Cities Connecting Children to Nature

SYSTEMS CHANGE MEASUREMENT TOOLKIT

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**The Systems Change Measurement Toolkit
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Cities Connecting Children to Nature

The Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN)
initiative helps city leaders and their partners ensure that
all children have the opportunity to play, learn and grow in nature,
from urban parks and community gardens to the great outdoors.
CCCN is a joint initiative of the National League of Cities
and the Children & Nature Network.

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Systems Change Leads to Equitable Nature Access

Spending time outdoors and in nature provides a range of benefits for children and youth. It improves mental and physical health, contributes to better educational outcomes, and fosters a conservation mindset from an early age. In many communities, however, a variety of forces prevent children and youth, particularly those from communities of color, from accessing opportunities to enjoy nature and its many proven benefits.

Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) applies a systems change approach to advance and sustain equitable access to nature. In cities, this work involves shaping policies, practices, distribution of resources, and infrastructure investments, while also engaging in the more subtle—but significant—work of building partnerships, addressing power imbalances, and changing societal norms and assumptions about who has a place in nature.[1] To successfully change a system requires a deep understanding of how the different pieces of that system interact and evolve over time. It means leveraging those different yet connected factors to achieve meaningful change in how children, youth, and families connect to nature.

Photo credit: Maria Durana, San Francisco Children & Nature

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1   CCCN's systems change approach is informed by the work of Foundation Strategy Group as described in *The Water of Systems Change*, June 2018. More information about how CCCN cities have fostered systems change can be found in the *CCCN Systems Change Discussion Paper*. More information about how CCCN cities have prompted equitable access to nature can be found in *Advancing Equity in Children's Connection to Nature*.

The Systems Change Measurement Toolkit

The Systems Change Measurement Toolkit is part of a growing set of CCCN resources that help cities measure their progress toward increasing equitable access to nature.

The Toolkit offers two resources to help your city understand and advance systems change:

Systems Change Outcomes Tracking Tool: questions and activities to measure your city's systems change outcomes that enhance children's equitable access to nature.

Systems Change Internal Assessment Tool: questions and activities to measure the extent to which your city is implementing effective systems change practices.
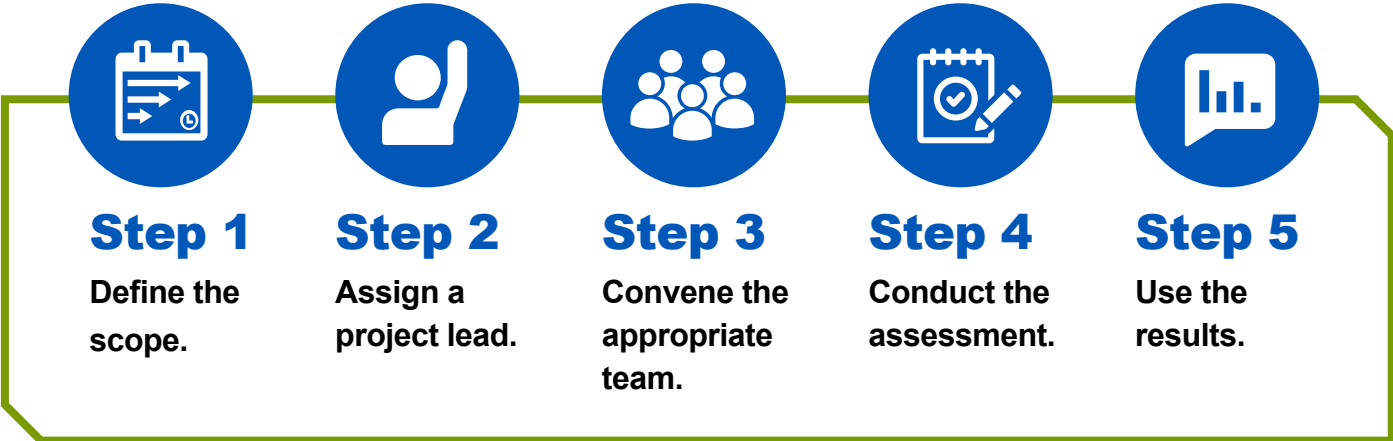
These two tools provide a way to:

☑ Develop a shared understanding of systems change and conditions for nature connection.

☑ Tell the story of how your city is shifting systems change levers to increase how all children access nature more equitably.

☑ Reflect on and identify where you can strengthen your work in systems change to increase opportunities for children of color to increase the frequency and access to nature's benefits.

These tools complement the CCCN Metrics Toolkit which shares a set of indicators and data sources to measure policy actions, infrastructure enhancements, and children's experiences with nature. The Toolkit also provides links to relevant CCCN citywide planning tools.

Tips for Using the Systems Change Measurement Toolkit

The following suggested steps can help you plan and structure use of these tools:

Step 1
Define the scope.

Step 2
Assign a project lead.

Step 3
Convene the appropriate team.

Step 4
Conduct the assessment.

Step 5
Use the results.

Step 1: Define the scope.

