



# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE PARK DIRECTORS

HEALTH AND NATURE PROGRAM PARTNERSHIP TOOLKIT



PREPARED BY

NC STATE  
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# ENGAGING IN HEALTH PROGRAMMING IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR STATE PARKS TO DIVERSIFY PARK USERS AND ADDRESS A SIGNIFICANT SOCIETAL ISSUE

## INTRODUCTION

### MOMENTUM FOR THE TOOLKIT

The chronic disease burden in the U.S. is a significant cause for concern. One hundred seven million Americans are obese and over sixteen million adults have an episode of depression each year<sup>1</sup>. Increasingly, studies are finding that experiencing outdoor settings, or natural spaces, has positive impacts on physiological and psychological

outcomes<sup>2</sup>, including health benefits derived from active and passive use of parks and green spaces<sup>3,4</sup>. These benefits have led to a growth of park and nature prescription programs to address the high burden of chronic disease and increasingly sedentary and screen-based lifestyles. Although no standard definition of a nature-prescription

1. Hales, C.M., Carroll, M.D., Fryar, C.D., Ogden, C.L., 2017. Prevalence of obesity among adults and youth: United States, 2015–2016. National Center for Health Statistics data brief no. 288 <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db288.pdf>

2. Haluza, D., Schönbauer, R., & Cervinka, R. (2014). Green perspectives for public health: A narrative review on the physiological effects of experiencing outdoor nature. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 11(5), 5445–5461.

3. Triguero-Mas, M., Davdand, P., Cirach, M., Martínez, D., Medina, A., Mompert, A., ... & Nieuwenhuijsen, M.J. (2015). Natural outdoor environments and mental and physical health: relationships and mechanisms. *Environment International*, 77, 35–41.

4. Ward Thompson, C., Aspinall, P., Roe, J., Robertson, L., & Miller, D. (2016). Mitigating stress and supporting health in deprived urban communities: The importance of green space and the social environment. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 13(4), 440.





exists, they generally involve a physician giving patients a written recommendation to spend time in outdoor settings. There are between 80-100 nature prescription programs across the US<sup>5</sup>. These programs are also motivated by a growing body of research demonstrating the health benefits of spending time in nature<sup>6,7</sup>.

In some regions outside the US, nature exposure is viewed as a cost-saving preventative and therapeutic treatment to incorporate into health care management. In Japan, the practice of *shinrin-yoku*, or forest bathing, became a recognized health therapy in the 1980s. Thus, nature as a health intervention is garnering wider institutional support in the US. For example, the American Academy of Pediatricians named connecting children and families with nature a top priority area for 2019<sup>8</sup> and the National Physical Activity Plan<sup>9</sup> recommended the use of park prescriptions.

Nature-based programming has gained momentum because it leverages existing services such as parks and outdoor programs to facilitate sustained involvement in healthy behavior.

5. Park Rx Directory of Programs (2019). Retrieved from <http://parkrx.org/content/directory-programs>

6. Kondo, M.C., Fluehr, J.M., McKeon, T., & Branas, C.C. (2018). Urban green space and its impact on human health. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(3), 445.

7. Twohig-Bennett, C., & Jones, A. (2018). The health benefits of the great outdoors: A systematic review and meta-analysis of greenspace exposure and health outcomes. *Environmental Research*, 166, 628-637.

8. Yasuda K. Priorities for 2019 focus on health of children and physicians. Letter from the President. AAP News. Jan 2, 2019.

9. National Physical Activity Plan Alliance, 2016. 2016 National Physical Activity Plan. Columbia, SC.



# METHODS

## RESEARCH APPROACH

In 2018, due to the connection between parks and health noted by numerous leading health agencies, the National Association of State Park Directors commissioned Cam Strategies to conduct a feasibility study to examine expanding health-related programming through America's state parks. Although the majority of respondents were either interested in or already

states. These interviews explored the thoughts of state park leadership around the benefits of offering and expanding health-related programming, identifying resource barriers and solutions, imagining program evaluation measures, and approaching the programming with sustainability in mind. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A. In-depth interviews with nine Nature Rx

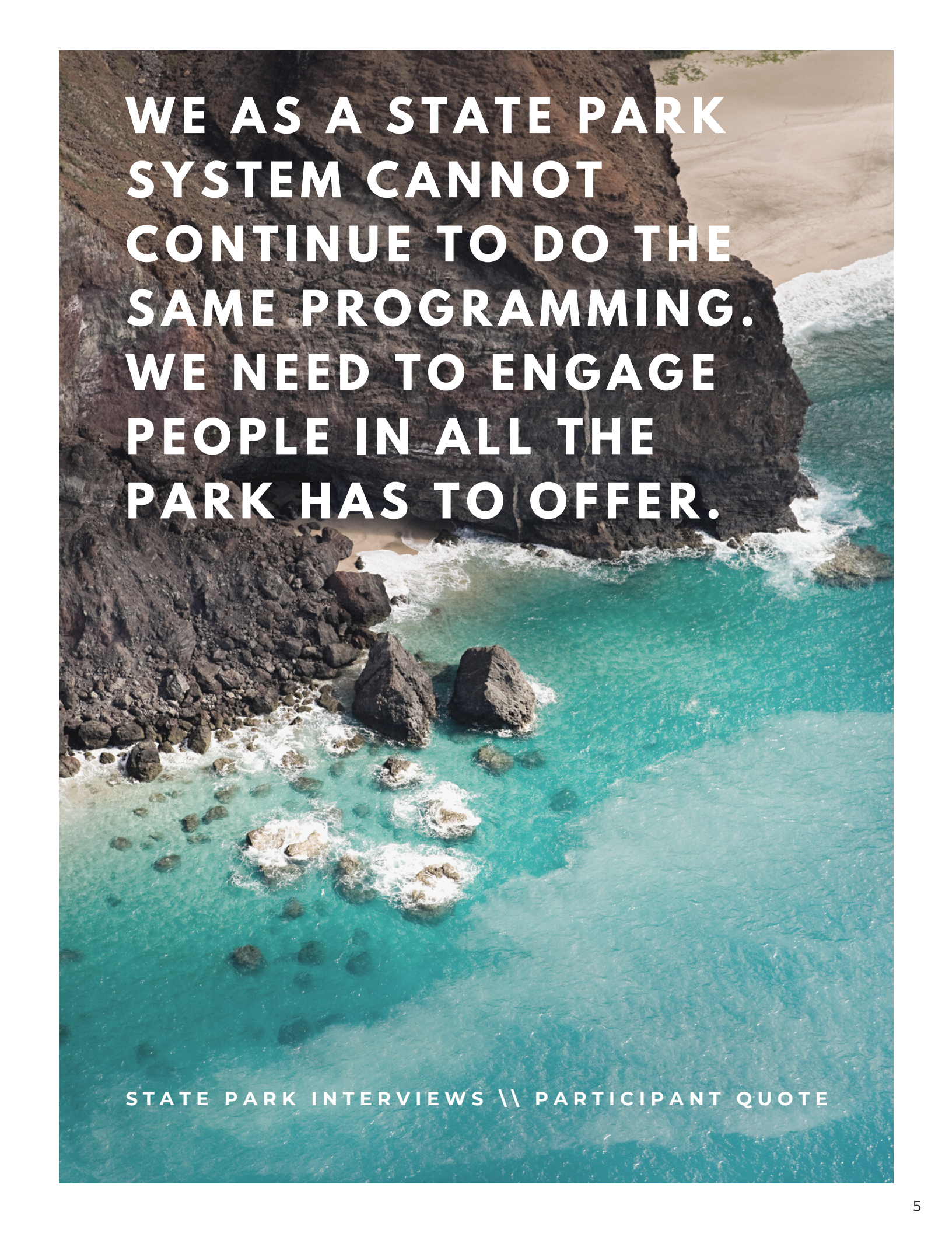


committed to health programming within their state park system, many respondents noted challenges and barriers related to the sustainability of these programs. The initial report recommended the creation of an action plan to provide more specific information on cost, resources, time, and staffing requirements related to health programming.

In Fall 2019, the NC State Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism Management and Health & Technology Partners, LLC conducted interviews with six state park directors, two partnership development consultants, and two state park superintendents spanning seven

organizations were also conducted. These included four local organizations, one state organization, one national organization, and three national/international organizations. Invited Nature Rx program interviewees were identified in the initial NASPD report and expanded to include partners across the spectrum of Nature Rx program offerings. These interviews focused on defining what a partnership between the program organization and state parks would look like while delivering health-related programming in order to allow for the development of an action plan. These interview questions can be found in Appendix B.



An aerial photograph of a rugged coastline. Dark, jagged rock formations dominate the left and top portions of the frame. A narrow strip of golden sand beach is visible at the top right. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, with white foam from waves crashing against the rocks and the shore. The overall scene is one of natural beauty and coastal wilderness.

