

Supplemental Resources for the Connect to Nature Site Award Application



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Category 1: Be physically active and play outside every day to grow up healthy.

(Three options must be accomplished)

We provide outdoor experiences everyday for every operation day of our site

Examples/suggestions:

- Create a culture of going outside to burn off energy.
- Do not eliminate outdoor time as a means of discipline.

Notes:

- This does not include days when the weather is not ideal.

We encourage outside play for our audience, provide and communicate ideas, and have developed a recognition program.

Examples/suggestions:

- Send home monthly ideas via newsletter, website, or email of quick outside play ideas that families can do. Set up recognition program such as have a bulletin board/social media page/website that families can send in photos to display of their family playing outside.

We provide inspiration to experience the outdoors through various media or programming on site and offsite for families.

Examples/suggestions:

- Poster Source: [Did Your Child Play Outside Today?](#)
- Poster Source: [Ohio Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights](#)



Category 2: Have Access to Safe, Natural Green Spaces in their Community

(Four options must be accomplished)

We promote safe outdoor play in natural environments.

Examples/suggestions:

- [Plant a garden with which the children can interact](#)
- Provide natural items for manipulating.
- Have paths and trails through your landscape that can be accessed and explored.

We promote imaginative unstructured and structured play with natural materials.

Examples/suggestions:

- Is your green space open for visits during operating hours?
- Suggest additional visits by offering a nature scavenger hunt for families to complete on the property.
- Build in playtime in a natural setting into your programming.

We provide a place on our grounds for families to engage with nature during our designated times.

Examples/suggestions:

- Welcoming signage for families to spend time on the property.
- Structured programming with play and exploration built in.

Note:

- We understand that all situations and circumstances are different. Please contact the Board if you have any questions about this section. We would also love to hear other suggestions for engagement your agency has come up with!

We encourage families to use and protect community green spaces beyond our facility.

Examples/suggestions:

- Programming about the importance of sustainable practices.
- Leave No Trace signage/message.
- Website/Social Media posts about conservation and sustainability.



CONTINUED Category 2 : Have Access to Safe, Natural Green Spaces in their Community

(Four options must be accomplished)

We facilitate community activities at our green spaces or other natural resources.

Examples/suggestions:

- Partner with other agencies to offer on site programming if you do not have staff to facilitate programs on your own.
- Conducting your own in-house programs.
- Provide self-guided program signage or post via website/social media to encourage participation in activities that educate about or expose people to nature.

Provide tobacco free access to our “Connection to Nature Site”

Examples/suggestions:

- No smoking signage posted or no smoking rules are listed in your official rules and regulations.



Category 3: Connect with Nature, with free time to Explore the Outdoors

(Two options must be accomplished)

We provide supplies, materials, and equipment free of charge for children to participate in outdoor programs at our facility.

Examples/suggestions:

- Have nature discovery tools in your office that families check out and return when their time visiting has completed.
- Supply 'tools' for programming to enhance the experience.

Notes:

- The supplies, materials, and equipment do not necessarily need to be top of the line. Items such as magnifying glasses and insect nets can be helpful. But, a piece of string, cardboard tube binoculars, and a notepad can be perceived by participants as all they need to be confident in their explorations.

We incorporate the outdoor experiences into activities we recommend for youth to accomplish away from our site.

Examples/suggestions:

- [Miami County's Nature Quest Program](#) has suggestions for activities families can do on their own.
- Encourage participants and families to keep nature journals. Post prompts through your newsletters/website/social media.
- Encourage participation in partnership programs that encourage outdoor participation such as [The Get Outside Book Club](#).
- Feature activities put on by other agencies that enhance your message of getting outdoors.

We will encourage the correlation of technology in the outdoors to experience nature.

Examples/suggestions:

- Put on nature photography contests via social media.
- Use Citizen Science apps to upload data. (iNaturalist, eBird, Nestwatch)
- Use identification apps to learn about something new.



Category 4: Discover the Wonder of Plants and Animals, Large and Small using all Five Senses

(Must accomplish 3 with special encouragement to accomplish the first option)

Our facility has an outdoor natural area that can be used for exploration and we have completed the survey about this area at this link.

Notes:

- For assistance with this section, contact dhovath@metroparks.org
- This survey is another google form which you fill out to list the address, acreage and describe who visits. Also you note if it is a private or public area. Many places of worship and other sites have natural areas used by their own youth audience on a routine basis and can be listed even if they are not open to the general public.

We encourage artistic expressions that celebrate nature.

Examples/suggestions:

- Encourage journaling, collages, leaf rubbing and other art projects that incorporate natural elements.

We provide an opportunity for visitors to listen to the sounds of nature.

Examples/suggestions:

- Use signage or programming that encourages participants and visitors to pause and listen to the nature sounds around them providing a nice place to sit and focus on the area around you. This is especially effective by small brooks or places where bird sounds are common.

We have changed our mowing routine to allow meadows to grow instead of turf grass to increase connection to nature habitat opportunities for youth.

Examples/suggestions:

- Create no-mow zones and educate the public about the benefits through signage.

Notes:

- A no-mow Zone can be large or small depending on your available space.



Category 5: Explore the Diversity of Ohio's Natural Habitats

(Two options must be accomplished)

We provide suggestions for family excursions to Ohio natural habitats.

