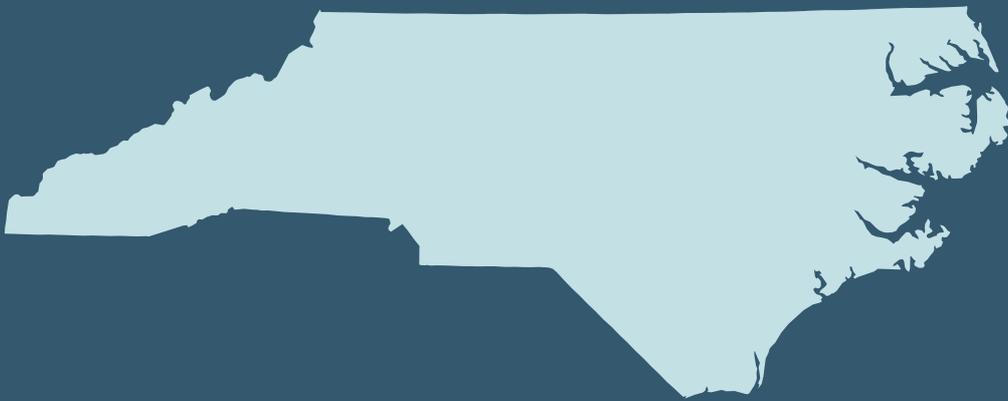


# SYNC



# STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS FOR NORTH CAROLINA CHILDREN



Funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES



INJURY PREVENTION  
RESEARCH CENTER



# About SYNC

## Goal

The goal of Strengthening Systems for North Carolina Children (SYNC) is to support North Carolina communities disproportionately affected by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in furthering their understanding of how community systems and structures influence ACEs. This understanding is meant to help identify ways to strengthen systems and build community resilience to prevent ACEs.

## What to Expect

SYNC is a no-cost opportunity for communities in North Carolina who have high ACEs burden and want to use a systems thinking approach to prevent ACEs. Community teams will receive guidance and technical assistance from subject matter experts in using systems thinking to identify ways to:

- Strengthen systems that contribute to protective factors for ACEs.
- Disrupt systems that contribute to risk factors for experiencing ACEs.

Teams will learn how to use a systems thinking tool called causal loop diagramming to create a personalized diagram of the various systems and structures that influence ACEs in your community. Subject matter experts will guide your team in developing a causal loop diagram (CLD) using your knowledge of your community systems. You will use the CLD to:

- Identify key points on the system your community can target to build resilience and mitigate ACEs.
- Identify additional stakeholders in the community interested in ACEs prevention work.

After completion of these workshops, teams will receive one year of ongoing technical assistance in testing and refining their CLDs to identify potential intervention points to prevent and disrupt ACEs.

## Learning Objectives

1. Describe adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and how shared protective and risk factors (SRPFs) can influence ACEs.
2. Apply a systems thinking lens to understand how dynamic and complex systems can influence SRPFs for ACEs.
3. Identify and prioritize community-level SRPFs that you believe have the most influence on ACEs in your community.
4. Develop a shared understanding of the community-level systems and structures that shape the most influential SRPFs in your community through creation of a causal loop diagram (CLD).
5. With support and technical assistance from project facilitators, use findings from the CLD to discuss potential interventions on different points of your community's systems to build community resilience and ultimately mitigate ACEs.
6. Develop a plan to promote the long term sustainability of your coalition to prevent ACEs.

## Benefits of Participation

- Help set your community up for long term change by strengthening systems to prevent ACEs and build community resilience.
- Learn techniques for approaching ACEs prevention through a systems thinking lens by exploring the bigger picture.
- Receive direct training and technical assistance from subject matter experts.
- Network and build relationships with organizations and members from your community who are also doing ACEs prevention work.
- Be part of a CDC-funded opportunity to strengthen the evidence base for community-based ACEs prevention.

# Pilot Community Experiences

Click [here](#) to read the testimony of the team leader of SYNC's pilot community in Surry County, North Carolina. For other stories from the pilot community, check out the following articles from The Mount Airy News.