**WE AS A STATE PARK  
SYSTEM CANNOT  
CONTINUE TO DO THE  
SAME PROGRAMMING.  
WE NEED TO ENGAGE  
PEOPLE IN ALL THE  
PARK HAS TO OFFER.**

STATE PARK INTERVIEWS \\\ PARTICIPANT QUOTE





# STATE PARK INTERVIEWS

## FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Interviews were conducted with six state park directors, two partnership development consultants, and two state park superintendents across seven states. The key findings of those interviews are summarized and reported around five general topics: benefits of health programming, expanding health-

related programs, resource barriers and solutions, program evaluation measures, and program sustainability strategies. A brief summary of the findings is included.

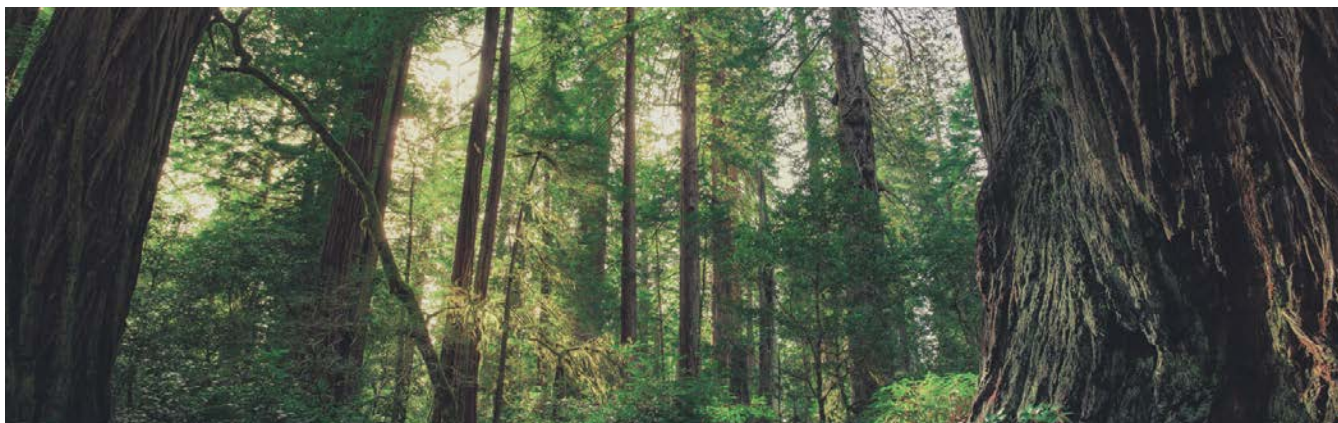
## 1. BENEFITS FOR STATE PARKS OFFERING HEALTH- RELATED PROGRAMMING

Health-related programming can open doors to new partnerships, but it can create issues of deviating away from an agency's mission. Interview respondents indicated that, while research has shown the important health connections to nature, it is a new message point for people to engage with public lands - what was once simply beautiful or wild is now healthy. The concept of relevancy continued to emerge as one of the primary reasons for state parks to develop health-related programming. Across the interviews there was a sense that health-related programming created the opportunity to show the health benefits of being in nature and allowed for diversifying the message of what state parks offer.

As one respondent remarked, "People want to be healthier and we can leverage that need to be able to attract them as well as new users. That can help in the support for state parks with legislators." Respondents indicated that more advocates would help state parks with annual budgets, park acquisition, and care of the parks. Another common theme to emerge was the possibility that by engaging more diverse constituents

## 2. EXPANDING HEALTH-RELATED PROGRAMMING OPTIONS

Overwhelmingly, respondents noted that state parks are just beginning to "scratch the surface of the impact and benefits of



### **NATURE RX PROGRAMS COULD BE ONE APPROACH TO HELPING STATE PARKS BECOME MORE RELEVANT TO A DIVERSIFYING CONSTITUENCY.**

through Nature Rx programs, an additional avenue for recruiting a more diverse workforce could occur.

This, in turn, could help connect different population groups to state parks earlier in life and could promote the idea of a career in state parks as more viable.

Nature Rx programs." It was suggested that "to build momentum in this area, programs need to be offered on a more consistent basis and be part of the fabric of the programming efforts" (e.g., program offered every Tuesday or once a month, etc.). Moving beyond one-time special events will help state parks to build a programming health brand for each park and attract new and potentially





consistent users. However, respondents cautioned that such efforts would only be effective if all park managers supported the programming and saw it as a priority through the shifting culture of state park agencies. One respondent noted, "The challenge is to get [park managers] to embrace the idea that state parks are integral to healthy lifestyles and get staff to understand where we are going with this."

Suggested program expansion ideas included:

- Hosting health seminars
- Partnering to offer health screenings
- Hosting farmers markets
- Getting healthcare providers out in the parks
- Working with veterinary care to address pets and human health
- Developing partnerships with local/state health departments, healthcare providers, and insurers
- Expanding the programming offerings of existing naturalist and interpretation programs
- Focusing on underrepresented communities and evolving pilot programs that meet these communities' needs
- Utilizing unique park settings, such as a yoga program overlooking a mountain

### 3.RESOURCE BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS

Several of the respondents mentioned a desire to find a way to partner with health insurance companies to help offset program costs and make programs more accessible for all participants through supportive measures, such as vehicle or entry fee subsidies, funding park passes, and funding state park staff dedicated to helping visitors engage in nature experiences.

However, as one respondent stated, "health insurance companies need to see the value to them economically



and see evidence that park-related preventative health programming works."

Other parks have found funding sources through local and state level partnerships. One successful example was a partnership with a local yoga studio to provide free park-based classes that in turn provided the yoga studio with an opportunity to advertise and promote their business.

Another respondent discussed how engaging and reaching out to related state and federal agencies (such as the Department of Public Health and Veteran Affairs) created support that has helped their health-related programs' sustainability.

State park directors have some discretionary money to invest in Nature Rx programs, but as a participant noted, "each state park director has various priorities, so health-related programming may or may not be a funding priority." Regardless of where the funding comes from, respondents widely agreed that dedicating staff to work on these initiatives or to support their development was equally important.

While there is a broad acknowledgement that state parks could benefit from diversifying and increasing funding for health-related programming, few of the respondents had developed the necessary partnerships for leveraging health insurance companies for additional funds.



## 4. PROGRAM EVALUATION MEASURES

While program evaluation can be challenging, respondents had suggestions for demonstrating the effectiveness and success of health-related programming.

Several respondents mentioned the power of a story. The ability to tell the park's story was one suggested way to examine how state parks affect constituents' lives. A method of capturing those narratives that has proven successful is to have staff pass out the state park superintendent's business card, asking visitors to report their positive experiences. This approach of leveraging good experiences helps such stories filter to upper management and also provides meaningful information that can be tied back to health-related state park use.

Respondents suggested the following metrics:

- Health related statistics such as calories burned
- Targeted testimony
- Return on investment for Nature Rx programming
- Program attendance
- Motivations and barriers for Nature Rx participants or prescription recipients
- Additional research studies documenting direct cause and effect on the benefit of nature to human health





## 5. PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES

The final question respondents were asked was how to make health-related programming a sustained and long-term perk of state parks.

The most frequently discussed theme was the necessity and importance of

commitment and the ability to expand and work on both health partnerships and program development.

Organizational culture and the structure of state parks were also mentioned as being key factors that would allow for the dedication of resources and the strategy to prioritize programs and initiatives.

Respondents also highlighted the need for training staff on how to develop



### **COALITIONS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND INTERNAL CREATION OF A SUPPORTIVE CULTURE WERE ALL KEY ASPECTS OF CREATING SUSTAINABLE PROGRAMMING.**

partnerships. Whether it was looking to investments from the medical community or getting dedicated funding from legislators, the respondents emphasized the need to get help from partners to make health-related partnerships a long-term part of state parks. For example, one respondent highlighted the need to address transportation barriers and partnering to provide bus routes that could be rerouted around hiking areas.

Other respondents re-emphasized the need to have a dedicated staff member empowered with institutional

health programming and outreach efforts. One participant recommended that trials of Nature Rx programs at a few select state parks could allow for better customization and implementation of appropriate programming state-wide.

The political environment has reduced the tenure for state park directors, making it hard to sustain initiatives through leadership transitions. To succeed, health-related programming must become a part of the state park culture and a priority.





## BRIEF SUMMARY OF STATE PARK INTERVIEWS

State parks engaging in health programming can better position around healthcare and healthcare costs while also leveraging an opportunity to diversify state park users. Respondents recognized that state parks cannot just provide traditional outdoor recreation and need to integrate health programming within their current offerings. Introducing new health-related programming could overwhelm staff with lots of different programs that could feel like a demand on top of their already busy workload. As such, here are the key themes the respondents shared to successfully implement Nature Rx programs at state parks:

1. Sustainability of programming is always a significant issue. Avoid losing momentum of pilot programs by first dedicating funding to those programs.
2. Training current staff may seem like a cost efficient way to build Nature Rx programs, but management should be wary about overwhelming staff by adding more tasks, responsibilities, and roles. Instead, look to partnerships to offset staff burdens.
3. Also look to partnerships to provide resources and offset costs. Such partnerships can provide marketing assistance, training, and resources that are critical to program success.
4. Any health-related programming needs to be tied to the mission of state parks to avoid the initiatives being abandoned with leadership changes.



# HEALTH PROGRAM PARTNER PROFILES





# ASSOCIATION OF NATURE AND FOREST THERAPY GUIDES AND PROGRAMS

## NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM

The Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs (ANFT) is a global training provider with an international community of Certified Forest Therapy Guides. Forest Therapy is a research-based framework for supporting healing and wellness of people and nature through immersion in forests and other natural environments. The focus is on the journey, not the destination, with guided walks of typically a mile or less, ranging in duration from two to three hours.

ANFT also certifies Forest Therapy Trails to increase access to and awareness of this practice. It also offers marketing to increase visitors and tourism for land owners. Trails can be self-guided or guided by a local certified forest therapy guide or a trained staff person.

At the end of 2019, ANFT had trained over 800 Forest Therapy Guides in over 46 countries on six continents, guiding in over 16 languages and in many cultures.

## PROGRAM INFORMATION

[www.natureandforesttherapy.org](http://www.natureandforesttherapy.org)

Michelle Hickey  
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Photo: ANFT



# PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

ANFT offers three tiers of services for state parks looking to implement Forest Therapy programs at their parks.

## 1. Certified Forest Therapy Trail

Forest Therapy Trails are paths or areas where individuals of all abilities can deeply connect with nature through their senses. State parks can join the network of ANFT certified Forest Therapy trails through a certification process to facilitate either ANFT-trained, guide conducted, Forest Therapy walks or self-guided signed trails.

## 2. Local ANFT Forest Therapy Guides

State parks looking for a plug and play program can reach out to ANFT for recommendations to local ANFT-certified guides who can lead Forest Therapy programs. Typically these are three-hour walks that provide different invitations to connect with sense, self, and nature, ending with a tea ceremony to ease participants back into the flow of their day. ANFT standards can be customized by guides to meet the unique needs of the state park, but typically a guide will provide a description of the event, information about themselves, a welcome email to participants, and follow up information.

## 3. Forest Therapy Guide Certification

For State Parks interested in having staff trained to be forest therapy guides, ANFT

offers training courses throughout the year in multiple locations. The training consists of a one-week on site intensive training followed by a six-month at home practicum supported by trained mentors, and ending in certification.

# PROGRAM COST & DETAILS

## 1. Certified Forest Therapy Trail

Trail assessment and certification is a three-phase process conducted by an ANFT trained Trail Certification Consultant with support by the ANFT Trail Certification Coordinator. The Consultant will work with the state park to assess the trail, make recommendations for improvements, assist with marketing materials, and complete all paperwork. ANFT charges a \$750 certification fee and Trail Certification Consultants charge their own fees based on time and travel. Additional costs may include trail improvements, signage, and marketing materials. ANFT can be contacted about rates for multiple trails and/or training staff as guides.

## 2. Local ANFT Forest Therapy Guides

There is a range of possible partnerships with the local guides depending on the needs of the state park. For example, state parks could work with guides to pay a flat fee to guide walks or negotiate a percentage of the registrations if handling the registration process.



Photo: ANFT

Conversely, the guides could handle the registration process in return for permission to guide on the land.

### **3. Forest Therapy Guide Certification**

Strategic partnership discounts are available to interested state parks. Staff participating in the training will complete a week-long training and 6-month practicum. Participants will spend approximately 4-8 hours weekly on the practicum tasks.

## **DATA COLLECTION & SUCCESS METRICS**

ANFT is currently expanding and developing additional ways to measure program effectiveness. To date, ANFT has utilized several approaches to measuring program impacts, including:

- Participant feedback from program evaluation forms
- Qualitative feedback from guide reports and guided walk reports

## **CREATIVE APPROACHES**

ANFT's Forest Therapy programs focus on building meaningful relationships between people and the land, bringing an aspect of land tending into traditional conservation. Through one innovative program, ANFT has developed a "Creating Conservation and Tending Module," which uses citizen science and mobile apps to connect Forest Therapy to the broader conservation efforts of land managers.

ANFT is also committed to equitable programming. A newly launched scholarship program is designed to increase accessibility to their Forest Therapy Guide Certification program. This initiative seeks to support individuals from diverse communities working to ensure that all communities, regardless of resources or natural spaces, have the opportunity to experience Forest Therapy through a community representative.



# KIDS IN PARKS

## NATIONAL PROGRAM

Kids in Parks (KIP) partners with land management agencies across the U.S. to convert existing trails (such as hiking, biking, paddling, and disc golf) into kid friendly trails through the installation of interactive self-guided materials that get families unplugged, active outdoors, and reconnected to nature.

To help link spending time in nature with improved health, KIP works with doctors' offices and hospital systems to prescribe outdoor recreation and the network of TRACK Trails to patients through the TRACK Rx program.

The KIP program offers kids the ability to earn Trail TRACKer Gear for registering their TRACK Trail and TRACK Rx Adventures on the KIP website.

KIP started in 2008 as a joint project among the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, National Park Service, and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation. There are currently 200 TRACK Trails in 12 states, Washington D.C., and the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation. Over 600 healthcare providers are writing prescriptions for time on TRACK Trails. Since 2009, over 600,000 kids have participated in TRACK Trails.

## PROGRAM INFORMATION

[www.kidsinparks.com](http://www.kidsinparks.com)

Jason Urroz  
Director  
[jurroz@brpfoundation.org](mailto:jurroz@brpfoundation.org)



## PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Over 10 years, KIP has developed into a turnkey program that is easily incorporated into new sites. The program offers several packages for new organizations to join the TRACK Trail Network. A base package includes a sign and frame for one trailhead, four sets of activity brochures, a webpage, custom sticker, and coordinated prizes mailed to kids who register adventures at your TRACK Trail site(s), and free program support including marketing and promotional materials. Additional supports can be added to the base package including

## PROGRAM COST & DETAILS

The minimum start-up cost for participating in KIP (for one trail) is \$4,999, with options for fee-based add-ons. Each TRACK Trail location is responsible for the cost of reprinting/restocking brochure supply, and an annual \$400 fee to maintain data collection and website technology. Startup and ongoing cost savings apply for state park systems with more than one trail. State parks should have at least one person devoted to managing the approval of all TRACK Trail materials and ensuring program maintenance onsite.

**KIP HAS REGISTERED 22,000 TRACK TRAIL  
ADVENTURES OVER 10 YEARS ACROSS MORE THAN  
200 SITES PROVIDING TESTED EXPERIENCE FOR  
NEW PARTNERS.**

customized premium brochures, onsite support visits, and trail blazes to mark the trail. An annual subscription fee covers website updates, prize mailings, data collection, online dashboard, and insurance for your sign and brochure holders. Additional add-ons for community integration and site exploration are also available. KIP works with agencies to determine pricing for adding multiple trails to the program. The KIP program can be integrated into existing interpretive programs.

## DATA COLLECTION & SUCCESS METRICS

Participating TRACK Trail members receive a biannual data report from KIP that benchmarks the state park TRACK Trail(s) against the average TRACK Trail, giving managers insight into the performance of their site(s). Metrics tracked from the participant logs include:





Photo: Kids in Parks

- Average age of participant
- Percentage of first-time hikers
- Percentage of first-time visitors to park/site
- Percentage of intentional visits for TRACK Trail alone
- Percentage of intention to return again
- Average group size

Based on a validated registration rate conversion and caloric expenditure, the report also includes the following health-based outcome measures for both the kids and the broader group participating in the program:

- Estimated total adventures
- Estimated total miles hiked
- Estimated total calories burned
- Estimated total hours outside

## CREATIVE APPROACHES

TRACK Trails is a versatile program that can be prescribed by pediatricians. The TRACK Trail Rx is part of a broader approach to help state parks bring kids and adults to their sites, helping to foster stewardship in the youth that will become supportive adults. The positive health impacts are in some ways a bonus for state parks to leverage additional funding to engage youth. While KIP has been primarily funded by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation, they understand the importance of partnering with state parks to apply for local, regional, state, and/or national foundation and agency funding sources that support efforts to expand the KIP network.



# HEALTHY PARKS HEALTHY PERSON TENNESSEE

## STATE PROGRAM

Healthy Parks Healthy Person Tennessee (HPPH) works with healthcare providers across Tennessee to improve the health of patients and the public by promoting time spent in the outdoors. The free program gives healthcare providers a way to refer their patients to the Park Prescription program alongside other treatments being used for physical and mental health issues.

