



Cities Connecting Children to Nature

NLC NATIONAL
LEAGUE
OF CITIES
CITIES STRONG TOGETHER

Children
& Nature
Network

ADVANCING EQUITY in children's connections to nature

Equity has served as a central goal of the Cities Connecting Children to Nature initiative (CCCN) since its outset in 2014. City leaders hoping to provide all children with equitable resources and opportunities to connect regularly to nature often encounter many barriers. These result from discriminatory patterns in park and housing development, investments in facilities and nature access, and hiring, as well as a disregard for ways different cultures connect to nature and stereotypical assumptions. These conditions combine with the broader trend of children spending less time outdoors to widen the gap in health and well-being further.

In response, and with increased intensity, CCCN city teams have pushed ahead with strategies designed to increase equitable connections to nature. In the last few years, focused dialogues with community-based equity partners, city leaders, and equity offices led to enhanced local planning, implementation, and coordination with other equity-focused initiatives.

This snapshot conveys the current consensus within CCCN on definitions and principles. It also provides a few illustrative examples of city progress and additional ideas. The brevity of this piece reflects CCCN's humility about the pace of such progress, as well as the ongoing challenges of reversing structural inequities and racism.

Tied to equity, CCCN also continues to test and sharpen ways to measure citywide systems change to document the benefits of nature connections for all people. A systems change perspective looks at the interaction of policies, practices, resources and relationships to better understand who holds influence and how ingrained patterns of thinking come into play. Companion pieces in the CCCN Systems Change Toolkit provide more in-depth looks at systems change.

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KEY CONCEPTS

CCCN encourages consistent and regular use of terms across the initiative.

EQUITY

Cities achieve equity when children and families stand on relatively equal footing, and race no longer predicts resources and opportunities for nature connection. Equity comes about through implementation of inclusive policies and practices and elimination of institutional racism.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Policies, practices, relationships, power dynamics, and attitudes and beliefs that city governments and stakeholders enact and maintain, which deprive children of color of the benefits of connections to nature.

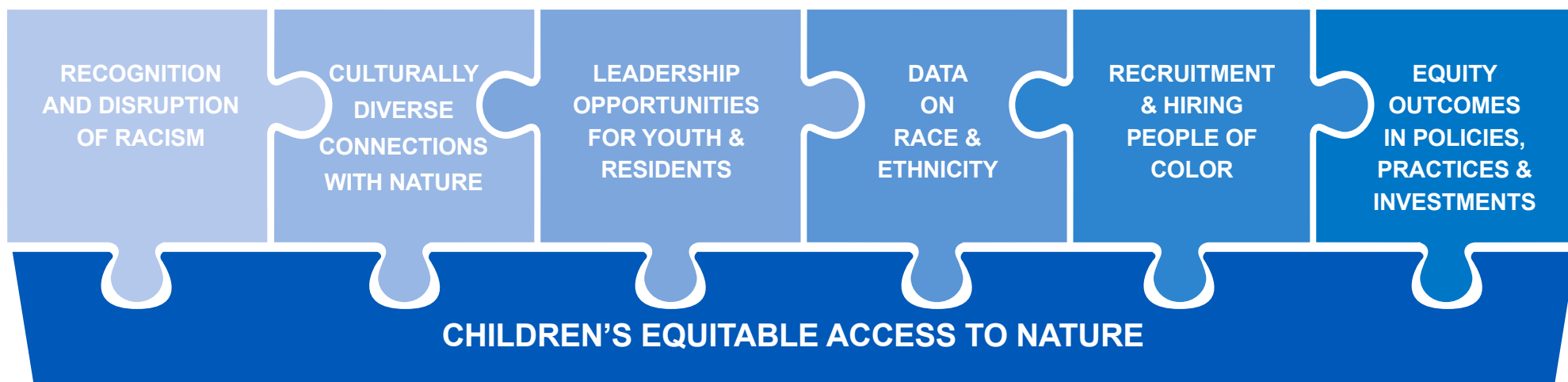
INCLUSION

Creation of natural environments and opportunities in which ALL individuals feel welcomed, safe, valued, and empowered to participate fully, and recognition of the diverse ways in which different individuals and cultures pursue nature connections.

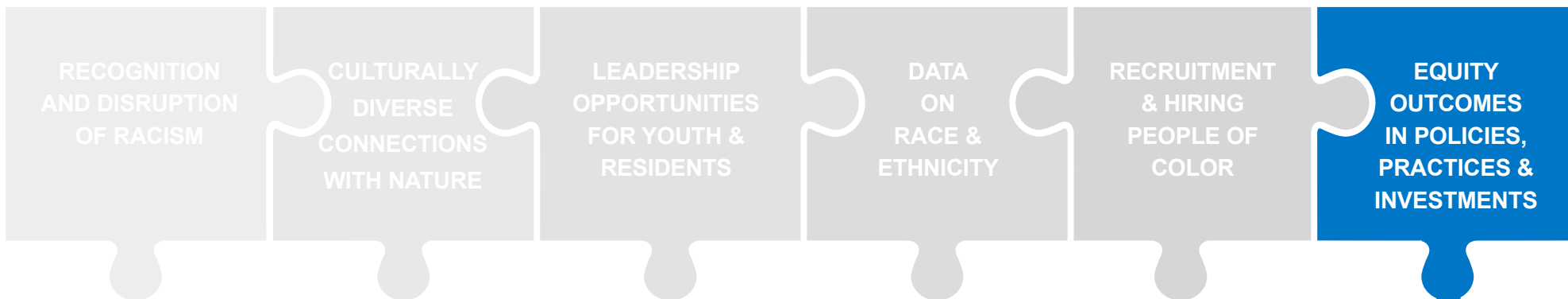
KEY PRINCIPLES FOR ADVANCING EQUITY

Below are six key principles to increase opportunities for children of color to gain more regular access to and experiences in nature. Principles require a commitment to continuous practice and dedication.

