.

## **DETERMINE THE INITIAL STAFFING NEEDS**

Identify the role and responsibilities of “project staff” as identified by the IC beyond the coaching and meeting facilitation functions. Initially, these staff functions may be fulfilled by the core group of volunteers who are a part of the IC, people who have made a conscious commitment to “own” the tasks that need to be completed. Later, as the organization develops, there may or may not be paid staff. The essential key is that a person or people see themselves as being accountable for keeping the work moving forward and on track. These roles and responsibilities may be adjusted as necessary after the second phase begins.

## **NAME YOUR CHILDREN & NATURE INITIATIVE!**

A well-chosen name aids understanding of the scope and purpose of the initiative and enables community members to identify with the work being done and its relationship to their lives. While this name may be revised through subsequent group processes, it is important to start out with an identity. The Children & Nature Network (C&NN) uses these terms: the campaign to “Leave No Child Inside” and “Building a Movement to Reconnect Children & Nature.” A number of local and state initiatives affiliated with C&NN are launching their own campaigns to “Leave No Child Inside,” often with a kick-off event such as a city or state-wide Summit to Leave No Child Inside. Ultimately, any one of a variety of terms, slogans and phrases can work effectively.

## PHASE TWO: DEVELOPING STRATEGIES AND PROJECTS

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### **KICK-OFF EVENT**

As mentioned above, the Stakeholder Group begins its work with a kick-off event. The kick off serves to inspire the participants, create an understanding about the initiative and provide an opportunity for the stakeholders to get to know one another and begin the development of a high performance team. The kick-off event should be part social gathering, part pep rally, and part media event.

The kick off may be preceded by a press conference to secure community awareness of the initiative, its purpose, and its promise. The event is principally intended to serve as the kick off for engaging the Stakeholder Group in your community's children and nature initiative.

Larger in size than the IC, the Stakeholder Group of participants in the kick-off event will represent the broad diversity of the community. Inclusion of people from every sector and all walks of life is essential if the process is to be successful. The Stakeholder Group is a planning, advisory and decision-making body and will ultimately help the working IC to develop constituencies to ensure implementation of the local C&NN strategies. The broader Stakeholder Group will be supported by the several committees formed by the IC and eventually by the administrative staff should the local network create a formal organization. After the kick-off event the IC may want to add a few people to broaden its representation. At this point the IC generally becomes known as the Steering Committee (SC) for your community's children and nature initiative. The Steering Committee will ensure the work is getting synthesized and integrated.

### **A PUBLIC EVENT AS PART OF THE KICK OFF**

You may wish to have a public event as part of the kick off to notify the community at large that something important is about to begin. A large, public evening "ice-breaking" event could be held at a high profile venue such as a Nature Center, Children's Museum or Museum of Nature and Science—venues that themselves are consistent with the message and can be asked to co-sponsor. Following a reception or perhaps something such as a family picnic, author Richard Louv or another appropriate, knowledgeable speaker identified by the Children & Nature Network or others in your community could launch the event with a keynote. The stakeholder kick-off event can be in the late afternoon before the public event.

## **SUGGESTED AGENDA MODULES: KICK-OFF EVENT AND AFTERWARDS**

The following modules comprise the work of the stakeholders as they develop strategies and products, beginning with their first engagement as a group at the kick-off event. How they are used may vary with the size, structure and cohesion of your particular group as well as the amount of time you are able to carve out for your meetings. You may want to start with a full day kick-off event on a weekend and continue the work in a sequence of 3 hour evening meetings to accommodate participants' work schedules. They may spread out over as many as six large stakeholder meetings and several smaller working group meetings. For instance, Modules Two and Three could be one meeting. Module Five, "action plan development," could be done by smaller task groups that would meet three to five times and report back to the stakeholders. Module Six will probably take at least two meetings with the stakeholder participants.

### **Module One: Sample Opening Exercise for Kick-Off Event**

After brief introductions and welcoming comments, hand out paper or journals, or ask people to bring out their notepads and post the following questions. Give 20 minutes to answer individually, telling them they can go outside to reflect and respond to these questions (if outdoor space is available).