Patients log in to the free HPPH TN mobile application that utilizes a gamification model to award points for checking in to an activity each day that can be redeemed for prizes (shirts, water bottles, free meals, cabin stays, and more) with the goal of creating lifestyle changes.

The program was started in 2016 by Ryan Jenkins. With over 5,000 users and more than 77,000 logged activities on the app, the program has had a state-wide impact.

## PROGRAM INFORMATION

[www.healthyparkstn.com](http://www.healthyparkstn.com)  
[app.healthyparkstn.com](http://app.healthyparkstn.com)

Ryan Jenkins  
Park Manager  
[Ryan.Jenkins@tn.gov](mailto:Ryan.Jenkins@tn.gov)

Acknowledgement: This program is funded through the Tennessee Department of Health







Ryan Jenkins to discuss their needs for implementing the program. State parks are encouraged to reach out to discuss their needs and help HPHP TN incorporate those requests.

**HEALTHY PARKS  
HEALTHY PERSON TN  
IS TRANSITIONING TO  
A CUSTOMIZABLE  
PLATFORM THAT WILL  
UTILIZE A NEW IOS  
APP AND PROGRAM  
FRAMEWORK.**

## **DATA COLLECTION & SUCCESS METRICS**

Currently, HPHP TN is working with select healthcare partners to finalize additional health metrics. HPHP TN offers the following measures:

- Number of users
- Number of logged activities
- Rate of activities logged versus rewards provided
- Location of the activities logged
- Participant testimony and qualitative feedback

## **PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION**

HPHP TN is working to develop a partnership/leasing opportunity that will provide several service levels that interested entities can decide upon. Once released, the program will utilize a plug and play framework that will facilitate customization for interested partners. HPHP TN is currently developing a new iOS app with a customizable Park Prescription framework that will allow partners to edit and utilize the mobile application for their own programs. Interested state park agencies are asked to directly contact





Moving forward, there will be additional opportunities for self-reported metrics, including how engaging in the activity has impacted the participant's mood. As further programs are developed, metrics will be expanded to meet program needs.

## CREATIVE APPROACHES

HPHP TN's program offers the ability for partnering agencies to access a full user experience designer who is able to customize the program platform. The fundamental focus of the platform is to encourage and sustain health behavior modifications through an app-based program that provides gamification, redeemable rewards, and encouragement for frequently incorporating park visits into daily life.

The HPHP TN program has been intentionally designed in an agnostic way; allowing for multiple applications of the program within different levels of the health and conservation worlds.

For instance, a new state park partner could take existing programs such as a hike with a ranger or junior ranger program, and through the HPHP TN platform, offer small rewards to help participants create habit and behavior change.

Rather than fighting to get phones out of participants' hands, HPHP TN uses phones to get them into the park and then allows nature to pull them away from their phones. By engaging a broader audience and getting them into the park, this program opens the possibility that those same users will become conservationists and stewards of the land.



# OUTDOORS RX

## LOCAL PROGRAM WORKING ON REGIONAL LEVEL

Outdoors Rx<sup>®</sup> supports families in building healthy lifestyle habits - making outdoor time easier by offering frequent, short, engaging programs in neighborhood parks. While the mental and physical wellness benefits of time outdoors are important for everyone, their focus on underserved, densely populated communities is paramount. Outdoors Rx communities have higher incidences of lifestyle diseases coupled with less nature, disposable income, time, and access to reliable transportation. Outdoors Rx achieves their mission through partnerships with trusted health professionals and respected community organizations to connect families to their free 60-90-minute programs that are designed to create a welcoming experience and encompass a variety of nature-based activities.

Outdoors Rx was started in Fall 2013 in collaboration with Boston's healthcare community to combine the recommendation of a trusted medical provider with AMC's outdoor expertise. Outdoors Rx serves families living in underserved communities to improve the mental and physical wellbeing of children from infancy to age 13 by helping them get outdoors.

## PROGRAM INFORMATION

[www.outdoors.org/outdoorsrx](http://www.outdoors.org/outdoorsrx)

Angel Santos Burres  
Director of Outdoors Rx

Acknowledgement: Outdoors Rx is a program of Appalachian Mountain Club



## PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

In 2020, Outdoors Rx will offer a toolkit to guide interested partners on how to launch their own local Outdoors Rx program. Partners interested in the program can participate in a toolkit training, for a nominal fee, hosted by Outdoors Rx which includes: training on how to use the curriculum, materials and supply list for curriculum lessons, co-branding with Outdoors Rx to be used on marketing materials, trip reports, and a unique Google

## PROGRAM COST & DETAILS

State parks looking to partner with Outdoors Rx would be required to pay a nominal fee for the toolkit training. At least one state park employee should be dedicated to leading the implementation of Outdoor Rx within their agency. State park partners are encouraged to consider how to grow personnel requirements along with the program.

### **THE APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN CLUB BRINGS NEARLY 144 YEARS OF LEADING OUTDOOR GROUP EXPERIENCES INTO THE OUTDOOR RX CURRICULUM TO SUCCESSFULLY AND INTENTIONALLY CONNECT UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES WITH NATURE.**

dashboard to report program metrics for participation in an annual report. Trainings for new curriculum are offered to partner organizations, AMC Volunteer Leaders, and organizations seeking to add outdoor programming for their constituents. The Outdoors Rx program offers flexibility for partnering agencies to select what reward mechanism for participants (e.g. earn badges, unique passport stamps at each park, etc.) suits the agencies' target audience and yearly budget.

Allocation of additional funds is recommended for the participant award mechanism. Partnerships between state parks and Outdoors Rx can also be leveraged to seek additional funding from third party sources such as local public health programs and insurance companies. Potential for a joint funded position is considered on a case-by-case basis.





## DATA COLLECTION & SUCCESS METRICS

The Outdoors Rx program uses several metrics for monitoring the success of their program including:

- Number of people attending a program
- Percent of people returning to a program
- Whether or not a program has attendees (to address where there is low or nonattendance)

Participant waivers are also used to gather information including:

- Participant zip code; used to generate a map of where participants come from
- Participant phone number
- Participant email
- How participant learned about the program

Trip reports are also used to track program information including:

- Date and time of program
- Weather factors

Trip reports, waiver information data fields, and other metrics are available to partners. There is flexibility for state park partners to work with Outdoors Rx to determine additional metrics of value.

## CREATIVE APPROACHES

Outdoors Rx is centered on an approach of providing quality curriculum that is simple and affordable. This allows partners to incorporate Outdoors Rx in a sustainable manner.

One of the real values to the Outdoors Rx program is their expertise in community building that it provides as part of the toolkit training, honed over decades of experience through the AMC.



# PARK RX AMERICA

## NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM

Park Rx America (PRA) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to decrease the burden of chronic disease, increase health and happiness, and foster environmental stewardship by virtue of prescribing nature during the routine delivery of healthcare by a diverse group of healthcare professionals.

The online PRA platform assists healthcare providers with prescribing nature to their patients through the generation of a prescription that includes location, activity, duration, and frequency that can be emailed or texted to their patients, along with reminders, and includes the ability to save the Park Prescription to the electronic medical record. Patients receive a unique prescription code that allows them to log each park visit on the PRA website. This prescription adherence data is accessible to the healthcare provider.

Founded in 2017 by pediatrician Dr. Robert Zarr, the goal of PRA was to make it easier for more healthcare professionals to write Park Prescriptions for patients of all ages during the patient visit. Since then, more than 600 prescribers nationwide have joined across 46 states, with additional prescribers in Australia, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Netherlands.

## PROGRAM INFORMATION

[www.parkrxamerica.org](http://www.parkrxamerica.org)

John Henderson  
Executive Director  
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## PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Park Rx America (PRA) works closely with public land managers to ensure patient access to therapeutic time in nature.

The PRA platform allows healthcare providers nationwide access to information about park lands close to where their patients live. In turn, this local knowledge allows patients to receive

## PROGRAM COST & DETAILS

State parks looking to join the PRA platform can do so at various branding levels and price points. Simply adding parks to the platform can be done for free.

Agencies looking for branded websites that highlight their own agency identity (e.g., colors and logo) can choose to



## **PRA CONNECTS PATIENTS TO NATURE EXPERIENCES IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THEIR LIVES AND WELLBEING.**

customized Park Prescriptions to spend more time in nature.

PRA has developed a park attribute formulary that gives land managers an opportunity to include their parks in the PRA platform. Land management partners are provided with an easy-to-use online interface to manage park profiles. PRA also provides partners with reports of prescriptions filled to their park agency allowing agencies to track the efficacy of the Park Prescriptions.

purchase a customizable webpage hosted by PRA that includes marketing/promotional materials, annual maintenance, and advanced metric options. Partners can also opt for a fully embedded branding option that provides a unique domain name (separate from the PRA site) including creation and maintenance of your new site, PRA platform tools, marketing/promotional materials, and advanced metric options. For pricing information on set up and annual costs, contact PRA.



