Community Engagement Guide

OVERVIEW

The **goal** is to meaningfully engage community members **to inform a Nature Everywhere vision and action plan**.

Community engagement is a process that puts community members in a position of power and centers their priorities, assets, needs and desires[1].

These efforts build on the Nature Everywhere assessment and help to build a deeper understanding of what the community values. Community engagement captures two distinct audiences: youth and adults.

> **Youth** are defined differently by communities and can range from children in early childhood to K-12, and young adults who are not being served. As teams complete their community assessment and identify priority populations for Nature Everywhere, they may select some or all of these age groups of youth.

> It is important to engage **adults** to hear directly from community members from the population being served. A community engagement plan may include youth and adults in similar processes or require different processes to ensure both voices are heard.

Youth and adult engagement outcomes are intended to:
- Foster cohesion, pride, collaboration and leadership capacity within the community.
- Develop a **clear understanding** of how youth and adults experience nature, including access and barriers.
- Inventory and **leverage community assets** and expertise.
- **Co-create** a plan for equitable and abundant access to nature with youth and adults.

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS
Community engagement preparation and plans should address: why you are conducting this process, who you seek to engage, and how these efforts will guide your visioning process. Please consider the following sequence, questions and success indicators when developing your Community Engagement Planning Sheet.

Readiness
- What is the shared understanding and common language of your community's history and culture?
- What resources do you have to support and sustain community engagement?
  - Organizations and staff (e.g. community-based organization led by people of color, existing youth advisory council or young leaders)
  - Physical space(s) to gather and hold community meetings
  - Financial resources to provide stipends to participants
  - Knowledge and experience conducting community engagement within your team
- What other needs are important to your community and are likely to come up? (public safety, etc.)

---

[1] Adapted from KABOOM!'s Community Involvement Toolkit

- What assumptions do you currently have related to how youth and adults engage in nature? What are these assumptions based upon?

Priority Populations

- Who do you seek to engage, including priority demographics and neighborhoods?
- Who is currently serving youth that can be included in your plan? Reference your Assessment Workbook.
- How have youth and adults previously been engaged in community planning processes?
- What would you like to learn from youth and adults in the priority neighborhoods or populations?
- What are potential barriers for priority populations to participate in community engagement? What resources and approaches could help reduce these barriers?
- What evidence-based research on youth nature connection is relevant to the well-being of priority populations in your community?

Recruitment & Outreach

- Adopt and use asset-based language[2].
- Remain open and flexible; you don't know what you don't know.
- Be intentional about relationships and power dynamics. Compensate community members for their time.
- Meet youth and adults where they are. For example, engage existing youth councils and groups to support data collection. Gather input through existing partner-led events and meetings before creating new single meetings.
- Publicize your activities widely and with multiple types of media to encourage accessibility and inclusion.
- Include age-appropriate engagement processes for children, youth and elders.
- Consider different methods of community engagement. Examples include:
  - **Community meetings:** join or host an in-person event with activities and conversations that encourage a group to share their input.
  - **Interviews and focus groups:** ask youth and adult leaders to lead conversations using a set of questions focused on gathering specific perspectives. These can also be with small focus groups.
  - **Community survey:** distribute a short survey that can be adapted for various audiences and used to gain feedback from a large number of youth and adults.
  - **Photo stories:** engage youth and adults in submitting a photograph with a short caption to highlight what matters to them in overcoming barriers and accessing nature.

---

[2] "We avoid words and phrases that look at situations or people from a "deficit" lens that prioritizes what's missing or what's wrong. Instead, we prioritize language that focuses on strengths and potentials" -Here to Here Language Guide

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLANNING SHEET

Document your ideas and developments below for advancing your community engagement.

READINESS
Goals for community engagement:
Resources available to support and sustain community engagement: (ex: staff, organizational capacity, partnerships)
Timeline for engagement:
Team member and partner responsibilities for leading community engagement activities:
PRIORITY POPULATIONS
Priority populations and neighborhoods for engagement:
RECRUITMENT & OUTREACH
Strategies for meeting youth and adults where they are: (ex: existing groups, youth councils and community events)
Communication strategies to reach different audiences in age-appropriate ways:
COMMUNITY INPUT
Potential methods for gathering input: ☐ Community Meeting ☐ Interviews and Focus Groups ☐ Survey ☐ Photo Stories
Methods adopted to be clear and culturally relevant for different audiences:
Practices to minimize barriers to participation related to scheduling, transportation, language justice, childcare, and technology:
SUSTAIN ENGAGEMENT
Plans to engage youth and adults in data collection: (ex: neighborhood liaisons, ambassadors, and trusted leaders)
Types of training and compensation you will offer to youth and adults:
Ongoing engagement opportunities for youth and adults to be involved in advocacy and decision-making: