



## Family Nature Club New Leader Guidebook



## Acknowledgments

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Unless otherwise specified, all photographs in this guidebook are from Columbia Families in Nature and shared with the permission of the participants.

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This guidebook is intended to be a companion resource to “Unplugged: 15 Steps to Disconnect from Technology and Reconnect with Nature, Yourself, Friends, and Family” by Jason Sperling.





## Introduction

The purpose of family nature clubs (FNCs), as articulated and promoted by the Children & Nature Network, is to gather children, families, friends and community members together to enjoy nature on a regular basis. The way in which FNCs are designed to meet that common purpose varies significantly, depending on the context within which they operate and the specific goals of their leaders. Overall, FNCs offer low-cost, simple way for individuals and organizations to foster significant positive personal, familial, and community outcomes.

This guidebook was developed out of extensive research on FNCs that included creating a new family nature club, [Columbia Families in Nature](#) (CFIN), in my own community in central Maryland as well as conducting surveys and interviews with the leaders and participants of other FNCs. In total, the results of my research weaved together insights from: 47 family nature clubs, 348 unique individuals that completed in-depth surveys, 48 in-depth interviews, and my experience of designing, launching, and leading a new FNC and participating in outings with my own family. Between March 2014 and December 2015 my family offered 71 CFIN outings that were enjoyed by more than 250 unique families over the course of more than 3,200 participant experiences equating to more than 6,500 hours of family time spent in nature.

This guidebook includes easy-to-implement, research-based, and field-tested resources to help you start a FNC in your community and/or within your organization. Contents of the guidebook include:

- [Benefits of Starting a FNC](#)
- [FNC Design Guide](#)
- [Outreach and Communications Strategies](#)
- [Event Planning Considerations](#)
- [Event Activity Suggestions](#)
- [Tips for Sustained Success](#)
- [FNC Planning Worksheet](#)
- [FNC Checklists](#)
- [Additional Resources](#)
- [Examples and Templates](#)
- [8 FNC Profiles](#)



## Benefits of Starting a FNC

When considering starting a FNC, it is helpful to understand the likely benefits for your organization (if applicable), the leader(s) of the FNC, and club participants.

### *Benefits for the Organization*

A FNC is a great way to increase exposure and visibility for the hosting organization in their local community. A recurring, family-focused event is likely to attract current organization members as well as new families that may later join the organization. Promoting family-friendly events in the local media can also increase awareness about the organization among members of the local community.

### *Benefits for Club Leader(s)*

Research on FNCs has identified numerous positive effects for club leaders (D'Amore, 2015). The most commonly reported benefits include enhanced personal relationships, increased well-being, more time spent outdoors, a sense of personal accomplishment, learning about nature, increased leadership opportunities, and satisfaction from teaching people about and helping people connect to nature. By all accounts, leading a FNC is very enjoyable and gratifying work.

### *Benefits for Participants*

Research on family nature clubs has identified more than 20 positive effects for club participants, as detailed below (D'Amore, 2015). These benefits can be organized into seven categories of benefits for both parents and children: learning opportunities, enhanced connection with nature, positive effects for family dynamics, stronger social connections, meaningful and memorable experiences, enhanced personal well-being, and reduced barriers to spending time in nature. There are many additional physical, emotional, and intellectual benefits of spending time in nature that are achieved by participating in a family nature club. For example, research shows that time spent in nature can improve overall psychological well-being, reduce ADHD, and reduce health problems, such as those associated with childhood obesity.



## The Top 20 Benefits of Participating in a Family Nature Club!

### Learning opportunities:

1. Learning about places to go in nature
2. Learning about the natural world
3. Learning from leaders and/or other families (about ways to be in nature, ways to be with kids, etc.)

### Nature connections:

4. Spending more time in nature
5. Developing a greater sense of connection with nature
6. Increased environmental awareness and/or behavior

### Family connections:

7. Being more physically active as a family
8. Having quality time together as a family
9. Developing a greater sense of connection as a family

### Social connections:

10. Meeting new families / getting to know new people
11. Developing a sense of community (friendships with like-minded people, etc.)
12. Feeling a stronger overall sense of connection to the area we live in

### Meaningful experiences:

13. Had fun, memorable (interesting, exciting, adventurous, novel, etc.) experiences
14. Experienced a sense of accomplishment and/or expansion of comfort zone
15. My child(ren) has enjoyed free play / playing with other kids (had the opportunity for independence, imagination, creativity, exploration, etc.)

### Enhanced well-being:

16. Child(ren) having experiences that are positive for their behavior (problem solving, patience, sharing, independence, etc.)
17. Experiencing an enhanced sense of well-being (relaxation, confidence, happiness, etc.)
18. Having experiences that foster a sense of connection to something bigger (spiritual, religious, etc.)

### Reduced barriers to getting out in nature:

19. Fewer barriers to getting out in nature (more prepared, experienced, comfortable, and/or leveraging the planning done by the FNC leader, etc.)
20. A greater commitment to spending time in nature (setting time in schedule, getting gear, such as play shoes, that make it more viable, etc.)