## DATA COLLECTION & SUCCESS METRICS

When prescriptions are generated by a prescriber, the PRA platform automatically records and tracks metrics including:

- Individual prescriptions including details on where the Park Rx is to be filled
- Frequency of the prescription "fill"
- Total number of prescriptions written
- Total number of prescriptions filled

Patients receiving a Park Rx through the PRA platform have the ability to record each time they "fill" the prescription via an online or mobile app platform, as well as track their own performance.

Partners can work with PRA to build additional metrics into both the prescriber and patient sides of the platform allowing them to customize the data they are collecting in addition to the base metrics.

## CREATIVE APPROACHES

PRA offers the ability for state parks and land managers to become part of the local healthcare delivery system without needing to develop their own healthcare partnerships. The PRA team actively recruits and trains local providers on integrating the PRA Park Rx into their patient encounters.

When a health provider prescribes your park through the PRA platform, a digital record is made that allows you to see how many constituents are using your parks specifically for a Park Rx and how often those prescriptions are being filled. Such information allows you to calculate healthcare savings impacts, and the value of your lands in promoting active park use.

PRA also offers bespoke packages that allow you to determine the visible branding and applied metrics to your particular program.



# PITTSBURGH PARKS RX

## LOCAL PROGRAM

Pittsburgh Parks Prescription (Parks Rx), a collaboration between the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, aims to support the health and well-being of children and families by encouraging regular park use and contact with nature.

Through three pathways (school, community, and clinical settings), park prescribers provide resources, guidance, and programming opportunities to participants. Parks Rx provides partners with training and technical assistance through workshops, presentations, and toolkits. By engaging school, community, and clinical partners, Parks Rx offers a continuum of advocacy and support for healthy, active lifestyles.

Through the Pittsburgh Parks Rx website, families can access additional information about local parks, ways to access them, and information about programs and seasonal events.

## PROGRAM INFORMATION

[www.pittsburghparks.org/rx](http://www.pittsburghparks.org/rx)

Kathryn Hunninen  
Senior Manager of Special Initiatives  
[khunninen@pittsburghparks.org](mailto:khunninen@pittsburghparks.org)





## PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Parks Rx is a program experienced in engaging the broader Pittsburgh community that provides a tested approach to community based programming. Partners are provided with an adaptable framework and material templates that provide guidance for developing a local focused program that connects urban or local municipal constituents into the state park system. Parks Rx has experience working with schools, community, and clinical settings, bringing a comprehensive approach to engaging the broader community.

## PROGRAM COST & DETAILS

State parks looking to establish their own Parks Rx program would need to dedicated at least one lead staff to direct the program. Parks Rx recommends two to three support staff at

**PARKS RX  
PROVIDES ADVICE  
TO STATE PARKS  
INTERESTED IN  
IMPLEMENTING A  
PARK  
PRESCRIPTION  
PROGRAM BASED  
ON THEIR  
ADAPTABLE  
MODEL.**

approximately 20 hours annually along with in-kind support from local partners and volunteers to adequately launch the program. State parks should budget for materials, program supplies and transportation, and marketing/promotion in addition to personnel/program administration.





## DATA COLLECTION & SUCCESS METRICS

Parks Rx measures program impacts and success both in terms of tracking program outputs and outcomes including:

- Number of staff trained/prescribing
- Pre-post survey on provider participation and experience
- Number of prescriptions written
- Number of program participants
- Participant pre-post program experience survey on knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and awareness of nature benefits

These measures and tools are shared with partners to administer with their program.

## CREATIVE APPROACHES

Parks Rx keeps relationship building central to its mission of encouraging community members to be more active in parks. Keeping programs local and grounded in relationships takes a substantial amount of time and honest effort, but local program champions are critical to success.

Another way to engage state parks into Parks Rx programs is to consider how health programming relates to the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. For state parks looking to institutionalize and mission align health-related programming, language identifying the value of such programs can be key to reinforcing the concept on a policy level.

# **PRESCRIPTION TRAILS**

## **LOCAL PROGRAM WITH NATIONAL AFFILIATES**

Prescription Trails is a program designed to give all healthcare professionals tools to increase walking and wheelchair rolling on suggested routes, targeting and promoting healthy lifestyles for families.

Each Prescription Trail participating community creates a Prescription Trail walking guide booklet to local "approved" parks and trails, with photos and detailed information about park locations, amenities, and trail ratings.

A key component of the Prescription Trails program is the development of a Trail Assessment worksheet that provides a consistent grading of trails for their appropriateness for participants from the start to the end of life.

In 2006, the New Mexico Health Care Takes on Diabetes coalition partnered with the National Park Service on a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant leading to the development of the first Prescription Trail program. Since then, the program has grown in communities around New Mexico and to affiliate programs in several states.

## **PROGRAM INFORMATION**

[www.prescriptiontrails.org](http://www.prescriptiontrails.org)

Charm Lindblad  
Executive Director  
[clind48535@aol.com](mailto:clind48535@aol.com)





## PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Prescription Trails partners with affiliates nationwide to provide a toolkit that can be adapted to meet the needs of the specific community application. State parks looking to develop their own Prescription Trails program will find the toolkit provides: assessment tool for the trails, graphics, and a template for creating a local Prescription Trails booklet guide. Prescription Trails also provides guidance and mentorship to new affiliates on how to navigate the challenges of launching a new program. Affiliates looking to use the materials and the Prescription Trails logo need to follow the

## PROGRAM COST & DETAILS

State parks looking to develop their own Prescription Trails will need to designate a project manager who can coordinate program timelines and milestones. While Prescription Trails provides the toolkit for free, state parks will need to budget for web design (if desired), printing and booklet cost, as well as either volunteer or staff time to conduct the trail assessments. Completion of the trail assessment makes a great activity for community groups looking for service projects or volunteer opportunities, and can help reduce the cost of program implementation.

**SINCE 2006, PRESCRIPTION TRAILS HAS BEEN USING  
AN AWARD-WINNING APPROACH TO CREATE  
ACCESSIBLE NATURE WALKING PROGRAMS FOR  
INDIVIDUALS REGARDLESS OF THEIR MOBILITY.**

toolkit and guidelines to reflect the simplicity of the messaging and maintain consistency of the brand for the local program. For instance, the trail assessment tool provides consistent grades for partners across the U.S. Application of the grades to accurately reflect the assessment of the parks is part of ensuring brand consistency across sites.

## DATA COLLECTION & SUCCESS METRICS

Initially Prescription Trails measured how many trail booklets were given out and how many prescriptions were written. State parks can choose to use their own metrics to measure the program impact. This could include visitor contacts with health foundation events in park, entrance fees waived with written



prescriptions, and number of visitors using Prescription trails. If developing a new resource near an adjacent community, one useful metric could be measuring the number of people with increased access to the park.

## CREATIVE APPROACHES

Prescription Trails is a straightforward program focused on what can be done and how it can be done to get more constituents out in parks and walking. The simple yet well-designed booklets provide an effective communication method that is a key component to the success of Prescription Trails.

By using existing resources and looking at how to make those spaces more accessible to visitors and constituents, this program addresses the safety issues around trails. The trails assessment emphasizes the importance of

walkability to apply a lifespan approach, making it a priority to meet the needs of all constituents at all levels of ability/mobility. Parks should be for everyone. There is a need for more nature-based areas for both adults and children with disabilities, and a need for more parks with accessible trails and playgrounds. Encouraging dog walking in approved areas is another great way to get people walking.

Not all parks will have trails that meet the criteria of the trails assessment tool. State park directors can consider this reality from a policy issue perspective, about how to evolve amenities and facilities that are more welcoming and inclusive of the whole community. If parks cannot be used by the whole community, then the health of the community is negatively impacted; however, the quality and accessibility of parks, and the levels of use, can be a good measure of the health of the community.



# STAY HEALTHY IN NATURE EVERYDAY

## LOCAL PROGRAM

Stay Healthy in Nature Everyday (SHINE™) is a clinical program with the mission to support families getting out into nature for health.

The SHINE program is integrated into the electronic medical system of the UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital where over 100 physicians prescribe time in nature for children with chronic illnesses. The program integrates nature into pediatric care through a monthly free half-day program for patients and their families to engage in outdoor activities led by park staff. Free transportation, a healthy lunch, and activities are provided for participants.

The SHINE clinical program, launched in 2014, is a partnership with the Primary Care Clinic at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland and the East Bay Regional Park District. Since then, over 80 park outings, and more than 1,000 children and family members have participated in the SHINE program as a long-term collaboration towards health and resiliency.