- Kelly, R. (2022, June 3). SYNC seeks to reduce childhood trauma. *The Mount Airy News*.  
<https://www.mtairynews.com/top-stories/110427/sync-seeks-to-reduce-childhood-trauma>
- Kelly, R. (2022, July 11). Group seeking to change outcomes for kids. *The Mount Airy News*.  
<https://www.mtairynews.com/news/111420/group-seeking-to-change-outcomes-for-kids>

## Who is SYNC For?

### We welcome teams in North Carolina who:

- Have high rates of ACEs ***and/or*** risk factors for ACEs in their community, such as:
  - Limited access to community resources
  - Limited economic and educational opportunities
  - High rates of poverty, food insecurity, or housing insecurity
  - High rates of intergenerational trauma
- Are interested in using a systems thinking lens to:
  - Further their understanding of how ACEs in their community are influenced by complex systems.
  - Build community resilience to prevent ACEs.
- Have or are willing to form a community team of about 10 to 25 members who represent a variety of sectors and perspectives in their community.

SYNC is working with one North Carolina community per year, with three communities in total from 2022 - 2024. Currently we are recruiting a community for the project's second year.

# Team Structure

## Community Team

For this project, we recommend you have a team of about 10-25 people interested in mobilizing to prevent ACEs in your community. Team members can be from a current coalition, or you can form a new group.

**Time Commitment:** The time for your full community team will consist of an introductory webinar on January 23rd, one to two virtual meetings in March/April, and three six-hour workshops on February 14th, April 25th, and April 26th. More detailed information on the project timeline is on page 7.

## Core Team

Of the 10 to 25 community team members, we ask that you identify a core team of 2 to 5 people who are willing to be involved in every step of the CLD process.

**Time Commitment:** In addition to the commitments of the community team, core team members are asked to participate in occasional calls with the SYNC team and a workday to synthesize and update your community's CLD. This skill building among core team members will also help ensure that the work started in the workshops can live on after the workshops are completed.

## Team Lead

Of the core team members, one will serve as the team lead. The team lead will be responsible for convening the community team outside of SYNC workshops.

**Time Commitment:** In addition to the responsibilities of the community and core teams, the team leader will be the group coordinator outside of SYNC workshops, staying in communication with SYNC staff, and keeping the team's project moving forward in the year following your community's completion of the SYNC workshops (with the support of SYNC staff).

# Forming a Community Team

If you are not part of an existing group, you can form a team of about 10 to 25 individuals who are invested in ACEs prevention in your community. Teams should represent a variety of sectors and perspectives in your community. If you need additional help identifying the relevant sectors and partners in your community, refer to the list of sectors below for guidance on possible team members.

## Possible Sectors for Community ACEs Prevention Team

- ACEs and resilience task forces
- Chambers of Commerce
- Child Fatality Prevention Team
- Clinics/health systems
- Community organizers/community advocates/violence prevention activists
- Coordinated community response team
- Domestic violence center
- Exchange clubs or civic organizations
- Faith communities
- Health department
- Homeless shelters
- Housing authority
- LGBTQ+ resource centers
- Local government officials
- Local management entities (LMEs)
- Managed care organizations (MCOs)
- Media
- Parks & rec/community recreation centers
- Pediatricians with wrap around services
- Perinatal care professionals
- Rape crisis center
- Safety net clinics/FQHCs
- School system/PTAs
- Senior centers
- Sexual assault coalitions
- Smart Start Social services
- Suicide prevention programs
- Women's centers
- YWCA & YMCA

This list is not exhaustive nor tailored to your community. There may be other sectors or organizations within your community that should be a part of the process.

If you are interested in using a systems thinking approach for ACEs prevention efforts but you are not ready to convene a team of 10 to 25, the Collaborative Learning Institute may be a good fit for your goals. Learn more at <https://injuryfreenc.org/injury-free-nc-focus-areas/collaborative-learning-institute/>.

# Project Timeline

While this is the general overview of the project timeline, we may make minor adjustments depending on project needs. We prioritize respecting your time and will provide as much notice as possible for any timeline adjustments.

