

Partnering with City Government and City Parks and Recreation

Introduction

Partnering with City Government and City Parks and Recreation Departments provides opportunities to take Cooperative Extension to the municipal level – working together to support each other’s efforts to serve the needs of city residents. City governments are typically involved in youth development and out-of-school (OST) initiatives – often through a Department of Recreation, Department of Community and Youth Development, or similar unit. City governments recognize the value of providing programs that engage youth and help prepare them for productive futures and to be contributing community members. In some cases, Cities directly administer afterschool and summer programs, but more often they provide support to community-based organizations to administer the OST sites. Cities often oversee and distribute federal and state resources targeted for youth development. In addition, through the appropriate departmental office, the City often serves as a community-wide organizer of youth and OST serving organizations and providers. The National League of Cities (NLC) works on behalf of municipal leaders across the country to help them improve their communities. The NLC’s Institute for Youth, Education and Families (see *Resources* below), has several publications outlining promising practices for City efforts in the areas of afterschool, summer, and youth programming. 4-H professionals working in urban communities should familiarize themselves with the work of city government and become aware of opportunities for partnerships.

City Parks and Recreation Departments have an abundance of resources available to help further 4-H Science programming – including parks and naturalists available for outdoor exploration and environmental education. Through recreation divisions, Cities often have community centers and recreation centers that are interested in non-recreational programming. 4-H can greatly enhance offerings at these sites with fun, engaging, and educational 4-H Science programs that take advantage of indoor and outdoor environments. The purpose of this chapter is to outline promising practices for working with City Government and City Parks and Recreation Departments to provide quality 4-H Science programs to urban youth.

Promising Practices

The promising practices for *Partnering with City Government and City Parks and Recreation* are subdivided into two categories: (a) City Government and (b) City Parks and Recreation.

City Government

1. *Understand as much as possible about the City’s involvement in youth development and OST efforts.* There is often more to City youth programming than is initially apparent. Some questions to ask:
 - Does the City administer program sites across the city?
 - Does the City support community-based organizations (CBOs) who administer OST sites?





- Does the City administer youth development and/or OST grants or contracts?
 - What level of support and/or resources does the City provide to the youth development and OST players in the community?
 - What role is appropriate for 4-H?
2. *Learn about federal and state funding coming to the City to support youth development and/or OST initiatives.* Common funding streams may include: Community Development Block Grants, U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Grants, U.S. Department of Justice Weed and Seed Grants, 21st Century Community Learning Center Grants, and so forth. Determine whether there is an appropriate role for 4-H Science programs in the context of these grant programs.
 3. *Maintain or increase visibility “at the table.”* Help City officials get to know what is available from 4-H. Advocate for 4-H Science programs and the broader youth development and OST field. Visibility can lead to substantial partnerships and resources.
 - Attend the annual youth summit, local OST conference, or other types of community-wide events for those in youth development and OST fields. These are often sponsored by the mayor’s office or other appropriate departmental offices (e.g., Department of Youth and Community Development, Department of Parks and Recreation, etc.).
 - Participate in City sponsored youth development and OST strategic planning, asset mapping, and needs assessment efforts.
 - Offer to serve on youth development and OST boards, advisory groups, commissions, and so forth.
 4. *Develop a niche in areas that require technical assistance unique to 4-H and the Land Grant University System.* Be aware of City government initiatives that may require specialized assistance, such as community gardens, positive youth development (PYD) training, OST science, and so forth.
 5. *Provide positive youth development, curricular, and/or program training for City staff.* Many grants require staff training. Look for opportunities to train staff at community/youth/recreation centers, summer camps, and afterschool sites.
 6. *Explore possibilities to become involved with summer jobs programs for teens.* Many cities sponsor these opportunities using state and federal funding, often associated with the local Workforce Investment Board (WIB).
 7. *Involve youth in 4-H Science activities that support City issues or needs.* Contact the relevant City departments to see whether they need assistance with community mapping projects, water quality testing, and so forth. Discover how to involve 4-H teens on City Youth Councils (Mayor’s Youth Councils), Commissions, or Boards.
 8. *Invite the mayor, city council members, departmental administrators, and collaborating staff to program showcases and 4-H/Extension stakeholder meetings.* Include them on mailing lists for newsletters and the annual report. Invite them to address 4-H youth groups or participate in other ways (e.g., panelists, judges, etc.). Utilize community rooms/space at City Hall for program showcases and displays, and invite City officials to participate. Provide opportunities for youth to present to the City Council, City departments, or other government entities.