## FNC Design Guide

Family nature clubs hold events in natural outdoor settings, are geared toward family participation, and are designed to develop positive connections with nature through direct, reoccurring experience. Beyond that, the specific structure of clubs varies to suit the context in which they are created. The following are key elements to consider when designing your FNC.

### 1. Define your purpose

Having a clear purpose will help to inform many other FNC design decisions, such as audience and event structure. For example, do you want to offer an opportunity for families to play in nature together, foster a greater sense of local community, or create nature-based experiential learning opportunities.

### 2. Determine who will lead the FNC

FNC leadership can be the responsibility of one person or group of co-leaders with specific responsibilities. Interest, availability, and club design decisions (i.e., event frequency and location) will inform what makes the most sense for your context.

### 3. Identify your audiences

Consider whether there are particular audiences from your broader community that you are interested in engaging (i.e., at risk youth, cultural groups) or organizations that you would like to collaborate with (i.e., schools, community centers). The audiences you identify will affect your communications strategies and the number of people that participate in your events.

Family nature clubs are as diverse as the communities they serve. Some are located in small towns while others are in large cities, some have focus on environmental education while others focus on child-led free play, some are intentionally kept small while others have grown so large that offshoots or sub-clubs are developed to manage demand and group size. For example, in a rural Pennsylvania community the library has a club that meets on their property every Thursday evening for an hour to read a seasonal book and play. In an urban California area a club meets each weekend to take a hike at local parks. In a suburban Maryland community, families gather every other weekend at a different place to play, explore, learn, and do conservation projects.

### 4. Determine event frequency and time

It is important to establish a consistent schedule for your FNC events so families can make it a reliable, recurring part of their schedules. Event frequency can range from quarterly to weekly; the most common is once or twice a month. In addition to picking a frequency, you will want to identify a set day and time of the week that events will be held. Keep in mind that the day and time of the week will affect who is able to attend.

### 5. Determine Event location(s)

If you are starting a FNC as a part of an organization that owns property, you could hold all FNC events there or choose a hybrid approach in which you hold some events at your property and others at natural areas in the community. If you do not have consistent access to a particular property, which is the case for many FNCs, identify local natural areas where you can hold events for a minimal fee or no fee. Some clubs pick just a few locations to visit over and over again, developing a close connection with particular places. Other clubs make a point to visit new areas at almost every outing, exposing participants to as many natural places in the community as possible.



## Outreach and Communications Strategies

Depending on your FNC purpose and audience, your outreach and communications strategies may vary. The following outreach and communications strategies will help you build a broad base of FNC participants.

### 1. Engage community partners

Look for organizations in the community that share your interest in youth, families, and nature and ask them to help you spread the word. Send them an announcement about your FNC and give them club fliers/postcards described below. Think broadly on this one, from pediatrician offices and schools, to groups for moms and outdoor enthusiasts, to local parks and conservation focused organizations. Engaging local organizations and inviting them to support and be a part of your FNC is an important strategy for growing your club.

### 2. Build an online presence

Web sites and social media feeds are the primary ways people will obtain information about your FNC events. These online tools also allow you to share photos of your events (be sure to have participants sign photo release forms before posting pictures of them online, see template language below). Some FNCs use MeetUp.com to organize their events. Others use a Facebook page to share information and engage attendees in conversations. You can also create Facebook “events” that will allow people to share your event through their own social networks. Instagram can be used to publish event photos right from your smartphone or tablet.

### 3. E-mail an announcement

An e-mailed FNC announcement can be a versatile outreach tool. With minor modifications, the same content can be sent to members of organizations you participate in, local media outlets, community allies (more on that below), and more. All your communications materials should include the “who, what, where, when, and why” of your FNC and links to your online platforms.

### 4. Create printed materials

A simple, eye catching flier or postcard can engage new audiences. Post them in stores, community centers, libraries, coffee shops, and other gathering places. Printed materials should direct interested families to your website or social media page to learn more about your FNC. See the “Examples and Templates” section of this guidebook for more ideas.



### 5. Stay in touch

Maintain a list of people interested in your FNC, including allies and previous event participants. You can use tools such as Excel, Eventbrite, or Signup Genius to easily manage this. Send a brief monthly or quarterly e-mail update that includes your upcoming FNC events, select testimonials from event participants, links relevant resources, etc. See the “Additional Resources” section at the end of this guidebook for suggestions.



## Event Planning Considerations

Depending on your FNC's purpose, audience, and location, there are a variety of things to consider when planning an event.

### 1. *Event style or approach*

Each FNC tends to have something of a style or approach, guided by the purpose and audience, which influences the way events are designed. Some clubs have events that are very informal while others follow a consistent structure. Some are focused on child-led play while others have educational objectives. Some prioritize physical activity while others do not cover much distance. Some specifically stay very local and others go further afield. Many clubs intentionally offer a variety of event and activity types. It is helpful to determine the type of events your FNC will offer and communicate this to prospective participants.