- **RECOGNITION AND DISRUPTION OF RACISM**
Continuously acknowledge, recognize, analyze, and interrupt institutional racism and its effects on residents.
- **CULTURALLY DIVERSE CONNECTIONS WITH NATURE**
Recognize the many ways diverse cultures, ethnicities, and immigrant groups meaningfully connect with nature.
- **LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH & RESIDENTS**
Provide leadership opportunities for youth and residents in the design and use of natural spaces.
- **DATA ON RACE & ETHNICITY**
Regularly collect and use data broken down by race and ethnicity to reflect on progress.
- **RECRUITMENT & HIRING PEOPLE OF COLOR**
Expand networks and shift recruitment and hiring practices to help people of color join nature-facing professions and city core teams.
- **EQUITY OUTCOMES IN POLICIES, PRACTICES & INVESTMENTS**
Prioritize equity outcomes when implementing policies, practices, strategic investments, and relationship-building steps.



HIGHLIGHTED EXAMPLES of Cities Advancing Equity



SAN FRANCISCO, CA

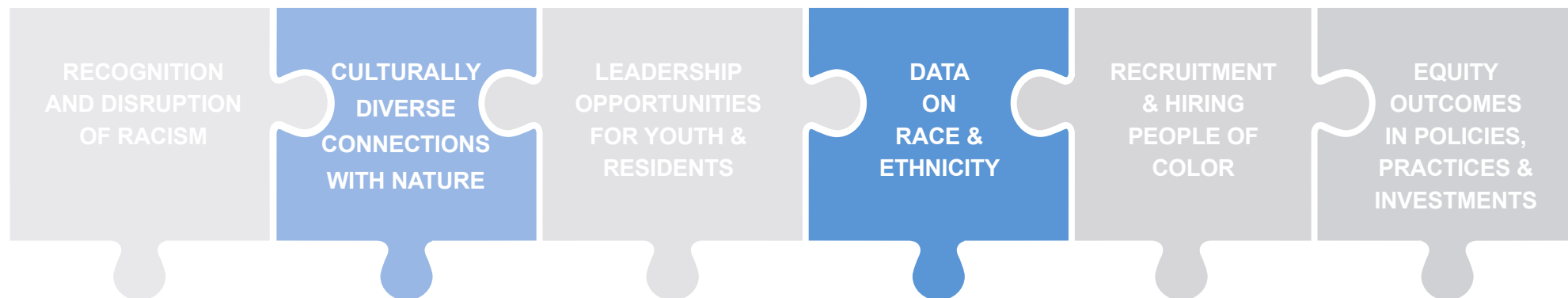
(pop. 883,305) invests resources for [early childhood nature play](#) into zones identified by Recreation and Parks as lacking equitable nature resources and opportunities. Since 2017, the CCCN team has trained 279 early childhood educators in nature-based education, enhanced 36 early childhood playscapes for nature connection, and repurposed 900+ tree stumps for nature play.



SEATTLE, WA

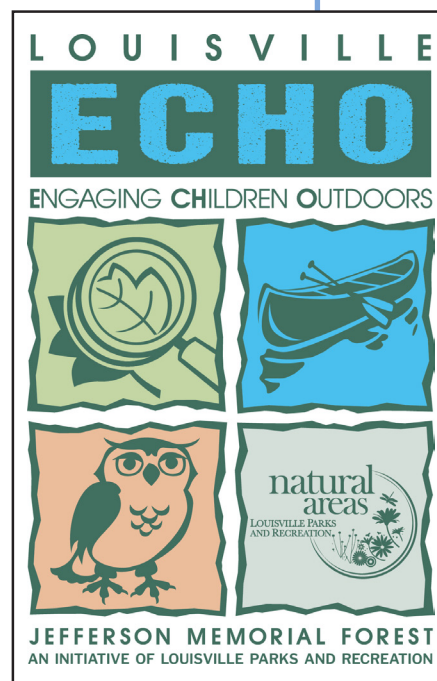
(pop. 744,955) prioritizes resources for historically underserved neighborhoods by using equity data to drive investments in parks and programs. For example, the Parks and Recreation Department sends naturalists off-site for youth programming in neighborhoods with limited park and [nature center](#) access.

ADDITIONAL PROMISING AND EMERGENT EXAMPLES of Cities Advancing Equity



ST. PAUL, MN

(pop. 307,695) used community liaisons to document culturally relevant ways two immigrant communities viewed nature connections. Somali residents noted the relevance of animal husbandry in their cultural traditions, and Hmong community members expressed the importance of agriculture and vegetable gardening. City leaders have added these assets in neighborhood park design and by building relationships, for example through nature programming at [Sun Ray Library](#).



LOUISVILLE, KY

(pop. 602,011) implemented a new data strategy for its [Engaging Children Outdoors](#) (ECHO) program to ensure inclusion of children from neighborhoods identified as needing resources. The city has begun to collect and analyze additional information about participants regarding zip code, gender, and race.

ON THE HORIZON: An evolving list of recommended next steps