## PROGRAM INFORMATION

[www.centerfornatureandhealth.org](http://www.centerfornatureandhealth.org)

Dr. Nooshin Razani  
Director of the Center for Nature and  
Health at UCSF Benioff Children's  
Hospital Oakland  
[SHINE@ucsf.edu](mailto:SHINE@ucsf.edu)







## PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The SHINE program builds upon the growing body of evidence between nature exposure and improved health and makes it appealing for clinicians to recommend nature by offering accessible, consolidated park information at the clinic. The integration of SHINE into the electronic medical record makes nature access readily incorporated into the clinical workflow.

Partnering with park managers also makes it possible to bring nature into the clinic through posters of local park maps, murals, and images that showcase local natural resources, encouraging patients' sense of pride in their own neighborhood.

SHINE advocates for the specific needs of patients and their families. Through its partnerships, SHINE has created specific culturally-appropriate

programming that appeals to patients and their families via the structured park outings. Translating the science into clinical care, the SHINE program helps connect patients to parks for their physical and mental health, recognizing that patients need more than to simply be told to get outside.

**SHINE CONNECTS  
HIGH HEALTH NEEDS  
POPULATIONS AND  
ENCOURAGES THEM  
TO FEEL  
COMFORTABLE IN  
NATURE AND GAIN  
HEALTH BENEFITS  
FROM SPENDING TIME  
OUTDOORS.**

## PROGRAM COST & DETAILS

State parks looking to develop a similar clinical program need to consider how to support their clinical partners by offering some added value. By engaging individuals already deeply thinking about these programs, state parks can ensure that they authentically design an experience for their own constituents who are not always well integrated into traditional programming (e.g., constituents facing inequity and trauma associated with poverty).





## DATA COLLECTION & SUCCESS METRICS

SHINE has evaluated the effectiveness of park prescriptions through several research studies utilizing several metrics including:

- Changes in caregiver stress
- Park Prescription adherence
- Physical activity levels (e.g., pedometer, journaling, number of park visits, average minutes per day in moderate to vigorous physical activity)
- Loneliness
- Family cohesion
- Affinity to nature
- Resilience
- Adverse Childhood Experiences score

The selected health metrics highlight the importance of using measures that address the intended impact of the program, rather than selecting only popular measures.

## CREATIVE APPROACHES

SHINE succeeds in fostering healthier communities because of its dedication to building an authentic relationship between the healthcare provider and the public land manager. At the heart of the program, SHINE ensures that the partnership is invested in the community and fits the health needs of the community as seen by the healthcare provider, rather than focusing on less salient issues that might be more popular to partners.

SHINE recognizes a universal truth: health does not happen only in clinical settings. They recognize that parks are powerful health partners. Parks get patients outdoors, leading to increased physical activity levels, better connected families and communities, and greater resilience.

SHINE demonstrates the importance of mutual respect and good community engagement practices in order to build relationships with the clinical sector that, in turn, creates authentic health interventions.

# WALK WITH A DOC

## NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM

Walk with a Doc is a program led by doctors in local parks. The doctor gives a brief presentation on a health topic and then leads participants on a walk at their own pace. Throughout the walk, participants are encouraged and emboldened to ask the doctor about health-related issues in a relaxed setting. Each Walk with a Doc community is asked to commit to a goal of at least 12 walks a year.

In 2005, Dr. David Sabgir, a cardiologist frustrated by the difficulties of affecting behavior change in the clinical setting, invited his patients to go for a walk with him at a local park one Saturday morning. Nearly 100 people showed up.

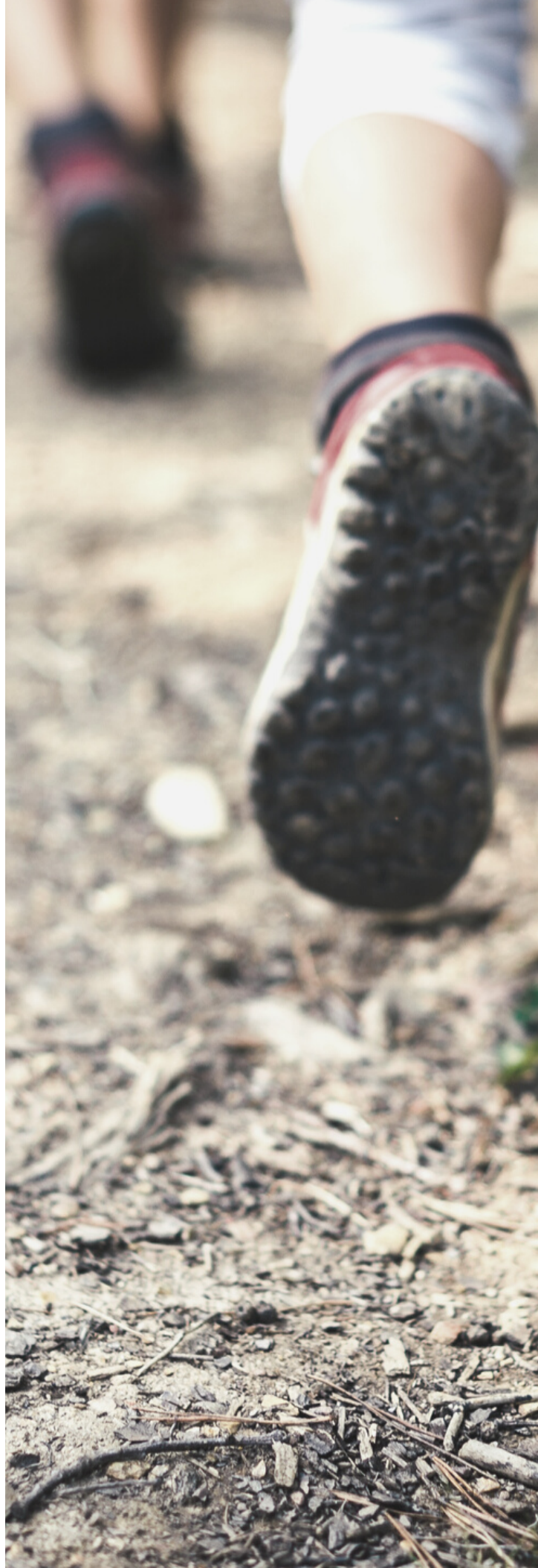
Since that first event, Walk with a Doc has grown to over 48 U.S. states and 32 countries with more than 530 chapters walking weekly, biweekly, or monthly, and has extended to include Walk with a Future Doc chapters led by medical students.

## PROGRAM INFORMATION

[www.walkwithadoc.org](http://www.walkwithadoc.org)

Dr. David Sabgir  
Founder, CEO, Board President,  
Cardiologist

Rachael Habash  
Chief Operating Officer  
[rachael@walkwithadoc.org](mailto:rachael@walkwithadoc.org)





## PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Walk with a Doc (WWAD) is a turnkey program focused on inspiring communities through movement and conversation with physician-led walking groups. Walkers of all ages, shapes, sizes, and backgrounds attend the free events. Each walk led by a participating doctor begins with a brief health topic discussion, then the rest of the hour is spent enjoying

## PROGRAM COST & DETAILS

State parks looking to implement a WWAD program will need to recruit a healthcare provider to lead a local chapter and determine to what degree the state park can support the membership fees for the state park chapter. A state toolkit membership option starts at \$650. There are several pricing options available to state parks



**WALK WITH A DOC DELIVERS BETTER HEALTH, COMMUNITY CONNECTION, AND PATIENT SATISFACTION FOR WALKERS OF ALL AGES, SHAPES, SIZES, AND BACKGROUNDS.**

a social nature walk. A WWAD membership provides the toolkit along with: liability insurance, walk webpage (developed and maintained by WWAD for you), sample marketing plan, access to marketing resources (flyers, press releases, etc.), options to co-brand your own materials, WWAD t-shirts, and prescription pads. Participant waivers and sign-in sheets are also provided to the local chapters.

looking to have multiple chapters. Contact WWAD to learn more about pricing options available to state parks. After the initial membership cost, there is an ongoing annual fee to cover the liability insurance (currently \$250/year).

Once a healthcare provider has been recruited, WWAD provides the training and toolkit directly to the healthcare provider. All that is left for the state park to do is to open up free admission for the walking group and encourage constituents to participate.



Photo: Walk with a Doc

## DATA COLLECTION & SUCCESS METRICS

WWAD is based on the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to encourage walking as a way to improve health outcomes. A feasibility study conducted showed additional evidence for the program impacts of WWAD. To date, WWAD measures program impacts including:

- Number of walkers per chapter event
- Number of events per chapter
- Number of chapters
- Total number of walkers
- Total number of events

## CREATIVE APPROACHES

While WWAD is still growing as an organization, the affect and proof of concept have been demonstrated by the growth and impact on patients worldwide.

The simplicity of the program, a walk with a doctor, is a unique asset of the program, directly connecting patients to a healthcare provider who is helping them establish a new healthy behavior. WWAD is a socially responsible program addressing the epidemic of sedentary lifestyles and apathy.