9. *List your program in online citywide directories of youth serving organizations.* Advertise the services 4-H has available for youth as well as collaborating organizations.
10. *Disseminate program successes - continuously.* The more the mayor's office or other appropriate departmental administrators know about 4-H's efforts in the City, the better. Visibility can lead to substantial partnerships and resources!

City Parks and Recreation

1. *Discover available city, county, state, and federal public spaces and parks in or near urban communities.* Develop a working relationship with parks and recreation departments or park commissions.
2. *Work with city, county, and state parks and recreation departments to get urban youth connected to local outdoor resources.* Parks are often underutilized by urban residents, and many park systems are interested in ways to help connect urban youth to the outdoors. Outdoor/environmental education, adventure programming, and exploration are niches that 4-H programs are able to fill based on staff expertise, resources, and interests.
3. *Partner with park planners and designers to develop appropriate, engaging environments.* Emphasize “cool contexts” – the more diverse and engaging a learning environment is – the more likely it will be used. Educate planners/designers about youth development and age appropriate environments. Even better, have youth work with them directly!
4. *Utilize public parks as venues for programming.* Public parks are great resources for ongoing programs in the sciences, but they are also great venues for summer camp programs, either as a component of a program or for hosting the entire camp.
5. *Engage park naturalists or other science educators in 4-H Science programs.* Park science staff love to share what they know with youth. Involve 4-H youth in relevant educational programs sponsored by the parks.
6. *Look for opportunities for youth to engage in beautification, urban forestry, or other major planting projects conducted by City Parks and Recreation.* Such activities can support application of concepts learned in 4-H Science programs while reinforcing principles of community engagement.
7. *Take advantage of outdoor environments to hold meetings.* There are a number of advantages to meeting outdoors (e.g., awareness of new parks/facilities, demonstrating commitment to active science/nature, negotiating a more complex environment, etc.). Ensure everyone is aware the meeting will be outside and that they need to come dressed for the conditions.

Case Studies

Arnett – 4-H + Five Rivers MetroParks = Adventure Central. Adventure Central is a community-based, positive youth development partnership between the county parks system (Five Rivers MetroParks) and 4-H. Adventure Central is physically located in a 60-acre park that includes recreation and hiking trails; a creek; and a building with five classrooms, a large multipurpose room, and a kitchen. Adventure Central has served at-risk children and their parents in the West Dayton community for over 10 years. The community identified a need for positive development opportunities for youth and their families through science activities. The partnership exists because

both organizations recognized that alone they did not have the capacity to accomplish this goal. This partnership has created exciting, engaging, and diverse outdoor learning contexts that have increased youth's participation in the outdoor world and improved their attitudes regarding the environment.

The partnership with Five Rivers MetroParks supports the 4-H summer teen work-based learning program, Job Experience and Training (JET). In this program, urban youth engage in work and learning experiences related to a parks career. Each summer 20-25 teens are placed in a variety of roles and mentored by an adult supervisor during the eight-week program (see also *Arnett Case Study in Staffing with Teenagers and Teens as Cross-Age Teachers*).

Another goal of the partnership is to move individuals to independent use of park facilities. Many families are not fully aware of what is offered at the parks. This leads to underutilization of park resources. In addition to hosting family events in the parks, Adventure Central includes field trips to other park areas where the program could benefit from an outside speaker on a particular subject or from a specialized environment. Staff development sessions have also been led by parks staff with our team to improve practices and skills. **-Nate Arnett, The Ohio State University**

