



**City of Austin Parks & Recreation Department
Request for Proposal
Velocity Skillpoint Alliance – Regan High School Project**

BACKGROUND:

The City of Austin Parks & Recreation Department:

The City of Austin Parks & Recreation Department (PARD) provides, protects, and preserves Austin’s vast collection of public parks and open green space and promotes quality recreational, cultural and outdoor experiences for the Austin community.

The Parks Department is in charge of building, improving and maintaining:

- 300 public parks
- 20,000 acres of open green space
- 212 miles of trails
- 41 public swimming pools
- 26 recreation and senior centers, including tennis centers and golf courses
- 5 historical cemeteries
- 23 historic buildings
- In addition to maintaining facilities, PARD also runs a numbers of educational and sports programming

The Department has achieved national accreditation twice (in 2007 and 2012) from the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). CAPRA recognizes park and recreation agencies for excellence in operation and service, and is the only body that accredits park and recreation agencies at a national level.

Cities Connecting Children to Nature Initiative:

In 2014 the National League of Cities and the Children & Nature Network partnered together to create the Cities Connecting Children to Nature Initiative (CCCN) with the goal of helping city leaders and their partners ensure that all children have the opportunity to play, learn and grow in nature, from city parks to the great outdoors.

The initiative believes that City leaders have extensive tools at their disposal to connect young people with nature and create the next generation of environmental stewards. Importantly, cities can play a



role in closing the "nature gap," particularly among low-income children and children of color. CCCN was created to support cities that want to build and strengthen connections to nature as integral elements of city plans and policies, programs, partnerships, and leadership strategies.

The problem we're trying to solve:

Today's youth are spending less and less time in the outdoors playing in and connecting with the natural world. This lack of time spent outdoors and lack of unstructured play can have negative affects on children's physical and mental health as well as their cognitive development and overall well being.

Recent studies have shown that:

- Kids spend over 50 hours a week on a electronic device
- Kids spend 90% of their time indoors
- The rate of childhood obesity has risen from 7% - 18% in the last 30 years
- Pre-schoolers are the fastest growing market for anti-depressants

But studies also show that increased time spent in nature can have tremendous positive effects:

- Children who spend even a small amount of time in nature each day show reduced symptoms of ADHD
- Hospitals now universally integrate nature scenes into hospital rooms, and are adding healing gardens and opportunities to see nature out one's window, as evidence shows that it improves the healing process
- Children who have regular time outside in nature perform better in school.
- Outdoor play is essential to children's abilities to learn problem solving and cooperation with other children.
- Daily exposure to natural settings increases children's ability to focus and therefore enhances cognitive abilities.
- Children with a park playground near their home are more likely to be of a healthy weight
- Nature activities soothe ADD symptoms

The Cities Connecting Children to Nature Initiative is working with city governments to tackle this issue and discover ways to help ensure that more children have regular and meaningful contact with nature and the outdoors.



PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

In March of 2016 The City of Austin Parks & Recreation Department (PARC) was awarded a \$25,000 Planning Grant by the Cities Connecting Children to Nature Initiative, designed to help city leaders develop strategies for getting more young people outdoors and connected to nature with a particular focus on children and youth in low-income and underserved communities. Austin was one of only six cities nationwide to receive this grant along with Saint Paul, Minnesota; Madison, Wisconsin; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Providence, Rhode Island; and Louisville, Kentucky.

This grant is currently funding a six-month strategic planning process. During this process PARC is bringing together different City Departments, Non-profit Organizations, Hospitals, Health Professionals and Community Members to understand the biggest gaps and barriers that exist in Austin for connecting children to nature and creating solutions to fill those gaps to ensure that every child in Austin has abundant and equitable access to nature.

TASKS:

As part of the CCCN Strategic Planning Process PARC needs to collect information from community members (mainly parents and children) to understand:

- How much time they currently spend outside in nature.
- What usually prevents them from spending time outside.
- What would help them spend more time in nature on a regular basis.

We're asking Velocity Skillpoint Alliance students to conduct community surveys to help answer the above questions and then create solutions for the community to help children and their families spend more time outside interacting with nature on a regular basis.



DELIVERABLES:

1. Develop strategies to survey a diverse range of parents and children (Ideal places for citizen communication are places where people congregate such as: community centers, pools, shopping centers, parks etc.)
2. The students will use prepared survey questions created by PARD via Survey Monkey, engage with citizens in the community and document input from the citizens. In addition, students may document data from themselves, their peers and families.
3. Project facilitators and students should determine an appropriate number of days and hours for citizen interaction. Students should identify times and locations to go into the field to reach target populations.
4. PARD expects students will document feedback from at least 100 parents and 50 children (ages 0-18).
5. PARD expects students to enter all survey data collected into SurveyMonkey and use provided tools to analyze the data collected. (PARD will provide access to a Survey Monkey account)
6. Students will present the methodology, data points, analysis via a PowerPoint or other multimedia presentation. The presentation should include real-world solution(s) to the issue that can be implemented in your neighborhood for increasing children's time spent outdoors in nature on a regular basis. Solutions should include examples of how you used Science, Technology, Math or Engineering to arrive at your conclusions.

LIMITATIONS:

Solutions offered should complement goals outlined by the CCCN Implementation Plan Outline and fit within the mission and service scope of PARD. If there are budget considerations for the solutions, students should specify and detail out the budget needs.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Students should work in teams of 2-3 and wear provided PARD shirts when communicating with citizens and act professionally during interactions. While in the field, students will act as ambassadors for the City.

Today's children are spending more and more time inside on screens than ever before and studies are showing that this can have significant consequences for a child's emotional and physical health.

CHECK-IN DATES:



TBD



RESOURCES:

City of Austin Parks & Recreation Department:

- Main Website: <https://austintexas.gov/department/parks-and-recreation>
- 2015 Annual Report: [https://issuu.com/atxparksmarketing/docs/pard annual report 2015 interactive](https://issuu.com/atxparksmarketing/docs/pard_annual_report_2015_interactive)
- Imagine Austin Comprehensive City Plan: <http://www.austintexas.gov/department/imagine-austin-download-center>

National League of Cities

- Institute for Youth, Education & Families: <http://www.nlc.org/find-city-solutions/institute-for-youth-education-and-families>

The Children & Nature Network - Research Library

- Research Center: <http://www.childrenandnature.org/learn/research-resources/>
- News Center: <http://www.childrenandnature.org/learn/news-center/>