- What are the primary causes of Nature Deficit Disorder in our community?
- Where do you see the effects of Nature Deficit Disorder showing up in our community (and in the issues we face as individuals, families and, if applicable, as a rapidly growing community)?
- Who else is working in this area? Who is poised to make a difference?
- Why are you personally engaged? Why do you have energy for the children and nature idea?
- Why is your organization interested and what can it bring to this initiative?

Ask the participants to come back to the large group to share ideas and discuss their reactions. Enlist volunteers to record responses on flipcharts. Let the discussion occur for about 20 minutes. If done well, this will help focus the group and get to the reasons for participating, creating a sense of relationship and continuity. You can collect the written responses and transcribe them into a tool to utilize in follow-up steps or as a reference point for all participants as the initiative unfolds over time.

### **Module Two: Creating a Vision—What Is the Desired Future?**

Stakeholders will be asked to describe what they would like to have accomplished in 10 to 15 years. A collaboratively developed, community-owned vision, addressing the key issues identified in the project scope, is a highly useful tool to focus hopes and aspirations and to build the foundation for framing the initiative and setting priorities. In articulating this vision of the desired future, it is important not to be constrained by either political or economic realities. While the vision may

not seem achievable in the short term, we believe it is better to aim too high than too low. Stakeholders will answer these questions:

- What words describe the relationship of children to nature in our community in the year 2020?
- How would we want our efforts to affect the lives of the next generation and the one after that?
- If we could travel to the future what would we want to see?

The stakeholders' answers to these questions will be integrated and synthesized by the Steering Committee into a draft Vision Statement. The statement will reflect the commonly-held values of the community and guide the stakeholders through the rest of their work. At the next meeting, the stakeholders will review and may fine-tune it. This allows the stakeholders to be guided by vision from the beginning, but to appropriately modify the vision over time with the benefit of learnings gleaned from other parts of the planning process.

### **Module Three: Current Realities, Trends and Activities**

It is critically important that the stakeholders have a clear understanding of the events, trends and issues that affect and are affected by the current disconnect of our children from an experience of nature. Without agreement on the status of this issue in your community, it won't be possible to reach agreement on where to go, or how to get there. It will be extremely valuable for the stakeholders to reach a rough consensus on how well they think things are going at the current point in time.

- What are the key strengths in our community and who are the groups currently working on these issues?
- What are the key weaknesses in the community for dealing with these issues?
- What opportunities exist today and may loom on the horizon?
- What threats exist today and may loom on the horizon?
- What capacities can we build on and what gaps must be filled?

During this module, products from the IC's Research Committee will be provided to the stakeholders, including a compilation of specific indicators measuring relevant aspects of the community and identifying trends. This hard data will be combined with the less tangible but equally important perceptions within the community about the current environment and trends. A compilation of existing or developing plans will also be assembled and presented. These presentations will not be in-depth at first, but will give stakeholders an understanding of some of the exciting ideas that have already been developed. The national Children & Nature Network ([www.cnaturenet.org](http://www.cnaturenet.org)) has collected and continually updates a vast compendium of research and resources that can be used directly by your community as well as frame your own local inquiry.

This Current Realities exercise helps the stakeholders to understand the likely future if there is no intervention. The process results, when weighed against the desired future, help to define key areas where change must be effected.

#### **Module Four: Areas of Focus—Priorities for the Community**

After the stakeholders have articulated their vision, and have identified current realities and trends, they next select priority issues or areas to narrow the focus for the remainder of the process. These “Areas of Focus” will provide the stakeholders a set of clear priorities to guide the work of their community’s children and nature initiative. To choose Areas of Focus the stakeholders will answer the following questions, building off the earlier work:

- What is happening in the children and nature arena right now, and what impact are we having on it? Who are the groups and individuals already working on these issues?
- What are our short and medium-term goals and objectives for getting children in nature?