Narrow the focus of what you are measuring, such as efforts across several city departments, a specific strategy, or the work of one department. Decide whether the focus will be on systems change outcomes, systems change practices, or both. Clearly define the time frame you are evaluating.

Step 2: Assign a project lead.

Identify the individual who will lead the assessment. The lead will guide the process, compile the results, and ensure that these results are used moving forward.

Step 3: Convene the appropriate team.

Bring together a team of five to eight people who have in-depth knowledge of the specific work you have identified in Step 1. Include people from a variety of sectors or organizations to ensure diverse perspectives. Consider reviewing the systems change overview to ensure team members have a shared understanding of these concepts.

Step 4: Conduct the assessment.

There are two approaches that can be used:

Individual-Guided Assessment.
Team members complete the assessment tool individually. The lead compiles the individual responses and convenes the group to discuss and reach consensus on a final version. This approach identifies what "rises to the top" for individual members. These results can be tallied to find areas of convergence and divergence with the group.

Group Assessment.
Team members complete the tool as a group. This approach may require less time. Good facilitation is key to ensure all voices are heard and consensus is reached. Sharing the tool in advance of the discussion is helpful.

Step 5: Use the results.

Review the assessment results to identify areas that require action and identify information that can be shared with partners and other stakeholders. The data you gather from these tools and the process you have initiated can be used moving forward in a variety of ways:

Identify next steps.
Use the results to prompt discussion about where and why your city has or has not been successful in creating the change you want to see. Identify areas for action, individuals responsible, and the timeline.

Celebrate and promote.
Share the results—particularly outcomes—to raise awareness and build support. Identify the people (city leaders, current and potential partners, funders and community members) and how best to reach them (social media, email, reports, and presentations). Share the data that will resonate most with each group.

Examine change over time.
Repeat the assessment at regular intervals to document progress over time and the continued unfolding story of your city's efforts.

Inform future data collection.
Review the process to identify and address data gaps. Would you change anything about how the data was collected or the team members engaged?

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SYSTEMS CHANGE OUTCOMES TRACKING TOOL

The Systems Change Outcomes Tracking Tool provides questions to prompt discussion and reflection on how your city has advanced systems changes that can lead to important outcomes for children and youth, particularly those traditionally underrepresented.

The tool is most useful when it aligns with the end of a significant project, an annual review process, or the preparation of a report, funding application, or communication where progress can be shared. Systems change work is iterative. You may not have examples in each category. If your team uses this tool to inform next steps, consider also using the Internal Assessment Tool to identify specific practices to implement.

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SYSTEMS CHANGE OUTCOMES TRACKING TOOL

Date Completed: _____   Time Period Covered: _____ to _____

POLICY: **New and revised policies and regulations that support equitable access to nature.**

What specific citywide, city agency, or organizational policies or regulations have been introduced, initiated, or enacted that increase opportunity and/or access to nature for children and youth who have historically been excluded? What has resulted?

- Citywide policies/regulations:

- Agency policies/regulations:

- Organizational policies/regulations:

PRACTICES: **New practices and expanded programs that support equitable access to nature.**

What opportunities or programs have been developed or changed to draw children and families to nature more equitably in our city?

SYSTEMS CHANGE OUTCOMES TRACKING TOOL

RELATIONSHIPS & CONNECTIONS: Enhanced connections among partners.

- Which key partners have we engaged in advancing nature connections for more children and youth?

- How have we engaged partners with a focus on equity or who are embedded in communities of color?

- How have partners contributed to advancing the goal of increasing opportunity and/or access to nature for children and youth of color?

RESOURCE FLOWS: Reallocated and new resources to support equitable access to nature.

What resources (funding, staff, infrastructure, knowledge) has our city been able to leverage to increase children's equitable access to nature?

Staffing, infrastructure, knowledge:

- City resources:
- Federal/state resources:
- Other resources:

Financial: (Estimates are acceptable)

- City: $_____
- Federal/state: $_____
- Private/Foundation Resources: $_____

SYSTEMS CHANGE OUTCOMES TRACKING TOOL

POWER DYNAMICS: Meaningful engagement of and leadership by city leaders, youth, and community members.

- How has city leadership (mayor, agency heads, other elected officials or leaders) been engaged in supporting opportunities for children and youth to connect to nature?

- To what extent have we engaged youth and families of color in the design and implementation of our city's efforts to connect children to nature?

- What has changed as a result of engagement of city leadership, youth, families, and organizations led by people of color?

ATTITUDES & BELIEFS: Expanded commitment to children's equitable access to nature and changes in preconceived notions and long-held assumptions.

- In what ways is the city helping to foster changes in attitudes and beliefs relative to children's equitable access to nature?

- In what ways have efforts shifted attitudes and beliefs about who has a place in nature?

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SYSTEMS CHANGE INTERNAL ASSESSMENT TOOL

The Systems Change Internal Assessment Tool provides a rating scale to assess your city's efforts to implement effective systems change practices and the appropriate action steps.

The tool can be used by a cross-department city team, a team focused on a specific strategy, or an individual department. First, assess the status by adding a check mark to not yet started, limited or solid for each practice. Include a short rationale for the rating. Then review the practices that are limited or not yet started and identify priorities for action. Identify specific next steps and the individuals responsible. Be careful not to take on too much.