Event Name	Date	Time	Location	Participants
<b>Introductory Webinar</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Level set on ACEs, SRPFs, systems thinking, and causal loop diagramming</li> </ul>	January 23, 2023	10 AM - 12 PM	Remote	Community Team
<b>Workshop 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intro to systems thinking and causal loop diagramming</li> <li>Team members create small CLDs in breakout groups</li> </ul>	February 14, 2023	10 AM - 4 PM	TBD	Community Team
<b>Core Team Workday</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With the assistance of the SYNC team, synthesize individual CLDs from Workshop 1 into a larger community CLD</li> </ul>	February 15, 2023	10 AM - 4 PM	TBD	Core Team
<b>Self-Paced Community Partner Interviews</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use the synthesized CLD to facilitate discussions with other community partners</li> </ul>	Self-Paced	N/A	N/A	Community Team
<b>1 to 2 Virtual Touchpoints</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community team members share what they learned during their community partner interviews</li> <li>SYNC facilitators work behind the scenes to incorporate participant findings from their interviews into the synthesized CLD</li> </ul>	March / Early April	TBD	Remote	Community Team
<b>Workshop 2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share the updated CLD with the community team and further refine as needed</li> <li>Use the CLD to begin thinking through areas of high leverage to build community resilience</li> <li>Use the CLD to identify and prioritize action steps</li> </ul>	April 25, 2023	10 AM - 4 PM	TBD	Community Team
<b>Workshop 3</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to use the CLD for action planning</li> <li>Discuss best practices for sustainability</li> </ul>	April 26, 2023	10 AM - 4 PM	TBD	Community Team
<b>Ongoing Technical Assistance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Receive support from SYNC facilitators in implementing action steps identified during workshops, maintaining long-term sustainability of your project, and troubleshooting any challenges</li> </ul>	Ongoing for 1 year after workshops	TBD	Remote	Core Team

# Location

Workshops will be held in-person in a location in or near your community. If necessitated by COVID-19 restrictions, workshops will be held remotely.

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*On the next few pages of this information packet, we describe our definitions and perspective on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), shared risk and protective factors (SRPFs), ACEs prevention, and systems thinking.*

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## What are Adverse Childhood Experiences?

**Adverse childhood experiences** (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood. Experiencing ACEs can have long term effects on health and quality of life. ACEs can appear in many forms, such as:

- experiencing or witnessing violence in the home or community
- experiencing child maltreatment, abuse, or neglect
- experiencing racial or ethnic discrimination
- experiencing economic hardship
- experiencing housing or food insecurity
- experiencing parental divorce or separation
- having a family member die by suicide
- living with someone with mental illness
- living with someone who misuses alcohol or drugs
- incarceration of a household member

(Adapted from: [CDC, Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences](#))

# What are Shared Risk and Protective Factors for ACEs?

Shared risk and protective factors (SRPFs) are factors that influence the likelihood of ACEs occurring. **Risk factors** increase the likelihood of experiencing ACEs, while **protective factors** decrease the likelihood of experiencing ACEs.

Examples of shared **protective factors** are:

- Access to mental health and substance use services
- Access to safe and affordable childcare, preschool, and after-school activities
- Access to work opportunities that have family-friendly policies

Examples of shared **risk factors** are:

- High rates of poverty and/or unemployment
- Limited educational and economic opportunities
- Easy access to alcohol and/or drugs
- Communities with high rates of unstable housing or homelessness

We call these factors shared risk and protective factors because they are often linked to multiple health and quality of life outcomes. For example, research has linked access to mental health and substance use services with reduction in child maltreatment, harmful substance abuse, and suicide. High rates of poverty or unemployment have been linked to increased risk of intimate partner violence, youth violence, child maltreatment, and suicide.

(Adapted from: [CDC, Risk and Protective Factors](#) and [CDC, Connecting the Dots](#)).

## What is ACEs Prevention?

Strengthening protective factors or targeting risk factors for ACEs can help prevent or reduce the severity of ACEs.

ACEs prevention can be done through many sectors in the community, such as education, government, social services, health services, public safety, business and labor, justice, housing, youth-serving organizations, faith-based groups, and domestic violence organizations.