Areas of Focus are priorities clustered around thematic issues—or change areas—to devise how the community can get from where it is today to where it wants to be. One way to think about Areas of Focus is that they are based on consideration of a substantive list of priority questions such as:

- Is it important to ensure that the design of our community parks include natural places with opportunities for unstructured play?
- Is it critical to get these issues into the required curriculum of our public schools?
- Do we need to make families and children feel safer outdoors?
- Is it critical that physicians and other health providers in our area encourage children, youth and families to spend more time outdoors?
- Do we need to provide bank access to streams and lakes?
- Should we require more green areas in our community’s land use planning?
- Should we develop wildlife habitat plots or corridors within our community?
- Do we need to offer programs that will help individuals learn how to recreate in the outdoors?
- Do we need a marketing effort to encourage more of our citizens to explore nature?
- Should we work with developers and homebuilders to encourage integrating connections to nature within their developments?
- Do we need state legislation?

By identifying a manageable number of Areas of Focus, the group will be able to target the key areas that will need to be worked on if the community is to begin moving in the direction of its desired future.

## **Module Five: Action Plan Development**

The work of the stakeholders will now move to smaller task groups for a month or two to work on different Areas of Focus. Additional people may be added to the task groups if there are people already active in the area that are not among the stakeholders. The task groups will answer:

- What is happening in this issue right now, and what impact are we having on it?
- What are our short and medium-term goals and objectives for this issue?
- What other efforts are under way either within or outside of the community to address this issue?
- What initiatives could we undertake to achieve the goals and objectives we have identified or to enhance other initiatives already underway to address this issue?
- Which of the initiatives identified have priority for immediate action and how do they relate to the initiatives identified in other Areas of Focus?

For those activities that the task groups feel are important, each group needs to develop an action plan, including:

- The specific steps to be taken to implement their priority project or projects within the community's overall children and nature initiative;
- The people and organizations or groups who could agree to take the lead on coordinating the implementation of each project;
- The resources necessary to implement each project and a plan to acquire them;
- A realistic timetable for the beginning and completion of each project within the initiative; and
- The measurable indicators of success expected from implementation of each project.

The final meeting of each of the task groups will arrive at consensus in support of their group's action plan.

## **Module Six: Implementation Plan Elements**

Once all of the task groups complete their action planning work, it will be necessary for someone on the Steering Committee to document and synthesize all of the goals and recommendations into a comprehensive, integrated action plan and report. Our experience shows that many of the goals and action steps will be complementary and will need to be combined in some way to create a coherent overall strategy document. The Steering Committee will need to distribute this document to the entire Stakeholder Group. Members may be invited to submit comments prior to their meeting as a whole a final time to affirm the results as the comprehensive plan for the community's children and nature initiative moves into the implementation phase. This is the final and most difficult phase of the process, where previous agreements are again tested and a final consensus is reached.

The stakeholders should test the proposed projects and activities that arise from the action plans against the following criteria:

- Are they highly leveraged, i.e., do the activities get others to take action to support reconnecting children to nature that they otherwise wouldn't have done?
- Can they create a major impact toward achieving the vision?
- Are they areas of activity that would not be addressed without this intervention?
- Do they take advantage of the unique cross-sector collaboration made possible through this effort?
- Do they address core systems issues and not just narrow project ideas, e.g., do they actually facilitate having organizations and agencies change the way they do their work, rather than just undertaking an isolated, specific project?
- Are they doable and viable given existing leadership and resources?
- Do they truly reconnect children to nature in our community?

The stakeholders will be unable to develop a strategic plan to accomplish everything in the vision. It will be most effective to develop five to ten "trendbender" projects and activities for the community's children and nature initiative from the Areas of Focus. We use the umbrella term "initiative, in addition to "activities" and "projects," as many outcomes of the overall children and nature initiative process will be systems-change efforts and not activities or projects in a limited sense.

The stakeholders can work from the recommendations coming from the Areas of Focus task groups to develop an overall implementation plan. Specific individuals and organizations, public, private and nonprofit, will have their names beside each action step to either take responsibility for implementation themselves or see to it that implementation occurs. Schedules for completion are essential.