When FNC participants were asked to indicate the major factors that led them to join their FNC they said:

- To have fun, 87%
- To learn about places to take my child(ren) in nature, 78%
- The health and well-being of my child(ren), 72%
- To learn about nature, 65%
- To meet new families, 61%
- To get quality time with my children, 60%
- For motivation to stay active as a family, 54%



### 2. *Cost considerations*

It is important to be clear about whether there is a fee to participate in FNC events. Many FNCs are free, some ask participants to cover their own costs (if there are any costs associated with a particular event), some have a small per-event fee, and some require an annual membership fee. Fee structures will influence participation in FNC in a variety of ways.

### 3. *Participant registration*

Consider whether you want families to pre-register for events or drop in the day of an event. For planning purposes, it is often easier if pre-registration is required, particularly if there is a fee involved, but the importance of this depends on the way your events are structured. There are a variety of ways to have people pre-register for an event, from asking them to e-mail the FNC leader or post to your Facebook or Meetup group page to using easy online tools such as Survey Monkey, Eventbrite, or Signup Genius to capture names and contact information.



## 4. *Event locations*

If all of your events will be held on one property, you can consider ways to help FNC participants connect meaningfully with that land (for example, by focusing on seasonal changes). If you plan to hold some or all of your events on property owned by other entities, start by making a list of the places that would be of interest (such as parks, farms, and nature centers). Determine whether certain places would be better suited to certain seasons (e.g., water-based play during the summer and indoor nature centers during the winter) and to certain participant groups based on terrain, travel distance, and other physical considerations. Contact the property owner/manager at the beginning of your event planning process to let them know what you would like to do and to lock down a date before you announce it publicly. Different levels of coordination are required with different property owners. Ask about existing nature-based programs that may be a fit for your FNC – you may not have to set up your own activity.

## 5. *Event communications*

Post sufficient details about your events to your website and social media pages to ensure potential attendees understand the event and any associated fees and physical requirements. If people are required to sign-up in advance and you are able to capture e-mail addresses, you will be well served by sending a reminder e-mail a few days in advance to registered attendees with details about the event and any suggested preparations (such as what to wear or bring).

## 6. *Liability/safety considerations*

It is important to clearly communicate what each event will entail, so people can determine whether it is a good fit for their family, and provide detailed preparation guidance in advance of the event. Leaders should keep a first aid kit handy as well as other safety equipment suitable for the terrain (such as a flotation device for an event involving water play). Most FNCs require participants to complete a liability waiver (example language is offered below). Some small FNCs that serve a small, closed group of families may not get liability insurance. Whether or not to obtain liability insurance is an important consideration and having formal coverage is strongly recommended overall. Some places may require groups to have insurance to visit their property.



## Event Activity Suggestions

Once you have a broad plan for the “when” and “where” of your FNC events and a general approach for the types of events you want to offer, you will need to create a plan for each event.

At the most basic, families show up to FNC events and explore and play in nature together. If you would like more structured events featuring specific activities and/or learning objectives, there are a variety of places to get inspiration.

A number of organizations offer resources focused on engaging youth in the outdoors, such as the Children & Nature Network, Nature Explore, Nature Rocks, Take a Child Outside, and other related organizations (see the Additional Resources section for links). Some of these resources are organized by the age of the participants and others are organized by the type of activity or area of inquiry (such as soil, air, woods, waters, wildlife).

FNC activities could include:

- Walking in the woods
- Scavenger hunts
- Bird watching
- Planting a garden
- Looking for bats at dusk
- Building a shelter with natural materials
- Visiting a farm
- Going fruit picking
- Creek exploration
- Live animal presentations
- Campfires and marshmallow roasting

As with all elements of your club design, consider your purpose, audience, and available locations when selecting activities. Some general tips are to

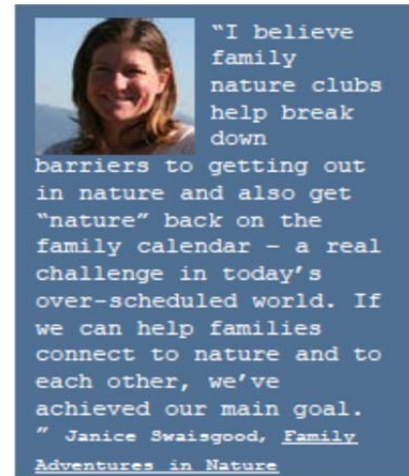
- Prioritize fun
- Allow some time for free play
- Focus on experiences that use multiple senses (e.g., water play or picking berries)
- Foster social interaction among participants



## Tips for Sustained Success

### *Getting people to show up:*

- **Schedule events in advance and regularly:** Having your FNC events on the same day(s) each month and announcing the events far in advance will help families get club events on their calendars.
- **Pre-registration:** This helps you plan adequately for events and gives people a sense of accountability for showing up, especially if you request cancellation notification.
- **Send pre-event e-mail:** Sending an e-mail reminder a few days before each event helps families feel excited and prepared and increases the likelihood that they will show up. Include weather-specific information on what to expect and how to dress in every pre-event reminder.