## Examples of ACEs Prevention Efforts

Creating family-friendly work policies

Preventing or addressing housing insecurity

Using family-centered approaches to treating substance use disorders

Providing safe dating and healthy relationship skills programs

Adopting trauma-informed practices and training for school faculty and staff

Connecting youth to caring adults and activities through mentoring and after-school programs

Strengthening supports for families experiencing domestic violence

Preventing or addressing community violence

## What is Systems Thinking?

**Systems thinking** is an approach to understanding how factors and components interact and function together to create a system, and how to modify components of a system to address a problem or make change. All problems are affected by a system of interconnected elements, such as people, norms, laws, resources, barriers, infrastructure, and influential factors ([Hassmiller Lich, 2020](#)). Rather than focusing on the immediate events or factors that influence a problem, systems thinking looks at the bigger picture to understand the interrelated structures and components that shape these factors ([Goodman](#)).

# What is Causal Loop Diagramming?

**Causal loop diagramming** is a tool to help understand the dynamics of a complex system. Rather than approaching cause and effect from a linear view, a causal loop diagram (CLD) can help to identify a larger system of how many different factors influence one another. By identifying the key factors at play in a system and the relationships that connect them, you can create a concise understanding of the “story” behind the system. Your CLD can then be used to identify key points on your system that you can target to have optimal effect on your intended outcomes. In ACEs prevention, this can mean identifying key points in your community system where you can test out making changes to mitigate ACEs and strengthen resilience in your community ([Frerichs et. al, 2016](#), [Lannon](#)).

## Examples of Causal Loop Diagrams

You can view examples of CLDs at the following links:

[Causal loop diagram depicting generational trauma in a North Carolina community](#) (Rural Opportunity Institute)

[Systems Thinking Tools: A User’s Reference Guide](#)  
(Daniel H. Kim)

[High-level causal loop diagram depicting alcohol-impaired driving in U.S. college environments](#)  
(Apostolopoulos, et. al)

# How to Apply

Fill out the application survey hyperlinked below. Applications submitted by **Tuesday, November 1st at 6 PM ET** will receive priority, but we will continue accepting submissions after this point. One team member, preferably the team lead, should apply on behalf of the entire community team. We will interview select teams in early to mid-November, and all applicants will be notified of their status by mid-December at the latest.

## What You Need to Apply

- A community team of 10 to 25 people.
- A core team of 2 to 5 members from your community team.
- Letters of support from at least 2 community team members who are *not* part of your core team.
- Filled out application.

[\*\*APPLY HERE\*\*](#)

If you have any questions, you can email the SYNC Project Manager, Meghan Chua at [chuam@live.unc.edu](mailto:chuam@live.unc.edu). Alternatively, you can attend any of the office hour sessions below.

## Office Hours

Zoom link for all sessions: <https://tinyurl.com/3xhc4ujm>

Meeting ID: 972 1036 1955

Passcode: 188382

Dial in: +13092053325,,97210361955# US

**Fri, September 16th**  
11 AM - 12 PM ET

**Wed, September 21st**  
10 AM - 11 AM ET

**Mon, September 26th**  
2 PM - 3 PM ET

**Tues, October 11th**  
2 PM - 3 PM ET

**Mon, October 24th**  
1 PM - 2 PM ET

# In Summary

## Application Deadline

The priority deadline is **Tuesday, November 1st, 2022 at 6:00 PM ET**, but we will continue accepting submissions after this point.

## Application Materials

Fill out the application using the link on the page above. Upload at least 2 letters of support from community team members who are not part of your core team.

## Project Timeline

- Introductory Webinar: January 23rd, 10 AM - 12 PM
- Workshop 1: February 14th, 10 AM - 4 PM
- Core Team Workday: February 15th, 10 AM - 4 PM
- Virtual Touchpoint(s): March / Early April
- Workshop 2: April 25th, 10 AM - 4 PM
- Workshop 3: April 26th, 10 AM - 4 PM
- Ongoing technical assistance for one year after last workshop

## Costs

Project participation is free. There is no cost for registration or materials.

## Location

Workshops will be held locally in or near the team's community. If necessitated by COVID-19 restrictions, workshops will be remote.