## **COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

Throughout the planning phase of the process, you will want to conduct a number of outreach activities to support the effort. It is critical to ensure that there is widespread public awareness of the work to create a local children and nature initiative and that anyone who is interested can have input into the plan through the Stakeholder Group. The outreach strategy should promote a two-way dialogue between stakeholders in their planning work and the community as a whole. At various times in the process, specific input will be needed. For instance, the community will wish to have input on the vision. Also, once the Areas of Focus are selected, the community will wish to have input on potential initiatives. Further, the stakeholders will likely wish to test their draft plans with the community for refinement and to develop support for implementation.

At different times in the process, outreach activities might include: community and neighborhood meetings; issues forums; focus groups; surveys; radio and TV; e-mail communications; public service announcements; use of the local print and broadcast media; and a Web site.

## PHASE THREE: IMPLEMENTATION

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When the stakeholders have reached consensus and the plan has been adopted, your children and nature initiative moves into its third phase—implementation. The third phase cannot be left to chance but must be treated with the same kind of methodical approach as the first two phases. After the stakeholder planning process, what began as the Initiating Committee and evolved into a Steering Committee will now become an Implementation Committee. Often new people are added at this time and some members may step aside. The purpose is to maintain structure and focus in order to build an organization—whether formal or informal—that can sustain the work of the children and nature initiative that has been charted to date. The Implementation Committee should include the chairs of the task groups. Phase Three should at least include these elements:

### IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Implementation Committee
  - Manage the ongoing implementation process.
  - Serve as a central clearinghouse and resource to the task groups.
  - Monitor and support individual activities and projects.
  - Help generate resources for individual activities and projects.
  - Provide direction to the overall initiative Coordinator.
- Task Groups
  - Provide regular updates to the Implementation Committee and Coordinator.
  - Determine if any members have decided not to participate in implementation.
  - Keep getting the word out:
    - When you present to groups or organizations, know what you would ask them to do to help with implementation.
  - Identify organizations and individuals to champion task groups' activities and projects.
  - Continue recruiting new participants.
  - Select activities and projects within your community's children and nature initiative for the first round of implementation. Look for those that meet criteria such as these:
    - Good timing.
    - Likely to engage a broad base of support.
    - High confidence it can be implemented.
    - Does not have to be earth-shaking but needs to show how success can be achieved.
    - May or may not be controversial.

- When selecting activities and projects, develop answers to the following questions
  - What are the specific steps toward implementation?
  - Is the first step a convening to ensure that all parties with a potential stake in the outcome have been heard and can agree with the selected activities or projects?
  - Who will be responsible to take the lead on implementation and to make sure something happens?
  - What resources (financial, physical, human) are needed and where might they be acquired?
  - Who (organizations, agencies, individuals) will benefit from implementation and can they be recruited to assist?
  - What is the timeline for implementation (beginning date, duration, completion date) and what can be completed over the next 12 months
- Coordinator
  - Provide a public face for the community’s children and nature initiative.
  - Arrange presentations to organizations.
  - Provide notices of meetings and events to task groups and stakeholders.
  - Coordinate meetings of the Implementation Committee.
  - Develop outreach mechanisms such as:
    - Newsletter
    - Op-ed pieces for newspapers
    - Video and PSAs
    - Web site
  - Complete other tasks identified by the Implementation Committee.

## **GOVERNANCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

It may be that the participants will want the Initiating Committee or Steering Committee to continue a managing and logistical support role in the implementation phase, or some new entity may be created or selected. Consideration will be given to and decisions must be made about organizational issues such as:

- Legal Status:
  - Independent 501c3 or housed within an existing entity
- Governance
  - Activist Board of Directors
  - Symbolic Advisory Board
  - Governance Culture – consensus vs. majority
- Staff
  - Roles and Responsibilities
  - Paid vs. volunteer

- Ongoing task groups to implement initiatives defined by stakeholders
  - Will likely have emerged during stakeholder process and will be populated by participants in that process.
  - May need to be supported by dedicated staff for continuity and to manage inevitable “hiccups” that accompany volunteer-driven initiatives
- Space
  - Home office
  - In-kind office space with “host sponsor”
  - Leased office space

### **PERIODIC INVOLVEMENT, CONVENING AND REPORTING TO LARGER STAKEHOLDER GROUP**

The larger Stakeholder Group should receive continuous periodic reports and updates. The governing group may want to consider an annual gathering or retreat that features elements such as reports and celebration of accomplishments, latest research, guests from other children and nature initiatives, and work sessions to advance new projects. The retreat could be held in nature and whole families could be invited to participate!