### *Managing events:*

- **Pre-visit new places:** Ensure the location is appropriate for your planned event before announcing it. This visit also ensures that you know where to take breaks or look for critters and can tell participants in your pre-event e-mail what to expect.
- **Something to do while waiting:** Pick a location where children can play while you wait for everyone to gather and/or have something for them to do while waiting (such as blowing bubbles or making a simple craft).
- **Welcome participants:** Welcome people warmly into the group and help them connect with each other. Name badges and scavenger hunts can be useful tools to encourage socializing.

### *Getting people to keep coming:*

- **Nurture confidence:** Encourage parents to slow down and follow their children's interests, and encourage everyone to explore, ask questions, and share their knowledge.
- **Keep it fun:** The big goal of your event is to get families excited about enjoying nature and inspired to do it more often. So relax and have fun!
- **Send follow-up notes, post pictures:** A thank you e-mail after each outing is a nice touch, especially if you invite constructive feedback that can help you in planning future events. Posting photographs on your social media platform and encouraging participants to do the same is a good way to build interest in future events.

### *Reaching new audiences:*

- **Word of mouth:** This is one of the best ways for people to learn about your FNC. Create a welcoming, positive experience for families and invite them to bring their friends to future events. Give them a FNC flier to post in an area they frequent and invite them to share their photos to your social media sites.
- **Media outreach:** Invite local reporters to an event that you anticipate will have a good turnout, photo opportunities, and an engaging story.





## **FNC Planning Worksheet**

The following prompts and space can be used to beginning planning your FNC.

### ***FNC Design:***

Club name:

Club purpose:

Leader(s):

Intended audience (e.g., organization members, community families, pre-school aged children):

Event frequency:

Event day and time:

Event location(s):

### ***Communications and Outreach:***

Online platform(s) (website, Facebook, Meetup, etc.):

List of community resources/allies:

### ***Event Planning:***

Event approach (informal, free-play focused, conservation projects, learning-objectives, etc.):

Participation costs (if any):



## FNC Checklists

### *Things to do before launching your FNC:*

- Set up a Web page, Facebook page, and any other online feeds
- Register your FNC with the Children & Nature Network
- Set up a participant registration system (if applicable)
- Develop liability and photo release forms
- Set dates and locations for several months of events
- Create and distribute announcement e-mails and printed materials

### *Things to do before each event:*

- Develop a basic plan for each event
- Pre-visit the event location
- Communicate the event plan with the property owner and coordinate as needed
- Advertise the event and direct families to pre-register (if applicable)
- Send a reminder e-mail to registered families with event details (two days in advance)
- Prepare any event materials (name badges, sign-in sheets, scavenger hunts, etc.)
- Refresh leader materials (backpack with first aid kit, field guides, binoculars, etc.)

### *Things to do at the event:*

- Have a clear place for people to check in
- Either check off people's names if they pre-registered, or add them to the list of attendees
- Make sure the liability and photo release is completed for each family
- Hand out any onsite materials (i.e., name badges, maps, scavenger hunts)
- Have something to keep the kids occupied or a place for them to play while waiting
- Gather everyone together to kick the event off – introduce yourself and any other leaders for the activity and let people know what to expect (i.e., route, timing, things to notice)
- Interact with attendees and encourage them to interact as a family and within the group
- Have fun and take pictures!

### *Things to do after each event:*

- Send thank you e-mails to participants--include information about the next few events, encourage them to share pictures and positive experiences on social media, and invite them to provide you feedback on the event, if desired
- Send a thank you e-mail to property owner/point of contact (if applicable)
- Post photos from the event to your Web site/social media pages
- Update your Web site/social media pages to focus on your next event
- Post "testimonials" to your Web site/social media pages if you gather feedback
- Send out a monthly email to contacts letting them know about upcoming events
- Post notices about relevant activities and events in the community and/or things to notice in nature (i.e., flowers in bloom, birds migrating) as a way to keep the conversation going



## Additional Resources

### Resource Organizations:

- Children & Nature Network ([www.childrenandnature.org](http://www.childrenandnature.org))
- Nature Explorer ([www.natureexplore.org](http://www.natureexplore.org))
- Nature Rocks ([www.naturerocks.org](http://www.naturerocks.org))
- Take a Child Outside ([www.takeachildoutside.org](http://www.takeachildoutside.org))

### Examples of Family Nature Clubs:

- Columbia Families in Nature ([www.columbiefamiliesinnature.org](http://www.columbiefamiliesinnature.org))
- Family Adventures in Nature San Diego (<http://quetallsd.wix.com/familyadventures>)
- Prairie Loft Family Outdoor Club ([www.prairieloft.org/Prairie\\_Loft/Prairie\\_Loft\\_Home.html](http://www.prairieloft.org/Prairie_Loft/Prairie_Loft_Home.html))
- Austin Families in Nature (<http://familiesinnature.org/benefits-of-a-family-nature-club>)



Please see the FNC Profile section at the end of the guidebook for detailed examples of eight FNCs that participated in the research that informed this resource.

For links to other family nature clubs, visit the Children & Nature Network club directory ([www.childrenandnature.org/directory/clubs](http://www.childrenandnature.org/directory/clubs)).