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SYSTEMS CHANGE INTERNAL ASSESSMENT TOOL

Date Completed: _____ Time Period Covered: _____ to _____

POLICY: **New and revised policies and regulations that support equitable access to nature.**

Good Practices *Shaded boxes = first priority*	Not Yet Started	Limited	Solid	Description of Progress	Next Steps
Policy scan to identify existing or emerging <u>city or department</u> policies or plans that can be leveraged or are needed to advance the goal of equitable access to nature.					
Policy scan to identify existing or emerging <u>organization-level</u> policies or plans that can be leveraged or are needed to advance the goal of equitable access to nature.					
Policy scan to identify existing or emerging <u>state- or national-level</u> policies or initiatives (e.g., 10 Minute Walk, Every Kid in a Park) that can be leveraged to advance the goal of equitable access to nature.					
Relationships with stakeholders/advocates who can promote policy change.					
Ongoing follow-up/ monitoring of policy implementation.					

SYSTEMS CHANGE INTERNAL ASSESSMENT TOOL

PRACTICES: **New practices and expanded programs that support equitable access to nature.**

Good Practices *Shaded boxes = first priority*	Not Yet Started	Limited	Solid	Description of Progress	Next Steps
Assessment of community assets, desires, and needs that includes voices from the community.					
Clearly identified goals and activities for each strategy that prioritize youth of color.					
Data collection strategy in place to track progress and outcomes including those related to equity.					
Well-developed, effective, diverse teams to lead the work in each strategy.					
Key city/department leaders engaged to lead or host strategy work.					
Clear workplans that align activities in each strategy and guide the work.					
Data regularly used to inform decision-making and improvement.					

SYSTEMS CHANGE INTERNAL ASSESSMENT TOOL

RELATIONSHIPS & CONNECTIONS: Enhanced connections among partners.

Good Practices *Shaded boxes = first priority*	Not Yet Started	Limited	Solid	Description of Progress	Next Steps
Engagement of city leaders, key departments, and community agencies.					
Engagement of partners with an equity orientation (i.e., city equity office or equivalent, organizations representing targeted populations).					
Strong partnerships in place for each strategy.					
Effective and regular communication between city team and partners.					
Regular review of partnerships to ensure diversity of perspectives and sectors.					
Clear definitions of partner roles (i.e., MOUs, letters of commitment).					
Ongoing outreach to ensure partners are connected with one another to further expand capacity and impact.					

SYSTEMS CHANGE INTERNAL ASSESSMENT TOOL

RESOURCE FLOWS: Reallocated and new resources to support equitable access to nature.

Good Practices *Shaded boxes = first priority*	Not Yet Started	Limited	Solid	Description of Progress	Next Steps
Cost estimates and projections that prioritize nature access in under-resourced communities.					
Assessment of existing city resources (financial, staff, space, knowledge, etc.) that could be realigned or repurposed to support children's equitable access to nature.					
Plan to pursue public and private resources from local, regional, and national funders.					
Capacity within the city team or among partners to pursue additional resources.					

SYSTEMS CHANGE INTERNAL ASSESSMENT TOOL

POWER DYNAMICS: **Meaningful engagement of and leadership by city leaders, youth, and community members.**

Good Practices *Shaded boxes = first priority*	Not Yet Started	Limited	Solid	Description of Progress	Next Steps
Outreach plan for engaging city leadership.					
Regular meetings/ communication between the team and city leadership (mayor or mayor's aide, city council, city manager).					
Assessment of opportunities to align nature connection with mayor's and other city priorities and plans.					
Youth and resident engagement plan in place that enables co-production of each strategy.					
Ongoing opportunities for youth and community residents to be fully engaged, including serving in advisory and leadership roles.					
Regular meetings/ communication between the team and other city leaders (i.e., city councilors, school superintendent, school board, state senators and representatives).					

SYSTEMS CHANGE INTERNAL ASSESSMENT TOOL

ATTITUDES & BELIEFS: Expanded commitment to children's equitable access to nature and changes in preconceived notions and long-held assumptions.

Good Practices *Shaded boxes = first priority*	Not Yet Started	Limited	Solid	Description of Progress	Next Steps
Shared understanding/ vision of equity and steps to improving nature access for under-resourced communities.					
Regular communications to ensure decision makers are aware of benefits of nature and opportunities for equitable access.					
Regular communications to ensure the public is aware of benefits of nature and opportunities for equitable access.					
Communications plan that outlines intended audiences and best methods to reach them and engages city leaders as champions.					
CCCN presence at important city and regional "tables."					

Informed by the following guides and tools: FSG, *Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact, 3: Sample Questions, Outcomes, and Indicators*, ND. CCCN. *CCCN Implementation Competencies Framework*, March 2019. CCCN. *CCCN Project Sustainability Framework*, May 2017. Build Health Challenge, *Community Approaches to Systems Change: A Compendium of Practices, Reflections, and Findings*, November 2019.