### **MONITORING, ASSESSMENT AND REFINEMENT MECHANISMS**

Metrics and a system for accountability should be established to ensure that your community’s children and nature initiative does move forward and the purposes are truly being served.

It is extremely important to maintain the interest and involvement of as many of the stakeholders and the strategic planning process participants as possible while continuing to recruit new help. Motivation for continuing involvement often arises from the ownership the participants feel for the plan they have created and the desire to see their ideas take hold. Early success during the implementation phase enables this. The activities and projects that are selected by the group for action should include some that have some certainty of quick success so that the group has something to point to as evidence of demonstrable results.

The implementation phase should include an assessment of the progress and results from all activities and projects included in the action plan, as well as an assessment of the initiative’s overall success. If any activity or project seems to falter, it should be re-examined to determine what is creating the difficulty and how it can be corrected, or, in some cases, whether the activity or project should be eliminated. They should not be allowed to just fade from memory and be passively deleted. If there is a problem, it will not be turned around unless faced and dealt with. The

hands-on approach, i.e., dealing quickly and effectively with problem issues, is the basis of this process and must apply throughout the implementation phase as well.

As activities and projects are completed, the group needs to assess whether the expected result has been achieved. If so, it may mean that resources are now free to be redirected to new activities or projects within the initiative. If not, the group may want to refine the existing activity or project and try again.

It may be that from time to time neutral facilitation or process coaching is needed to refocus the participants on the vision, their common purpose, and how the action plan is designed to achieve that vision. It is impossible to anticipate whether such outside assistance will actually be needed. If it is, the leadership team should not hesitate to make it available to the group.

## **ACQUISITION OF RESOURCES**

Members of the Implementation Committee need to move immediately on those resource needs that are targeted in the action plan so that implementation of short-term action is not delayed. Budget estimates will need to be created for any overhead or specific costs that are identified by the preceding processes. Proposals will need to be authored that are adapted to the priorities of the funders being approached. Systematic procurement and tracking of in-kind resources should not be overlooked. Many of the activities and projects that emerge from this process for your community's children and nature initiative will not be able to be implemented with traditional resources. It may be that they will not fit eligibility criteria established by the usual public or private sector funders or that they are not easily slotted into any particular institution's jurisdiction. The stakeholders, representing a broad cross section of the community, have an enormous opportunity to seek out and develop new, non-traditional resources, both financial and in-kind, to support your community's children and nature initiative.

## **CELEBRATION AND REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY**

Finally, we strongly encourage that the Implementation Committee, including the full Stakeholder Group, plan a celebration event for the end of the stakeholder process to acknowledge those who sponsored and developed your community's children and nature initiative, and to introduce the final results to the entire community. The celebration should showcase all of the successful activities and projects that are underway as a result of your community's children and nature initiative and this process.

## **SAMPLE BUDGET FOR INITIAL GETTING TO IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS**

This sample budget is just that—a sample. It may be possible for your community to get underway and to implement this community action process with few, if any,

out-of-pocket resources. Since that may not be feasible, particularly given what we believe is a need for neutral facilitation of such a process, this sample budget assumes that there is no staff or overhead for designing and launching your community’s children and nature initiative. Further, this sample budget includes only the costs of facilitating and documentation, including developing of reports. There are a number of groups and individuals around the country that are experienced in helping communities do this type of work. Some type of neutral facilitation is needed to create an effective community-based children and nature initiative because it involves getting groups that historically have not worked together to collaborate. In some communities there may be skilled facilitators who are available for a lower rate or might offer these services on a pro bono basis. This budget assumes everything must be paid for “out of pocket.”