Examples/suggestions:

- Contact your county, city, and township park systems or local nature centers for opportunities

We encourage our audience to participate in local outdoor programs once a month.

Examples/suggestions:

- For specific habitat excursions to suggest, contact your local park system or nature center
- MVLNCI Partners and Board Members offer a wealth of opportunities. [Visit our webpage for their contact information.](#)

We have modified our policies to expand more natural areas open to the public at our facilities.

Examples/suggestions:

- Many land management policies call for extensive mowing. Often water retention ponds are routinely mowed around when leaving some edge to grow up will make is less likely to attract Canada Goose while also providing more habitat. You may want to adjust your policy and mowing patterns to encourage Asters and Goldenrod Flowers in a small non-mowed area to provide butterfly habitat. (For example, mow once a year in late March instead of weekly or monthly)
- Contact dhorvath@metroparks.org for assistance on this Action Item.



Category 6: Understand the Patterns and Cycles in Nature

(Two options must be accomplished)

We post on social media or website/page a fact or information that encourages our audience to observe these seasonal natural happenings.

Examples/suggestions:

- For ideas on what to post, you can follow [MVLNCI's Facebook Page](#)
- The Children and Nature Network is also a great resource
- Examples of Patterns and Cycles in Nature:
 - Water Cycle
 - Individual Lifecycles for specific wildlife
 - Hibernation
 - Photosynthesis
 - Seasons and Time
 - Rock Cycle
 - Carbon Cycle
 - Decomposition Cycle
 - Lunar Cycle

We provide a facilitated opportunity for youth using our site to observe nature during all seasons.

Notes:

- Facilitated opportunities can be in the form of signage, social media posts, and downloadable scavenger hunts in addition to in-person programming.



Category 7: Experience the Joys of Splashing, Playing, and Swimming in Safe, Clean Lakes and Streams

(One option must be accomplished)

We will distribute information about natural waters that can be explored in our area.

Examples/suggestions:

- Contact your county, city, and township park systems or local nature centers for opportunities
- MVLNCI Partners and Board Members offer a wealth of opportunities. [Visit our webpage for their contact information.](#)

Our facility has natural waters that can be explored by our audience

Notes:

- You may also have temporary wet areas which from big puddles on the grass or even create your own rain-gardens to enhance these areas which can be great access for children to explore a wet environment.
- For guidance on creating opportunities to explore natural waters at your facility, reach out to our Partners and your local Park Districts and Nature Preserves.



Category 8: Be Fully Immersed in Nature by Camping Overnight

(Two options must be accomplished)

We provide local camping information

Examples/suggestions:

- Highlight local opportunities for camping by keeping brochures from local campsites on hand for parents to access
- Send an informational email or post to social media local camping information.
- Encourage backyard camping

Notes

- You can do this in conjunction with the second option in this section.

We encourage participation in the Great American Campout National Wildlife Federation

Examples/suggestions:

- [Visit their website for more information](#)

We provide outdoor camping opportunities at our facilities.

Notes

- You may offer programming that hosts the occasional family camp-out at your site. These can be organized around a camp fire sing along, full moons or meteor events like the Perseid Meteor Shower for greater effect.
- To get a camping program/event started, please feel free to reach out to our Partners and your local Park Districts and Nature Preserves that already offer this option for guidance.
- Partners: [Visit our webpage for their contact information.](#)



Category 9: Learn How to Give Back to Nature

(Five options must be accomplished)

We facilitate programs or discussion encouraging our audience to protect nature.

Examples/suggestions:

- [The Earth Day website has many suggestions](#)
- [Leave No Trace](#)

We encourage monthly nature focus ideas for our audience to give back to and protect nature including recycling, planting seeds, picking up litter etc.

Examples/suggestions:

- Consider a monthly Facebook Post encouraging your audience to take a small conservation action or volunteer with conservation activity at your site.
- MVLNCI Partners and Board Members offer a wealth of opportunities. [Visit our webpage for their contact information.](#)

We encourage parents to share their nature connection stories from their childhood with their children.

Examples/suggestions:

- Create 'dinner conversation prompts' to encourage parents to share
- Have a session during a campfire program for parents to share memories.

We encourage families to certify their backyards as National Wildlife Federation Backyard Habitat or similar natural habitat certification.

Examples/suggestions:

- Direct families toward programming that encourages habitat certification
- [Habitat Certification Webpage](#)

We participate in the Lights Out Miami Valley program to protect birds by eliminating extraneous outdoor lighting during migration season.

Examples/suggestions:

- [Lights Out Miami Valley](#)



CONTINUED Category 9: Learn How to Give Back to Nature

(Five options must be accomplished)

We are: A) a National Wildlife Federation certified WILDLIFE HABITAT or B) a Monarch Watch certified MONARCH WAYSTATION site or C) other similar natural habitat certification; and have our sign posted on our grounds.

Examples/suggestions:

- [NWF Certified Habitats](#)
- [Monarch Waystations](#)

We model giving back to nature by partnering with other conservation-minded organizations on projects that encourage a nature rich environment.

Examples/suggestions:

- See our partner list for potential partners in these endeavors. [Visit our webpage for their contact information.](#)
- Contact your local Nature Centers, Park Districts, and Nature Preserves for more information about ways to partner with them.

We have toured and taken a pledge at the Montgomery County Environmental Learning Center.

Examples/suggestions:

- [More information on tours](#)