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Outdoor Foundation Thrive Outside Grand Rapids Community

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Grand Rapids to Receive Multi-Year Grant from the Outdoor Foundation to Get More Kids and Families Outside

The Thrive Outside Initiative brings together local Grand Rapids organizations to make getting outside part of the fabric of peoples' lives by providing repeat experiences of fun, joy and learning in the outdoors for kids and families of all backgrounds.

BOULDER, Colo. & Grand Rapids, MI., April 15, 2019 – Grand Rapids has been chosen as one of four communities in the [Outdoor Foundation's](#) nationwide [Thrive Outside Community Initiative](#). In [Grand Rapids](#), the initiative will provide a multi-year capacity-building grant to strengthen partnerships between existing local organizations such as schools, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs and nonprofit conservation and outdoor organizations that create repeat and reinforcing positive outdoor experiences for kids and families. Fewer than 18 percent of Americans recreate outside once per week, and fewer than 50 percent report getting outside even once per year, according to the Outdoor Foundation's Outdoor Participation Report. Research also shows that outdoor activity participation does not mirror the overall demographics of our country. The core goal of the Thrive Outside Community investments is to create healthy individuals, communities, economies and environments by making the outdoors a habit for kids and families of all backgrounds.

"The City of Grand Rapids and Grand Rapids Public Schools have a dynamic partnership and joint commitment to environmental education, parks and schoolyard activation and sustainability. The Outdoor Foundation's Thrive Outside Initiative is a perfect fit and remarkable opportunity for us to advance our mutually desired goals and outcomes," said David Marquardt, Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation director. "This award will kick-start a comprehensive outdoor program for Grand Rapids youth to connect with nature, play outdoors, and serve as leaders in neighborhood and park projects that engage families and children."

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This grant allows Grand Rapids to build on the foundation set forth through the Connecting Children to Nature Initiative and brings to scale through planning and partnerships a citywide effort to engage children in nature. Grand Rapids intends to engage kids of all ages with an emphasis on those in fifth through 12th grades. This investment leverages additional foundation support, and its opportune timing will pave the way for further public and private investment. [The Thrive Outside Grand Rapids Community](#) will be led by Our Community's Children, a partnership of the City of Grand Rapids and Grand Rapids Public Schools; the Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department; and a close set of initial partners in the Grand Rapids Environmental Education Network, with more to come.

“We didn’t become an indoor species overnight and the decline of outdoor activity in the United States is a problem that requires collaboration, funding, and scale,” said Lise Aangeenbrug, Outdoor Foundation executive director. “For a variety of reasons, the days when children were outside playing more than they were inside have passed – this has to change for the health of our children, families and communities. With this grant, we are helping to fuel an outdoor movement in and around Grand Rapids to bring back that connection by supporting local community partners to create a network focused on getting as many children and families as possible experiencing the outdoors in a positive way, so we don’t have anything to lose. Over the next decade, the Outdoor Foundation will connect and engage a diverse constituency of participants, advocates and volunteers in at least 32 cities, with the goal of getting 3 million people outside.”

The inaugural Thrive Outside Communities – Atlanta, Georgia; Grand Rapids, Michigan; San Diego, California; and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma – were chosen by the Outdoor Foundation’s board of directors, based on written applications, location visits, in-person interviews and third-party consultant research. Each Thrive Outside Community grant requires the recipient community to provide a 1-to-1 funding match in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the network. One backbone organization in each community will manage the grant and facilitate the work of the network partners.

The Outdoor Foundation’s Thrive Outside Communities would not be possible without the extremely generous support of [The VF Foundation](#), [REI](#), [Patagonia](#), [Thule](#) and [Wolverine World Wide, Inc.](#)

In order to grow the number of cities and regions that the Thrive Outside Communities Initiative is able to reach, the Outdoor Foundation will be looking for additional funding partners in 2019. Please reach out to Michaela Gold (mgold@outdoorfoundation.org) for more information.

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About Outdoor Foundation

[The Outdoor Foundation](#), the philanthropic arm of Outdoor Industry Association, is a national 501(C)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to getting people outside for their health, the health of communities and the health of the outdoor industry. Through community investment and

groundbreaking research, the Outdoor Foundation works with many partners to get more people outside more often. Visit outdoorfoundation.org for more information.