## Questions?

Email the Project Manager, Meghan Chua at [chuam\[at\]live.unc.edu](mailto:chuam[at]live.unc.edu) or attend one of our office hour sessions listed on the page above.

## Application - Strengthening Systems for North Carolina Children (SYNC)

(Note: This document is only for your reference. You must apply through the online form [here](#).)

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**The SYNC application deadline has been extended to Tuesday, November 1st, 2022 at 6 PM. This is to allow applicant communities more time to assemble their community teams and prepare their applications. We will hold one additional office hours session using the Zoom link <https://tinyurl.com/3xhc4ujm>. This session will occur on Monday, October 24th from 1 - 2 PM.**

**We will interview select teams in early to mid-November, and all applicants will be notified of their status by mid-December at the latest.**

Thank you for your interest in Strengthening Systems for North Carolina Children (SYNC). For more information about the project, please review the attached [SYNC Information Packet](#) or watch our [introductory video](#).

SYNC is intended for teams of 10 to 25 representing a community in North Carolina who are interested in mobilizing to prevent adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Teams should represent diverse perspectives from the community, including members of different organizations and community advocates.

Of this community team of 10 to 25 people, we ask that you identify a core team of about 2 to 5 people. This core team will be involved in every step of the project.

One team representative will be designated the “team lead.” The team lead will be responsible for convening the team outside of workshops. We suggest that a group or organization take on the role of leading the group, with a member from that organization serving as the team leader.

Only one person from the submitting organization, preferably the team lead, should fill out the application. We may reach out to the team leader to schedule a follow-up call.

Please note that this application includes providing at least two separate letters of support from two members of your community team who are NOT a part of your core team. The purpose of the letters of support is to show that your organization is able to convene your larger community team for the workshops. If you have questions or need assistance with your application, email the Project Manager, Meghan Chua at [chuam@live.unc.edu](mailto:chuam@live.unc.edu).

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Please fill in the following information if you are the team leader who would be responsible for convening your team during this project.

1. First and last name:  
Email address:  
Phone number:

Organization, if applicable:  
Address:

2. Name of community/town/city that your team serves or will serve:  
[open text]
  
3. Please provide a brief (3-6 sentences) description of 1) your organization's work and 2) activities or projects your organization has conducted around ACEs (if applicable).  
[open text]
  
4. Please provide a brief (3-6 sentences) biographical summary of yourself and, if applicable, your experience working in ACEs prevention.  
[open text]
  
5. Select the description that best matches your team.  
Our team...
  - Has not yet worked together.
  - Has been working together for less than 2 years.
  - Has been working together for 2 or more years.
  
6. This project is intended for teams of 10 to 25 individuals representing a community. Please list each team member's organization.  
[open text]
  
7. Of your community team of 10 to 25 people, you will need a core team of about 2 to 5 people. This core team will be responsible for keeping your project moving forward outside of the scheduled workshops.  
  
Please provide the names, organizations, and email addresses of your core team members.  
[open text]
  
8. Describe your organization's established partnerships with other community-based organizations and/or members of the community with respect to ACEs prevention work. (Approximately 200 words or fewer)

For more information on what is considered ACEs prevention work, see pages 9 and 10

of the SYNC Information Packet.  
[open text]

9. What does your organization and/or community team hope to accomplish by being a part of this project? (Approximately 200 words or fewer)  
[open text]

10. This project is meant for communities where children and families face limited access to opportunity and inequities that may exacerbate risk of experiencing ACEs.

Does your community experience any of these risk factors for ACEs? Please elaborate.

Limited access to:

- a. employment opportunities
- b. educational opportunities
- c. community resources and services

High rates of:

- d. neighborhood poverty, economic insecurity, or unemployment
- e. food insecurity
- f. homelessness or housing insecurity
- g. multigenerational trauma
- h. community violence

11. Has your community collected any data on ACEs in your community? Examples could include data via community health assessments or through the school system.  
[open text]

12. Please upload two separate letters of support from two community team members who are *not* part of your core team. The purpose of including letters of support is to show that your organization is able to convene your larger community team for the workshops.