### Books:

- Cornell, Joseph. (1999). *Sharing Nature with Children II*. Dawn Publications.
- Dunlap, Julie & Kellert, Stephen. (2012). *Companions in Wonder: Children and Adults Exploring Nature Together*. MIT Press.
- Leslie, Clare (2010). *The Nature Connection: An Outdoor Workbook for Kids, Families, and Classrooms*. Storey Publishing.
- Louv, Richard. (2008). *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Algonquin Books.
- Louv, Richard. (2012). *The Nature Principle: Human Restoration and the End of Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Algonquin Books.
- Van Noy, Rick. (2008). *A Natural Sense of Wonder: Connecting Kids with Nature Through the Seasons*. University of Georgia Press.
- Ward, Jennifer. (2008). *I Love Dirt: 52 Activities to Help You and Your Kids Discover the Wonder of Nature*. Trumpeter.
- Young, Jon. (2010). *Coyotes Guide to Connecting with Nature*. OwlLink Media.

### Cited Research:

- D'Amore, C. (2015). Family Nature Clubs: Creating the Conditions for Social and Environmental Connection and Care (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.





## Examples and Templates

### Announcements

A basic FNC announcement can be modified for a variety of uses. The following example is targeted towards an ally organization.

“I want to share an update relevant to ALLY ORGANIZATION NAME. A family nature club is being launched to provide free, fun, community oriented opportunities for families to spend time together in nature. *On two Sunday afternoons a month, from 2 to 4pm*, CLUB NAME outings will take place in natural areas in and around YOUR COMMUNITY. These outings will emphasize play time in nature and also include hands-on environmental education and conservation activities. The first CLUB NAME event will be on EVENT DATE AND DESCRIPTION. You can learn more at INSERT YOUR ONLINE PLATFORM(s).”

### Flier

Two types of fliers can be useful for advertising your FNC. One is a basic club information flier that can be widely distributed and is not time specific and the other is an event specific flier, which is helpful to share with FNC participants.



Date	Location	Activity Notes
April 6	Middle Patuxent River, Kings Contrivance	We will start at the Amherst House in Kings Contrivance and take a beautiful wooded hike along the river. We will be looking for spring flowers and stopping at several tot lots to play.
April 13	Jackson Pond, Long Reach	We will start at the Phelps Luk neighborhood center and walk around Jackson Pond, enjoying a beautiful stand of old beech trees along the way. These are natural gems of Columbia!
April 27	Wilde Lake	To celebrate Arbor Day we will explore parts of Wilde Lake that include an arboretum and gather natural materials that we will use to create art projects under the guidance of a outdoor educator.
May 4	Miller Branch Library, Enchanted Garden	May is Garden for Wildlife Month. We will be given a tour of the library's Enchanted Children's Garden, plant seeds for sunflowers, and go on a spring scavenger hunt. A tour of their green roof will be available.
May 25	Clay's Forest woods, Harper's Choice	We will start at the Swansfield neighborhood center and take a hike through the woods that includes several stream crossings. Prepare to explore the streams!
June 1	Patapsco Park, Orange Grove area	This moderately challenging hike will be guided by a professional outdoor educator who has extensive knowledge of this trail overlooking several beautiful waterfalls.

Outings are held from 2:00 to 4:00 pm  
Pre-registration is required  
[www.columbiafamiliesinnature.org](http://www.columbiafamiliesinnature.org)



## Registration form

A registration form should capture several key pieces of information: the names of all family members, the ages of children, an email address for a primary adult contact, and the anticipated date of the family's first FNC event. It is helpful to use an online registration process where the family can provide this information before their first event in such a way that it will feed into a database you can easily manage and then for subsequent outings they can sign-up more simply by just indicating that their family will attend. This type of registration process can include the liability and photo release forms (templates provided below) as well. For an example, visit [www.surveymonkey.com/s/CFINreg](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CFINreg).

"Thank you for your interest in participating in CLUB NAME outings! This is a family nature club being offered by the [ORGANIZATION OR GROUP if relevant or your family's name] to [STATE PURPOSE HERE].

You only need to complete this form before your first outing. It should take less than five minutes. Families that do not complete this online form in advance will need to complete a paper form with the same information at the beginning of their first outing - so doing it here will save everyone time! Registration is required so we are able to effectively plan events. For future events you will just need to submit a quick sign-up form on the website or club Facebook page and check in at the event.

Please provide the following contact information for yourself and any other adult expected to participate in FNC events with you (i.e. spouse, partner, grandparent, etc.) if applicable.

- Your first name:
- Your last name:
- Your email:
- Other adult's first name:
- Other adult's last name:
- Other adult's email:

What is the first name and age of the children participating in FNC events with you? Please include all children likely to participate in FNC events. At each event you will have an opportunity to indicate who is actually present.

- Child 1 – Name & Age
- Child 2 – Name & Age
- Child 3 – Name & Age
- Child 4 – Name & Age
- Child 5 – Name & Age
- Child 6 – Name & Age

What is the date of the FIRST FNC event you are planning to attend?"



## ***Waiver and Release from Liability***

You can do an internet search for standard liability waivers and customize it based on the specifics of your FNC. The following is an example FNC liability waiver. This type of waiver can be completed online in advance of outings and cover all event participation or be added to a hard copy sign in sheet that people complete at their first event or each event they attend.