Children & Nature Initiative – Planning Facilitation Hypothetical Budget				
Item	Number	Unit	Unit Price	Amount
<b>Initiating Committee</b>				
Planning Sessions	3	Each	\$1,500	\$4,500
Travel	3	Trips		
<b>Stakeholder Planning</b>				
Planning Sessions	8	Each	\$2,000	\$16,000
Travel	8	Trips		
Review/Assist Final Report	10	Hours	\$150	\$1,500
<b>Task Group Support</b>				
Task Group Meetings (Est)	12	Each	\$1,000	\$12,000
Travel	6	Trips		
<b>Implementation Committee Work</b>				
Committee Meetings	4	Each	\$1,000	\$4,000
Travel	4	Trips		
<b>Total</b>				<b>\$38,000.00</b>

## FUNDING OPTIONS/RESOURCES

The following sources of funding or support may exist in your community for financing start-up organizations and projects in support of your children and nature initiative:

- Graduated membership fees, from small to large, friend to patron.
- Local foundations that fund activities related to children, education, health and the environment:
  - Family, community and individually-funded foundations;
  - Foundations created from the conversion of non-profit hospitals to private ownership; and

- Publicly-funded foundations, e.g., foundations created with proceeds from environmental fines.
- Like-minded advocacy and non-governmental organizations; these will likely not have cash, but may lend their name as a partner to provide credibility to a proposal, serve as loan development support, or loan office space.
- Corporate sponsorship such as from outdoor products manufacturers & retailers, tourism industries
- Government sources for grants or contracts from U.S., regional, state and local targeted and discretionary funds in areas such as:
  - Health
  - Children
  - Education
  - Environmental Quality and Protection
  - Parks and Recreation
  - Agriculture

## CONCLUSION

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Ultimately, your community’s children and nature initiative should be designed to engender and engage the enthusiasm and commitment of local stakeholders who share the vision of a healthy future for children, communities and the environments that sustain us all. The time is right to foster local and regional initiatives that will in turn inspire and generate actions to reconnect children and nature—now and in the future. The recommendations and suggestions offered in this *C&NN Community Action Guide* are based on decades of experience and success in fostering community change. This is the first time these models have been directly applied to the movement to reconnect children and nature. We hope those of you using this *Guide* will share your feedback, stories of success, challenges and opportunities as we all work together, as Richard Louv says, “to heal the broken bond between children and the natural world.”

*Visit the Children & Nature Network website at [www.cnaturenet.org](http://www.cnaturenet.org) for more detailed suggestions, resources, research, news and information about the grassroots movement to reconnect children and nature.*



APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE TIMELINE

Phase I: Engaging the Community	Phase II: Developing Strategies & Projects	Phase III: Implementation
Educate Yourself (week 1,2; ongoing)	IC continue preparation for kick-off Event (week 13-18)	Create Implementation Committee to design implementation structure appropriate to Action Plan (week 33) Hire Coordinator Resource Acquisition (weeks 33+, ongoing)
Generate a Buzz (week 2-4, ongoing)	Kick-Off Stakeholder Event (week 18-20)	Implement Action Plan (weeks 33+, ongoing)
Map Your Community (week 1-4; ongoing)	Steering Committee Follow-Up (week 19-21) Vision Statement Other as determined by Event results	Create Task Groups Follow Up with Implementation Committee and Coordinator Continue to publicize to groups and organizations Choose organizations to champion task groups initiatives Continue recruiting Select initiatives for first round of implementation
Conduct Interviews with Leaders (week 3-4)	Stakeholder Meeting 2/3 if needed (3 week intervals - e.g. week 21 & 24)	2 Reports to Larger Stakeholder Group (quarterly)
Create the Initiating Committee (IC) (week 5-6)	Steering Committee Follow Up (week after meeting) Documentation & distribution of meeting results to all attendees	Celebration/Report to Full Community (week 72 - one year after initial kick off meeting)
IC Meeting 1 (week 7/8) Establish groundrules Determine initial staffing needs, committee structure Name your Initiative Begin Stakeholder Analysis	Action Plan Development by smaller Task Groups (week 24-28)	
IC does follow up work from Meeting 1	Steering Committee Follow-Up Integrate Action Plans from Task Groups into one document (week 29) Disseminate to Larger Stakeholder Group for Comment prior to final large meeting) week 30	

