Ripple Mapping: A Tool for Evaluating Program Impact and the Role of Social Capital

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

While the benefits of 4-H participation are well documented, little is known about the impact of 4-H participation on community social capital. 4-H programs foster youth-adult partnerships that encourage active participation by youth and adults, often over many years. Approximately 20 states and Land Grant Institutions have engaged in a Multi-State Research Project (NCERA215) to further explore these connections.

PROJECT AIMS

The purpose of this research project is:

1. To determine how the unique youth/adult partnerships in 4-H contribute to the wellbeing of youth and of the greater community.
2. To explore the role of 4-H community-focused programming in developing social capital not only for youth participants, but also for the community at large.
3. To demonstrate the linkage between successful youth development programs and successful community development.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Robert Putnam (2000) defines social capital as the connections among individuals and the social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. Two central tenets of social capital are that social networks have value and relationships matter.

COMPLETING A RIPPLE MAP

1. Begin by asking people to share in pairs for about 5 minutes how they feel their work has made a difference in the community.

2. Write the capitals around the edges of the map (Natural, Cultural, Human, Social, Political, Financial & Built)
3. Confirm the topic for the center of the map (i.e. service project or program)

4. Explain the three levels of ripple process and that the purpose of this tool is to better understand the impact of our work by thinking about it as a pebble or boulder in the community pond. Using the capitals to frame this discussion helps us think about the whole community and avoid overlooking some aspects.

5. Begin mapping the first ripple with the question. Use a different color, so the ripples are evident in the colors scheme.
a. What are people doing differently?

b. Who is benefitting and how, how is the fact that people are doing things differently affecting others?