“My aforementioned family members and I, as well as any additional guests that we bring to an event, are voluntarily participating in FNC events and activities. I understand that there is a certain amount of risk associated with the physical activity of visiting natural areas, including personal injury and/or damage to personal property. If necessary, I have obtained all medical clearances for members of my family (and guests) to participate in these activities and take responsibility for the health and safety for myself and each person that I bring to FNC events (i.e. bringing any needed medical supplies such as inhalers and closely supervising my children).

By participating in FNC events, I assume any risk and waive any claims of damage to personal property, personal injury, or death of myself or the family members, including children and guests, who I am responsible for bringing to FNC events. I have signed this Agreement freely, voluntarily, under no duress. The selection of the "yes" option below is proof of my intention to execute a complete and unconditional WAIVER AND RELEASE of all liability to the full extent of the law. I am 18 year of age or older and mentally competent to enter into this waiver.”

## ***Photo Release***

Customize the following photo release based on the specifics of your FNC. A photo release can be completed online in advance of event participant and cover all future events or be added to a hard copy sign in sheet that people complete at their first event or each event they attend.

“I grant FNC NAME the right to take photographs of me, my family members and any guests during outings that we participate in as a part of this family nature club. I agree that FNC NAME may use such photographs for any lawful purpose, including, for example, print or electronic publicity, illustration, advertising, and web content. I have read and agree to the above [have check box that says “yes” or a place for signature].”

## ***FAQs (web content)***

Customize the following frequently asked questions based on specifics of your FNC. This is great content to include on your online platform.

**What is [FNC NAME]?** We are a family nature club! It is our goal to gather families for outdoor adventures and to experience the benefits of time spent together in nature.

**Is there a fee to join?** No! We are a free group and there is no membership fee. In some cases, however, there may be a small fee required to cover the cost for specific events. Full detail about any fees will always be outlined upfront in the event details.

**Are FNC NAME Club outings just for kids and their parents?** ALL family members are welcome! We love having moms, dads, grandparents, aunts/uncles, neighbors, etc. come out with the special kids in their lives.





**Do we need to have much experience with outdoor activities?** No! Come as you are, just wear sturdy shoes, weather appropriate clothes, and bring water and a snack for your family. We will take care of the rest and help you learn what you want to know about getting outdoors as a family as we go. Please review the details for each outing to see if it is a good fit for your family.

**Can children attend events by themselves?** No. FNC NAME requires that adults stay with their children at all times. We encourage you to come prepared to make memories with your kid(s).

**This sounds great! How do I get involved?** It's easy! Either register on the contact us page of this site to receive event invitations, or follow us on Facebook to do the same.

## *Coming Prepared (web content)*

Customize the following event preparation guidelines based on specifics of your FNC activities. This is great content to include on your online platform.

### **Clothing and Shoes:**

Everyone should be dressed for the weather in clothes and shoes that are comfortable enough to move in and are OK to get dirty. The weather can change quickly so wear or pack layers and bring rain gear if it may be needed. It is a good idea to have a spare set of clothes and shoes in the car in case they are needed.

### **Water and Food:**

Each family member needs to have their own full water bottle. Snacks will be helpful for keeping energy up and little bellies happy during outings. Trail mix, dried fruit, energy bars, cheese slices, crackers, and sliced veggies all make good snack options.

### **Backpack:**

In addition to water and snacks, fill it with: sunscreen, insect repellent, hats and sunglasses, tissues, a small garbage bag, and any medication your family may need (such as an inhaler and small first aid kit). Other items you may want to bring are: binoculars, magnifying glass, field guide, a camera, a small container for each child to use to collect nature "treasures", and a towel or small blanket. Older kids may want to wear their own packs too! If you have little ones that may tire quickly, a baby carrier will work better than a stroller unless it is able to go "off-road".

*Be ready to have fun, get dirty, and enjoy nature and each other!*



## **Pre-Event Email:**

The following is an example of an email that can be sent to pre-registered participants two days in advance of a forthcoming FNC event. The specific details should be customized.

“Thank you for signing your family up to be a part of the FNC NAME outing to Sandy Point State Park this Sunday! The following details about this event are intended to help you make the most of it, so please be sure to read them.

**Who/When/Where:** Ten families have signed up to be a part of this outing, which will be held from 2:00 to 4:00pm at [Sandy Point State Park](#) (100 East College Parkway, Annapolis, MD 21409). There is a \$3 per car fee to enter the park. **We will gather at the nearby playground by the beach. Please see the attached park map.**

**What:** Sandy Point State Park is comprised of 786-acres along the Northwestern shore of the majestic Chesapeake Bay. The park’s beaches and picnic areas are well known for their breathtaking scenic water views that overlook one of Maryland’s true treasures. Wildlife viewing and bird watching are favorite pastimes for many park visitors. Sandy Point’s location on the Eastern Flyway makes it an ideal location for viewing a large variety of woodland, marsh and migratory waterfowl. We will enjoy a mix of activities with our group, including time at the playground, walking on the beach and along marsh trails, looking for birds, flying kites, etc.