IC Meeting 2 (week 9/10) Continue stakeholder Analysis Start Planning of Kick Off Meeting	Stakeholder Group Meet to Review Final Integrated Action Plan (week 32)	
IC Follow Up		
IC Meeting 3 (week 11/12) Finalize kick off meeting: agenda, invitation list, logistics such as time and place		
IC Follow-Up Meeting logistics Issue invitations Finalize agendas Prepare meeting materials		

APPENDIX 2: GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING TOGETHER

**GROUP CULTURE**

Collaborative Groups	Conventional Groups
<p>Everyone participates, not just a vocal few.</p> <p>People give each other space to think and speak.</p> <p>People agree to disagree.</p> <p>People are supportive and help draw out opinions.</p> <p>There is active listening and engagement.</p> <p>Everyone knows where everyone stands.</p> <p>People refrain from talking behind each other's backs.</p> <p>People are encouraged to stand up for their beliefs.</p> <p>Everyone understands the reasoning behind a decision.</p> <p>Decisions reflect a wide range of perspectives.</p>	<p>The fastest and most articulate participate.</p> <p>People interrupt each other.</p> <p>Differences of opinion are stifled.</p> <p>People are distracted, not present.</p> <p>Some members are quiet, no transparency.</p> <p>People talk behind each other's backs.</p> <p>People are discouraged from speaking out.</p> <p>Everyone has to agree with the loudest voice.</p> <p>There is the assumption that everyone thinks the same.</p>

**FACILITATION**

It has been said that leadership is something you do to a group, while facilitation is something you do with a group. Although many leaders can (and should) be effective facilitators, the facilitator differs from a leader in that the former is cognizant about the use of power, authority, or control and places limitations on the uses of it.

Facilitators assist groups as they work together toward achieving goals, and in most instances do not interject their own personal opinions or agenda. By expressing their opinions, facilitators risk discouraging others with differing opinions from speaking. They remain alert to group dynamics and encourage challenging reflection while maintaining respect and safety. Although facilitators may help guide a discussion, they also recognize and foster the group's own ability to lead itself. Thus unlike authoritative leaders, good facilitators relinquish control to the assembly and promote open, democratic dialogue among members.

A good facilitator tries to support everyone to do their best thinking, ensure a safe environment and encourage involvement from all members. Key elements include promoting mutual understanding, full participation, cultivating shared responsibility, and intervening when negative remarks or cutting behavior take

place. Supporting everyone to contribute in a safe manner enables the group members to search for inclusive solutions and build a framework for sustainability.

**A good facilitator does:**

- Use open-ended questions (not "Should the educational system be reformed?", but "What aspects of the educational system would you change?").
- Ask for specifics and examples.
- Paraphrase and summarize ("So what you're concerned about is who defines what's best for this community?").
- Acknowledge contributions.
- Redirect questions to the group ("Rehabilitation may not be occurring in our healthcare system, should that be the goal of the healthcare system?")
- Be creative.
- Take some risks by posing provocative questions.

**A good facilitator doesn't:**

- Refute people's ideas.
- Put people on the spot.
- Downplay thoughts, feelings.
- Force people to speak.

***Establishing Safety:*** The key to open and honest reflection is an environment in which participants feel safe and comfortable. In order for group members to express their thoughts and opinions they must feel that they can do so without fear of attack or condemnation. It is the facilitator's job to create such an environment, to monitor participants' comfort levels, and to take the necessary steps to maintain safety. This includes understanding and planning for individual differences in needs, abilities, fears, and apprehensions. Participants who feel safe are more likely to make honest and genuine contributions and to feel camaraderie and respect towards other group members.

***Manage disagreements:*** It has been said that "whatever resists will persist." Facilitators must be adept at recognizing tension building in the group, and respond to it immediately. Among the most useful strategies is to repeat the ground rules established by the group, including a reminder that criticism should pertain to ideas not to people. In addition, facilitators should not permit any disrespect or insults and should clarify misinformation. It is important that negative behavior be handled immediately so that participants do not get the impression that the behavior is condoned by the facilitator.