WWAD is a universal approach that gathers partners and teams to locally address societal needs around health.



An aerial photograph of a dense, lush green forest. A dark, winding road with white lane markings curves through the trees, starting from the upper left and curving towards the bottom right. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# **ACTION PLAN FOR DEVELOPING HEALTH AND NATURE PROGRAM PARTNERSHIPS**





# ACTION PLAN

## DEVELOPING HEALTH AND NATURE PROGRAM PARTNERSHIPS

The steps provided in this action plan were created to help bring the lessons learned from state parks and health program partners together in a concise, actionable manner. It consists of an action map and four areas to guide your state park through in the process of developing health and nature program partnerships and the growth of such programs at your site(s).

This action plan provides a framework that offers guidance as you need it. Your team can decide exactly how to customize this plan and suggested activities to fit your program development needs.

There are four areas that your team can work through to achieve your goal of creating health and nature programming. Depending on your goal and work accomplished thus far, you may need to follow a non-linear path through the areas and activities.

The objective of this action plan is to provide your team with guidance for identifying and reaching your goals for integrating health and nature programming.

The prompts and exercises on the following pages will help your team select the right programming to achieve your goal.



# 1. DEFINE YOUR GOAL

So your agency wants to offer health and nature programming. What impact do you hope to have? What is the goal you hope to achieve through this programming? By answering these questions you'll find your true north - a clear statement of purpose and intention that you can return to again and again to assess if your goal has changed.

The first step is to spend time deciding what kind of impact you want to have improving the lives of individuals and your broader community.

Next, define exactly your audience: what health problem will your program address. For instance, are you looking to simply increase time spent in nature for the broader community? Or are you looking to address high rates of diabetes in your community? Or are you hoping to encourage seniors to walk more?

Each health nature program must be tailored to address the unique challenges and needs of your target participants. Spend some time really addressing who will benefit from the program.



## **WHY ARE YOU INTRODUCING HEALTH AND NATURE PROGRAMMING? BY KNOWING THE WHY, WHO, AND WHAT, YOU WILL DEFINE A USEFUL GOAL.**

When thinking about the program impacts, it is also important to thoughtfully consider how this goal of improving health aligns with your mission as a state park. Is there language in your Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan that addresses health and wellbeing? How does health programming support your goals for establishing stewardship in various audiences?

One useful exercise is to assess the ripple effect of your program. For instance, how might a program targeted to children through their healthcare provider impact individual behaviors? How might that impact the health of their family? The idea is to consider the circles moving out from the intended prescription recipient who is benefiting from the program. By defining your goal and impact, it will help guide you in the next three areas.

# DEFINE YOUR GOAL WORKSHEET

WHAT IS THE MISSION OF YOUR AGENCY? FILL IT IN BELOW.

WHERE DOES HEALTH AND NATURE PROGRAMMING FIT INTO THAT MISSION STATEMENT?

WHAT IMPACT IS MOST SALIENT TO YOUR CURRENT GOALS?

WHICH CONSTITUENTS WILL THE PROGRAM TARGET AND WHAT HEALTH OUTCOMES WILL THE PROGRAM SEEK TO ADDRESS?

**Remember!**

Setting a clearly defined goal for your program will help guide you as you move through developing partnerships, launching the program, and evaluating its success.



## 2. BUILD YOUR PARTNERSHIP(S)

Chances are, your staff are already stretched thin and the idea of adding even more responsibility to their jobs could be a limiting factor. This is where partnerships can be extremely important for long-term success. Whereas constituents were once satisfied with less organized activities such as camping and boating, increasingly there is a desire for a greater range of activities and programming (e.g. 5km runs in the park, guided health hikes). This shift in programming provides an opportunity for land managers to partner with agencies who have the programming expertise and interest, but not the land

program goal. First, let's assess your resources. What skills does your team already bring to the table? What skills would you benefit from a partner bringing to the table? Spend time working with your team through the worksheet on the next page to establish what you can bring to a partnership and what you are hoping to benefit from out of a partnership that moves your agency towards your health and nature programming goals. Thinking about your wants and needs around marketing/promotion, technical expertise, staffing, and funding will help you determine what partnership(s) is right for your goal. For example,

**BY IDENTIFYING PEOPLE WITHIN YOUR AGENCY AND WITHIN THE BROADER COMMUNITY THAT HAVE SKILLS TO SHARE, YOU CAN BRING TOGETHER THESE UNIQUE STRENGTHS TO HELP YOU REACH YOUR PROGRAM GOAL.**

or space to develop their own programs. For instance, local healthcare systems may be interested in supporting a nature walking program but do not have the land to support such a program, leading to a beneficial partnership. Or perhaps you have the funding and staff to support a health nature program but do not have the technical capabilities of managing a mobile app, while a national group does. The key here is to determine what skills are required to reach your

growing a partnership with the AmeriCorps program could be one way to offset the staffing requirements of new programming and initiatives. Or maybe your park offers an unrivaled vista; perhaps that unique setting would be perfect for a local yoga studio to offer classes for you. The idea here is to take stock of what you already have and figure out ways to create mutually beneficial partnerships to increase your programming.

# WHAT ARE THE KEY SKILLS YOU NEED FROM A PARTNER TO MAKE YOUR PROGRAM GOALS SUCCESSFUL?

As a team, consider what skills you can realistically provide for your new health nature program and what skills you are looking for a partner to provide. Take the time to assess what level of support you can dedicate to your program and how a strategic partnership can address the remaining needs.

Necessary Skills for Program Success	Skill Your Team Has	Skill You Need from a Partner
<b>Marketing/Promotion</b>		
Website and/or Mobile Application		
Emails/Newsletters		
Posters/Flyers		
Distribution Channels		
Other		
<b>Experience Expertise</b>		
Program Design/Curriculum/Toolkit		
Training the Trainer		
Program		
Registration/Administration		
Technical Assistance/Know How		
Other		
<b>Awareness/Outreach</b>		
Branding		
Connecting with Diverse Audiences		
Connecting with Funding Sources		
Connecting with Volunteers		
Other		



## Remember!

Engaging community volunteer groups can be a great way to build an authentic program. By engaging local community members, you can intentionally design the program to meet their needs by including their perspectives throughout the design and planning phase.



### 3. CREATE DYNAMIC SOLUTIONS

Now that you have assessed your existing skills and necessary partnerships, it is time to create new solutions. A good place to start is by honestly assessing your available funding. Setting a realistic budget for your new program will help you determine the format of the program and allow you to mix and match elements of existing ideas to find the best fit for your goal.

around the program, whether ideal or not, and combine them in different ways to generate a customized new program. The focus here is to not allow yourself or your partners to be constrained by funding or resources. Instead go back to your true north and begin mixing ideas. Focus on combining the unique strengths of your team's ideas and program designs to create an innovative and sustainable approach.



#### **LET YOUR TRUE NORTH GUIDE YOU TO THE PROGRAMMATIC APPROACH THAT ACHIEVES YOUR PROGRAM GOAL.**

For instance, are you wanting to add curriculum to existing interpretation programs or are you looking to partner with a healthcare integrated program? Are you looking for a turnkey program or wanting to develop a bespoke program?

One exercise that is useful at this stage is the idea remix. Ask open ended questions of your partners to see what new ideas might emerge. Take ideas

Another approach to creating dynamic solutions is to consider what additional benefits you want the program to achieve. For instance, will this program address the state park's efforts towards relevancy and diversity? How can health and nature programming create stewardship and a land tending ethic among constituents? Does inviting partners to use the land help develop greater support for conservation and land management efforts?

# CREATING YOUR PROGRAM PARAMETERS FOR DYNAMIC SOLUTIONS

As a team, consider the following six continuums and select where you would like your program to fall along each gradient. Use the results of this exercise to help guide your idea remix to determine the specifics of your program. Add your own continuum(s) with the help of your team. Sometimes adding parameters helps to define creative solutions.

Program Design	●	Turnkey Program	●	Partially Adaptable Program	●	Bespoke Program		
Program Frequency	●	One Time Program	●	Seasonal Program	●	Monthly Program	●	Daily Program
Program Content	●	Interpretive Program					●	Healthcare Integrated Program
Program Staffing	●	No Park Staff					●	At Least 1 FT Park Staff
Program Funding	●	Self Supported	●	Agency Subsidized			●	Grant/Foundation Funded
Program Training	●	In House Staff Development					●	External Staff Development
Fill in your own	●							●



## Remember!

Over time your resources and skills will change. Returning to this exercise can help you plan for programming changes as new partnerships and funding opportunities arise.



## 4. PLAN FOR SOMETHING REAL

At this point, you have a good sense of what your goal is and how you are going to achieve that goal. Having created budgets, timelines, milestones, and having assigned staff to each aspect of the program, there is one last area to address - evaluation.