**Coming Prepared:** The high in Annapolis on Sunday is supposed to be around 46 - nice for this time of year! There is a slight chance of rain, but it doesn't look like it will be coming into the area until the evening. Please dress in weather appropriate layers including a wind breaker/rain repellent layer and sturdy, mud tolerant shoes. If you have them, this is a good outing to bring kites, binoculars, and a camera. There are bathrooms in the park, but the refreshment kiosks are closed for the season, so bring your own water and snacks.

**Notes for first time participants:** Please check in with me when you arrive--I'll be the one with the sign-in clip board. Parents will be responsible for their children during the entire outing and will be supported in finding age appropriate opportunities to engage them in the activities and area. There is a [frequently asked questions page](#) and [coming prepared page](#) on our website that I recommend taking a quick look at.

Please let me know if you have any questions. If you know you won't be able to attend the event please email me or call my cell phone (insert number here). I look forward to having a lot of fun exploring together!

Warm regards,

Club leader



## FNC Profiles

This section presents brief profiles of eight FNCs for the purpose of illustrating the way different design decisions come together to form clubs that achieve their purpose and make sense for their context. Eight FNCs from which there was both leader and participant engagement in my research, including CFIN, are profiled in order of the date of their founding. Each profile includes a photograph from the FNC, the public description and website when available, and the structural and design elements summarized in the table below. The statistics provided for these FNCs are based on data provided in late 2014 / early 2015.

Table 1. *Family Nature Club Structure and Design Elements.*

<b>Organizational Leadership Structures</b>	<i>Organization</i>	Part of organization	Under an umbrella	Independent
	<i>Leader compensation</i>	Paid leader	Membership fees/grants	Volunteer Leader
	<i>Leader structure</i>	Single leader	Volunteer support	Co-leaders
<b>Participant Engagement</b>	<i>Access</i>	Public group, no requirements	Open to public with registration	Private group
	<i>Size</i>	Large	Medium	Small
	<i>Cost</i>	Free	Cover own costs	Membership fee
<b>Event Structures</b>	<i>Frequency</i>	Frequent (weekly)	Regular (1-3/month)	Infrequent (quarterly)
	<i>Location</i>	One location	A few regular locations	A range of rarely repeated locations
	<i>Activity</i>	Informal / child-led free play	A variety of activities types	Structured / educational format





## Young Naturalists Club of British Columbia



Figure 1. Young Naturalists Club of BC photograph. Reprinted with permission.

- Founded: 2000
- Location: British Columbia, Canada
- Leadership structure: Executive director for non-profit and volunteer leaders for each club.
- Participation: Public. Families register to participate in their local YNC.
- Families receiving communications: 650 families in 40+ clubs in network
- Average number of families at events: 10-15
- Frequency of events: Explorer Days are typically held once a month in each club.
- Location and activity: Widely varied with an interest in environmental education.
- Costs: Annual membership fee.
- Public description: *YNC is an exciting nature discovery and environmental action program that invites young people ages 5-12 years to discover nearby nature on Explorer Day Adventures with local experts, learn about native wildlife and plants in NatureWILD Magazine and take part in environmental actions to protect their habitat with Stewardship Projects and an Action Awards Quest. The YNC is a registered charity, powered by passionate volunteers, members and donors.*
- Website: [www.ync.ca/](http://www.ync.ca/)

## Austin Families in Nature



Figure 2. Austin Families in Nature photograph. Reprinted with permission.

- Founded: 2008
- Location: Austin, Texas
- Leadership structure: Independent parent volunteer leader that is nurturing new leaders for emerging sub-groups
- Participation: Private. Families are matched with specific groups, which are kept to a set size.
- Families receiving communications: 200
- Average number of families at events: 15
- Frequency of events: 2 to 4 times a month
- Location and activity: Widely varied with an interest in diversity and environmental education.
- Costs: Annual membership fee plus coverage of event specific costs. They have received some grants to help offset costs.
- Public description: *The mission of Austin Families in Nature is to connect children and their families to nature and to each other through time spent learning, playing, and volunteering outdoors. AFiN activities are aimed at teaching children and their parents about ecology and conservation through hands-on experiences in nature, while they spend quality family time together. Each activity also has time built in for unstructured play.*
- Website: <http://familiesinnature.org/benefits-of-a-family-nature-club/>



## Family Adventures in Nature San Diego



Figure 3. Family Adventures in Nature San Diego photograph. Reprinted with permission.

- Founded: 2009
- Location: San Diego, California
- Leadership structure: Led by a single family that volunteers their time. Sub-groups have formed with their own leaders that receive support from the founding family.
- Participation access: Public, open “enrollment”, with pre-registration requirement.
- Families receiving information: 1,300
- Average number of families at events: 40
- Frequency of events: 10-20 opportunities per month across the FNCs in the group.
- Location and activity: Widely varied with an interest in diversity. Depending on the group, more rigorous hikes and extended camping trips are popular.
- Costs: Free unless there is a cost associated with the event, which participants cover. They have received some grants to help offset costs.
- Description: *Family Adventures in Nature (FAN) and its eight "sub-clubs" called Nearby Nature Clubs meet either weekly or bi-weekly "nearby" in their own neighborhoods. The mission of FAN is to inspire and support families to unite in a commitment to frequently enjoy fulfilling experiences in nature, and ultimately to foster a deep, lifelong connection to, and responsibility for, the natural world.*
- Website: <http://quetallsd.wix.com/familyadventures>



## Priestly Forsyth Memorial Library Nature Nuts



Figure 4. Priestly Forsyth Library Nature Nuts photograph. Reprinted with permission.

