



Cities Connecting Children to Nature

LIBRARIES AS NATURE CONNECTORS

STRATEGY: use public libraries as venues to connect children and families to nature

WHO GETS ENGAGED: library patrons and park visitors, including families, children, and youth

KEY BENEFITS:

- reach families of color and low-income families through a known neighborhood resource,
- maximize library facilities and resources through partnerships with parks departments,
- increase regular access to nature for children, young adults, and families, and
- strengthen stewardship and expansion of library green spaces and adjacent parks and gardens.

RELATED CITY PRIORITIES: equity and inclusion; family and community engagement; parks and green space access; education; and out-of-school time.

Libraries as nature connectors provide materials, programming, and leadership opportunities for youth to connect with nature in their neighborhoods. As a free community resource, often operating as an agency of city government, libraries can reach children who otherwise might not have access to quality nature experiences. Library system-wide initiatives can reach children across an entire city.

CASE STUDIES: FROM PILOT PROJECTS TO CITY-WIDE INITIATIVES

Nature-Smart Libraries

Building upon a successful 2018 pilot at the [Sun Ray Library](#), the City of Saint Paul expanded its [Nature-Smart Library model](#) city-wide. Six libraries now provide programming and resources for youth to interact with nature in their neighborhoods through nature themed storytimes, pollinator and outdoor reading gardens, and experiential learning activities to promote literacy and environmental education. Forty Nature Backpacks are in circulation across the six libraries. The backpacks include binoculars and field guides for families to engage in nature activities in library gardens and adjacent parks. The Sun Ray Library also serves as a neighborhood base for

the Children & Nature Network's youth leadership development initiative, [Natural Leaders](#), in Saint Paul. Local youth and young adults receive training in leadership development, community organizing, and action planning to increase access to nature in their communities. The city hired a full-time employee within the Saint Paul Library system to coordinate nature connection strategies, including library-park partnerships, staff training on how to become a Nature-Smart Library, and development of nature-based resources and programs, at all of the city's 13 libraries

Library-Park Partnerships

What began as a pilot project in 2016 in honor of the National Park Service Centennial evolved into a city-wide initiative involving 28 city libraries reaching 26,700 library patrons each year. The library-park partnership called [Summer Stride](#) is a collaboration between San Francisco Public Library (SFPL), the National Park Service (NPS) and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. It offers ranger-led talks and programs, free shuttles from libraries to national parks, Little Free Libraries at park locations and park trailhead

information at SFPL locations. With a goal of reaching more diverse populations and families who would otherwise not have access to parks, the initiative also offers translators and programs in various languages. The [library-park partnership](#), which received endorsement from San Francisco Mayor London Breed, provides a gateway to nature for local residents who would otherwise not have access to their local national parks, and a way for libraries to help residents spend regular time in nature.

ELEMENTS FOR ACTIVATION: *Libraries can choose and adapt based on resources and local assets*

	RESOURCE LENDING	NATURE ACTIVITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE	YOUTH LEADERSHIP
WHO <i>Target Audience</i>	Families, youth, and children ages	Families and children	Youth and young adults
WHY	Provide resources for children and families to engage in self-directed nature activities	Provide opportunities for family engagement, and outdoor learning and exploration.	Build youth connection with nature and capacity for local leadership
WHAT	<p>Backpacks Lend backpacks stocked with supplies to facilitate nearby nature exploration and inquiry.</p> <p>Nature Book Nook Promote nature-focused and/or conservation books for patrons.</p> <p>Seed Library Invite community members to contribute and harvest seeds for a seed exchange.</p>	<p>Family Nature Clubs Schedule recurring time on the calendar for family activities in nature.</p> <p>Use of Parks & Green Space Connect parks or green spaces with nature-based literacy activities and environmental programs, such as StoryWalk® laminated book paths.</p> <p>Infrastructure Include outdoor native-planted reading nooks; pollinator or edible gardens; and wildlife habitats.</p>	<p>Training Youth facilitate nature-based experiences and stewardship projects.</p> <p>Mentorship Youth support and mentor younger kids to develop as outdoor leaders.</p> <p>Internships Youth participate in internships at the library or with partner agencies.</p>

Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) is an initiative of the National League of Cities and the Children & Nature Network, made possible with support from The JPB Foundation. CCCN helps city leaders and their partners ensure equitable opportunities for children to play, learn and grow in nature, from urban parks and community gardens to the great outdoors. Find more planning resources at the [CCCN Resource Hub](#).