***Promote equality:*** As indicated, effective reflection is not designed around the leadership of one person. Equality of participants should be communicated and modeled by the facilitator. Again, the facilitator must be an alert observer, The facilitator should not permit arguing against any group members, and should not take sides in any developing debate. Such situations can be counteracted by recognizing all members, and encouraging their participation equally.

***Be mindful of power, and who has it:*** All groups have opinion leaders or people who most others look up to. Often, these opinion leaders will set the tone for a discussion, thereby limiting active involvement of the more reserved members. Identify who these opinion leaders are and if it appears as though their power and authority is dominating the discussion, ask them, politely, to entertain other opinions.

**Other keys to managing group dynamics include:**

- Know the group
- Keep the group on track
- Don't avoid topics
- Reflect responsibility back on group
- Be prepared for disagreements
- Encourage challenging issues

***Build in diversity:*** In order to appropriately handle diversity issues in reflection sessions, facilitators must begin by recognizing their own attitudes, stereotypes, and expectations and must open their minds to understanding the limits these prejudices place on their perspective. The facilitator will be the example to which the group looks, and should therefore model the values of multiculturalism. It is important that diversity be integrated throughout the reflection process, rather than compartmentalized into special multicultural segments.

Monitoring communication for expressions of bias requires the facilitators' attention and sensitivity. Facilitators should be aware that some language and behavior has questionable, different or offensive meaning to some people, and they should encourage them to share their perspectives and information. Specifically, facilitators should watch out for statements or situations that generalize groups, or that identify race, sex, age unnecessarily (for example, just as it is inappropriate to say "Bob Dole, White presidential candidate," it is also inappropriate to say "Colin Powell, Black political hopeful"). When qualifiers are used that reinforce stereotypes by suggesting exceptions to the rule, facilitators should ask for clarification. For example when a participant describes his or her experience working with a "respectable gay resident" of a shelter, the facilitator should ask the participant why he or she included the word "respectable." Is this a statement about gay people's respectability? About shelter residents? Is this based on his or her experience with specific populations of one shelter, or a generalization about all such people? Helping participants identify the assumptions inherent in their statements fosters greater understanding and sensitivity.

Most importantly, while expressions of prejudice should be interrupted, the person who spoke should not be publicly attacked. Placing guilt on the speaker is likely to increase the tension and stifle further exploration of the topic. The Building Bridges Coalition suggests the following appropriate ways to respond:

- Express empathy and compassion. (Example: "You must have been disappointed about not getting the job you thought you were qualified for.")
- Ask for more information. (Example: "Please tell me more about why you think a person in a wheel chair can't do that job?")
- Paraphrase the feelings you hear expressed. (Example: "it sounds like you aren't comfortable working around gay people.")
- Give information (new information may alter their attitude). (Example: "Did you know that Ms. Jones has a college degree?")

It is important that responses to prejudice be nonjudgmental and non-confrontational, and that you express genuine concern and interest.

Meetings should be conducted in a way that builds a higher level of trust and respect between the participants and encourages active listening and validation of differing views. Such results are a common outcome of an effort like this. These participants will, through the discussion and dialogue that takes place in the process, come to a greater understanding of the significance of differing views and the foundation of these views in values that all the participants share.

Close involvement with others, even those with seemingly vast differences of opinion, produces a resilient bond that will grow stronger as this initiative moves the community forward. Such an outcome has a substantial impact on the capacity of the community addressing new challenges in the future. A collaborative effort such as this is not a one time event. It can be structured to establish a new way of doing the community's business. Future intensive efforts such as this planning process should not be necessary to maintain and enhance the collaborative spirit. This process should serve as a testing and training ground for the new relationships that will strengthen the community and prepare it for a future filled with change and uncertainty.

The final product, increased community capacity based on growing trust and respect in and for each other, will have the greatest value to the community in the long run.

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**COMMUNITY ACTION GUIDE:** BUILDING THE CHILDREN & NATURE MOVEMENT FROM THE GROUND UP

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