Randolph-Benjamin, Davis-Manigaulte – 4-H Partners with a Citywide Urban Forestry Initiative. As part of their ongoing urban 4-H Science initiative, the New York City (NYC) 4-H Youth Development Program is taking part in the MillionTreesNYC project, a citywide, public-private program enacted to plant and care for one million new trees across the city's five boroughs. The City of New York will plant 60% of the trees and the other 40% will come from private and community organizations, such as 4-H. NYC 4-H is promoting three components of the project:

- *Tree Planting:* 4-H joined citywide volunteer plantings in parks and abandoned urban areas, and currently partners with the NYC Parks Department to supply free trees to community residents and 4-H clubs for planting.
- *Stewardship/Community Beautification:* 4-H students became stewards over existing gardens and trees, adopting neglected community green spaces, maintaining tree pits, conducting community clean-ups and plantings, and building raised beds to plant flowers. 4-H provided starter supplies to groups.
- *Environmental Education:* 4-H Groups learned about urban horticulture, community mapping and the environment through 4-H Junior Master Gardener® (JMG) curriculum and MillionTreesNYC Educational Resources.

This initiative targets diverse ethnic communities in all five boroughs, historically underserved and under the national average for household median income, including: Harlem, Washington Heights, Bedford Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, Fort Green, Bushwick, Brownsville, Jamaica, Flushing, Far Rockaway, South Bronx and Staten Island through their 4-H clubs.

NYC-4-H hosted two science-related trainings, the JMG® training, a gardening program operated nationwide through the Cooperative Extension network and the Environmental Stewardship project. Fourteen volunteers participated. The JMG® curriculum introduces youth to “hands-on” group and individual learning experiences that promote a love of gardening, develop an appreciation for the environment, and cultivate the mind. This will help prepare students for spring gardening. The Environmental Stewardship project included a review of the summer pilot project and lessons learned. A total of 10 4-H sites will participate in fall bulb planting around tree





pits and other green spaces. -**Lucinda Randolph-Benjamin and Jackie Davis-Manigaulte, Cornell University**

Ripberger – Shared Resources Support Shared Goals. In Mercer County, New Jersey, 4-H has partnered with the City of Trenton Department of Recreation, Natural Resources, and Culture since 2003. At the time, the City was administering 10 afterschool and Saturday programs throughout Trenton, and 4-H was conducting outdoor education and adventure programs for youth at the collaborating sites through 4-H Afterschool Adventure. For this program, 4-H taps into county and state parks – such as a 70-mile canal and 2,500 acre park with miles of trails to expose urban youth to outdoor environments. The original partnership included funding from a Weed and Seed grant from the Department of Justice that provided support for youth development programming at school-based and community center sites. 4-H served as a member of the City’s Weed and Seed steering committee and participated in citywide youth summits and boards hosted by the Department of Recreation. Since 2005, 4-H has partnered with City sites to involve youth in its Horses and Youth afterschool and summer programs at the Mercer County Equestrian Center, a facility of the county park commission. Starting in 2006, 4-H has provided training in positive youth development to City afterschool and summer camp frontline staff. With interest in additional 4-H programming, the City began providing salary support for a full-time 4-H program associate in 2008, which allowed 4-H to expand its science programming and the number of sites served. Even though the City no longer directly administers school-based programs, they continue to support community organizations that provide OST programs and continue to administer City owned community and recreation centers. In 2008, they partnered with 4-H to install a low-element challenge course at one of its recreation centers. Since 2008, the City has provided transportation, bus and driver, for multiple weeks of 4-H summer programs. -**Chad Ripberger, Rutgers University**

Resources

National Recreation and Park Association - NRPA is the leading advocacy organization dedicated to the advancement of public parks and recreation opportunities, <http://www.nrpa.org/>. National and state affiliates of NRPA are available at <http://www.nrpa.org/stateassociations/>.

National League of Cities’ Institute for Youth, Education and Families - includes information on their afterschool and youth development initiatives. The Institute, a special entity within the National League of Cities (NLC), helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities. Available at <http://www.nlc.org/iyef/>. Several relevant publications may be found at <http://www.nlc.org/find-city-solutions/iyef/afterschool/> (under tools and resources tab) and <http://www.nlc.org/find-city-solutions/iyef/youth-civic-engagement/> (under tools and resources tab).