- Founded: 2010
- Location: Northumberland, Pennsylvania – a small, rural community
- Leadership structure: Individual leader that is an employee of the library.
- Participation access: Public.
- Families receiving communications: 400
- Average number of families at events: 4
- Frequency of events: Tuesday evenings, September to May with occasional summer events.
- Location and activity: Almost all events are held on the library property. Events begin with the reading of a related book, include outdoor play and exploration and include a craft.
- Costs: Free.
- Description: *The Priestley-Forsyth Memorial Library is a Family Place Library. We are committed to creating an environment that is welcoming to all. It is a service model that emphasizes the important role parents (and caregivers who act as parents) play as a child's first teacher. The Nature Nuts Program is an opportunity for families with school aged children to explore, play in, and learn about nature together.*
- Website: <http://priestleyforsyth.org/new/family-place/>

## Nature Play Orlando Outdoor Families



Figure 5. Nature Play Orlando Outdoor Families photograph. Reprinted with permission.

- Founded: 2013
- Location: Orlando, Florida
- Leadership structure: Independent, individual parent volunteer leader
- Participation access: Private. For the area homeschool community.
- Families receiving information: 250
- Average number of families at events: 20
- Frequency of events: Weekly
- Location and activity: Several public locations with a pattern of repeat visitation.
- Cost: Free, participants cover any costs associated with a particular event.
- Public description: *Nature Play Orlando offers a weekly forest school experience for homeschoolers between the ages of 5 and 12 years old. The emphasis of our events is child-directed free play in which the children have the opportunity for independent exploration of the natural area we are visiting.*
- Club website: n/a

## Maryland Family Friendly Hikes



Figure 6. Maryland Family Friendly Hikes photograph. Reprinted with permission.

- Founded: 2013
- Location: Baltimore, Maryland
- Leadership structure: Independent, family volunteer leader
- Participation: Public, with open enrollment via Meetup
- Families receiving communications: 170
- Average number of families at events: 4
- Frequency of event: Three times a month
- Location and activity: A wide variety of locations and activities around the region.
- Costs: Annual Meetup dues and coverage of any event specific costs.
- Public description: *Let's get together for some outside adventures! We like to have easy hikes the whole family can enjoy. Hikes will be scheduled throughout the week, including daytime, evening, and weekend hikes in relatively close proximity to Baltimore City. It will be a slower pace to let children explore plants, bugs, sounds and anything they might find interesting along the way!*
- Website: [www.meetup.com/Family-Friendly-Hikes/](http://www.meetup.com/Family-Friendly-Hikes/)



## Prairie Loft Family Outdoor Club



Figure 7. Prairie Loft Family Outdoor Club photograph. Reprinted with permission.

- Founded: 2013
- Location: Nebraska, small rural town of approximately 25,000
- Leadership structure: The Executive Director of the agricultural center leads the club
- Participation access: Public
- Families receiving communications: 60
- Average number of families at events: 15
- Frequency of events: The third Saturday of each month.
- Location and activity: Always at the center's property with a variety of activities that are lightly structured.
- Cost: \$5 per family per event.
- Public description: *Our Family Outdoor Club offers outdoor activities and art activities geared toward kids ages 2-8 with their grownups.*
- Club website: [www.prairieloft.org/Prairie\\_Loft/Prairie\\_Loft\\_Home.html](http://www.prairieloft.org/Prairie_Loft/Prairie_Loft_Home.html)

## Columbia Families in Nature



Figure 8. Columbia Families in Nature photograph.

- Founded: March 2014
- Location: Columbia, Maryland – a large suburban community of 100,000
- Leadership structure: Led by a single family that volunteers their time and invites others to volunteer to assist during events.
- Participation access: Public, open enrollment with pre-registration requirement.
- Families receiving information: 560 on Facebook page, 250 on list serve for emails
- Average number of families at events: 20
- Frequency of events: two to three per month
- Location and activity: Widely varied locations and activities with an interest in diversity.
- Cost: Free unless there is a cost associated with the event, which participants cover. Has received grants to help offset costs.
- Description: *Columbia Families in Nature (CFIN) provides free, fun, friendly opportunities for families to spend time together in nature. On two to three Sunday afternoons a month CFIN outings take place at natural areas in and around Columbia, Maryland. These outings emphasize play time in nature and also include hands-on environmental education and conservation activities. By connecting families with nearby nature, the goals of CFIN are to: foster greater connection with nature and the community; increase environmental awareness and action; support the well-being of participants; and help strengthen family relationships.*
- Website: [www.columbiafamiliesinnature.org](http://www.columbiafamiliesinnature.org)