Increasingly, managers are tasked with providing success measures that show

by your staff or if this is a task that will be managed by a partner. Another consideration is to determine the method and frequency of collecting data. For instance, can you collect data through an online platform or mobile application or will you be using a paper questionnaire? Will you measure a pre-program/post-program impact on participants or are you simply collecting



### **DATA PROVIDES INSIGHTS SO THAT YOU CAN MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT YOUR PROGRAM.**

exactly what a program's reach and impact has been. In determining what metrics to use, it is best to first determine what success for this program means. In part, this is also influenced by who your audience will be. Are you simply measuring program performance for internal reports? Are you required to provide evidence of success to funders? Do you provide a performance report to your constituents?

Second, it is useful to determine if data collection and analysis can be managed

information about the program (e.g., number of participants)?

Finally, you will want to consider if your evaluation measures will be quantitative, qualitative, or a mix. Quantitative data lends itself towards numerically measuring both program and participant characteristics. Qualitative data, however, can capture testimonial insights from participants and program leaders that is lacking from purely quantitative data.

# EVALUATION GUIDELINES

When considering what to measure, it is useful to consider what information you want to track regarding the program's characteristics and performance versus participants' participation experience and health outcomes.

Evaluating both the program performance along with participants' outcomes provides a balanced assessment of exactly how the program is performing and impacting participants. Data collection and analysis is one particular skill set that can benefit by working with healthcare and research partners.

Below is a sample of common metrics to get you started in considering what mix of program and participant data you will need to accurately assess your program.

Domain	Measure	Measurement Tools
Program Characteristics	Weather report day of program	Program Report, NOAA forecast
	Program staff	Program Report
	Time/Date of program	Program Report
	Participant demographics (e.g., zip code, age, gender, race/ethnicity)	Registration Forms
	Participant directory information (e.g., phone number, email)	Registration Forms
	Location of program/activity	Program Report, Surveys, Self Administrated Questionnaires
Program Performance	Attendance frequency	Trail Counters, Car Monitoring Systems, Eco Counters, Program Reports, Surveys, Self Administrated Questionnaires
	Number of participants/group size	Program Reports, Surveys, Self Administrated Questionnaires, Direct Observation
	Number of social media interactions/reposts/likes	Internal Report
	Percentage of 1st time attendees	Program Reports, Surveys, Self Administrated Questionnaires
	Percentage of return attendees	Program Reports, Surveys, Self Administrated Questionnaires
	Percentage of community reached/engaged	Program Reports, Surveys, Self Administrated Questionnaires, Local Census Data
	Number of prescriptions written/filled	Program Reports, Surveys, Self Administrated Questionnaires
	Return on investment	Calculation of performance/health outcomes
Participants' Experience	Testimonials	Interviews, Surveys, Self Administrated Questionnaires
	Changes in knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and/or awareness of nature benefits	Interviews, Surveys, Self Administrated Questionnaires
	Motivations and/or barriers to participation	Interviews, Surveys, Self Administrated Questionnaires
	Adherence to prescription	Interviews, Surveys, Self Administrated Questionnaires
Participants' Health Outcomes	Physical activity levels (e.g., time spent in nature, miles covered, calorie expenditure)	Interviews, Surveys, Self Administrated Questionnaires, Physical Activity Monitors
	Stress	Interviews, Surveys, Validated Questionnaires
	Mental restoration	Interviews, Surveys, Validated Questionnaires
	Sense of wellbeing	Interviews, Surveys, Validated Questionnaires
	Biomarkers (e.g., cortisol, A1c, blood pressure)	Self-reported data, Blood Assays, Clinical Testing



## Remember!

Program evaluation can be intimidating. Focus on identifying what data are meaningful to your agency, your funders, and your constituents. Then, select the metrics that will accurately capture that information.



# CONCLUSIONS AND THOUGHTS FOR NEXT STEPS







# CONCLUSIONS

## BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS TO LAST

This Health and Nature Partnership Program Toolkit was designed to provide you with ideas for how to integrate nature-based physical activity programs into your state park.

Ultimately, this toolkit provides inspiration, a guidebook of potential programs, and a series of exercises that will enable your state park to bring nature-based physical activity programs to your community.

The nine programs featured in this toolkit showcase diverse programmatic options ranging from plug-and-play operations that include all of the elements necessary to begin a program immediately to bespoke models that

can serve as inspiration for a program that best fits your intentions, your community, your budget, and your partnership(s). These overviews can be used in two ways:

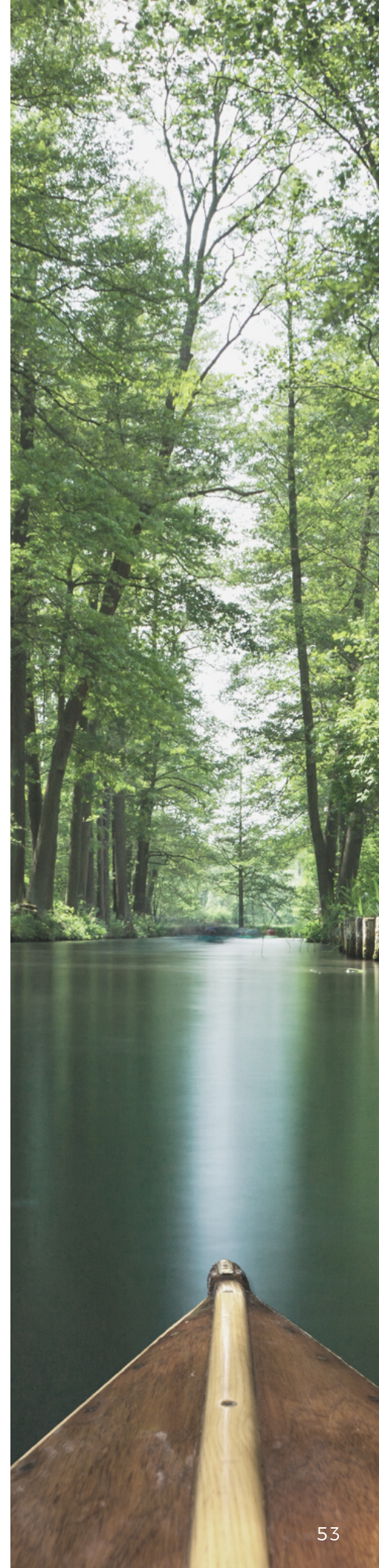
- 1) They can be read through initially to provide context, examples, and a starting point for ideas, prior to using the Action Plan worksheets with your state park staff, or
- 2) They can be used after having gone through the Action Plan exercises to determine if there is an existing model that would work, or if creating a customized program that draws on multiple programs' features best suits your park's needs.



# APPENDIX A

## QUESTIONS FOR STATE PARKS

1. What are the primary benefits for state parks (and specifically your state park) in offering health-related programming?
  - a. Attract new visitors (more diverse visitors)
  - b. Conservation benefits
  - c. Address an important societal need
2. In thinking about health-related programming within your state park system, what types of programming would you like to see that doesn't currently exist
  - a. Are there programs that do currently exist but need improving?
3. Resources have traditionally been cited as the major barrier for sustained, quality health programming (e.g., staff time, not enough sustained funding for programming). Have you thought about any creative solutions to overcome some of these resource barriers?
4. In thinking about demonstrating the effectiveness and success of health-related programming, what evaluation measures would be most useful to you?
  - a. What measures would attract the attention of key decision makers?
5. What would it take for health programming to be a sustained and long-term part of state parks?



# APPENDIX B

## QUESTIONS FOR NATURE RX PROGRAM PARTNERS

1. In thinking about a partnership with state park agencies nationwide, what would make state parks an ideal partner for your organization? What would motivate you to partner with them?
  - a. Marketing/Exposure
  - b. Resource Sharing
  - c. Address an important societal need
2. Could a state park “plug-and-play” {name of program} into their health-related programming? Does your organization offer a program implementation framework for NASPD partners looking to launch (program name) in their state?
3. In thinking about program funding, is your current program funding model scalable to a nationwide roll-out?
  - a. Current Source of Funding
  - b. Limitations of Funding Source
  - c. Potential Funding Partners
4. Resources, such as cost and staffing requirements, are a major barrier for sustained quality health programming.
  - a. How do you see a partnership with NASPD creatively negotiating those resource barriers?
  - b. What are the minimum costs associated with your program monthly/annually?
  - c. What are the minimum staffing requirements for your program? Can you provide that or would you need NASPD partners to contribute?
5. It is important for state park partners to demonstrate program success.
  - a. How do you currently measure program impacts?
  - b. How do you measure success?
  - c. How would program evaluation be conducted across multiple partnership sites?
  - d. How would you communicate program data to your state park partners?
6. What would it take for {name of program} to be a sustained and long-term part of state parks?



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