c. What changes are you seeing in the community's systems and institutions and organizations? Are everyday ways of thinking and doing changing? How?
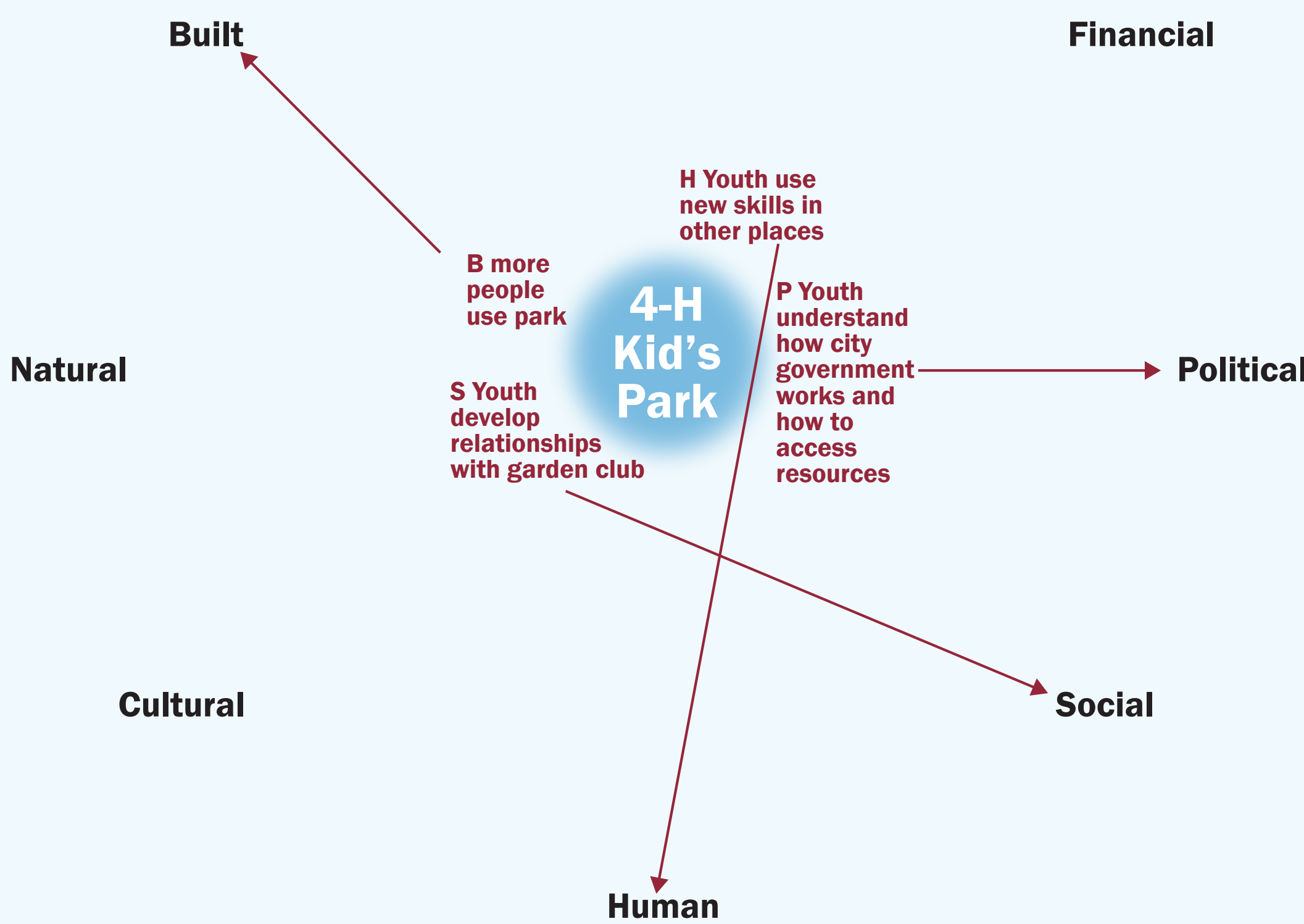
Figure 1
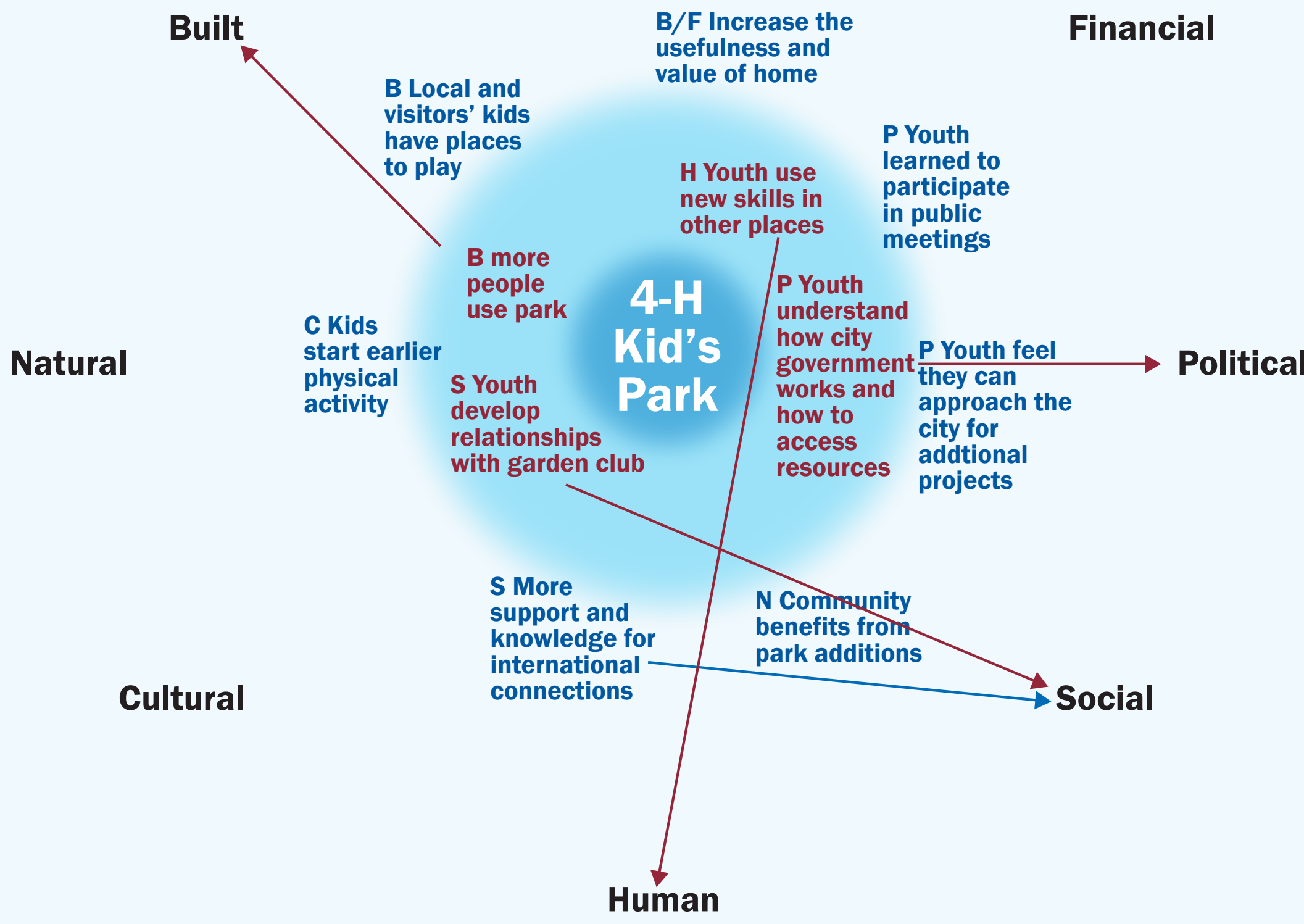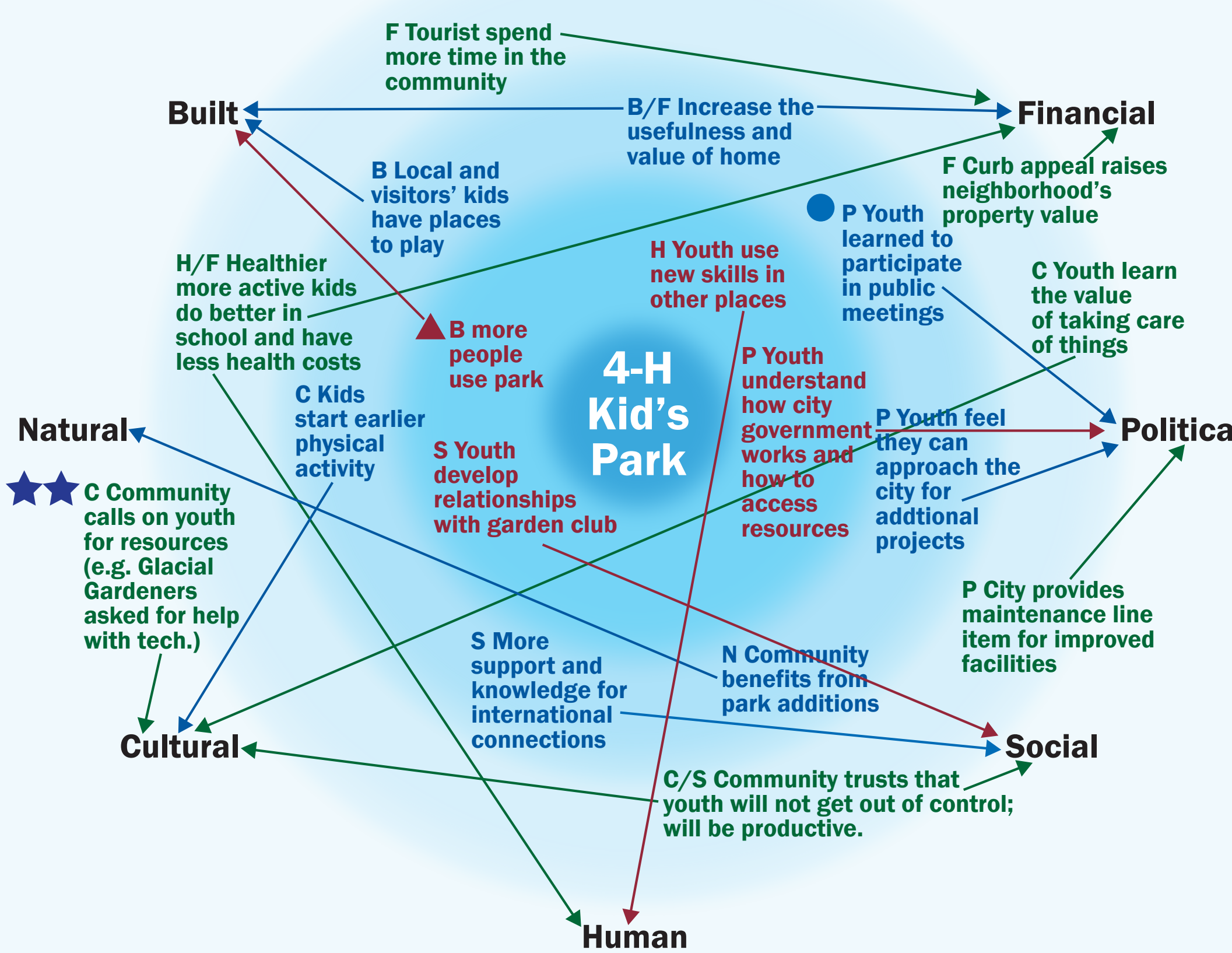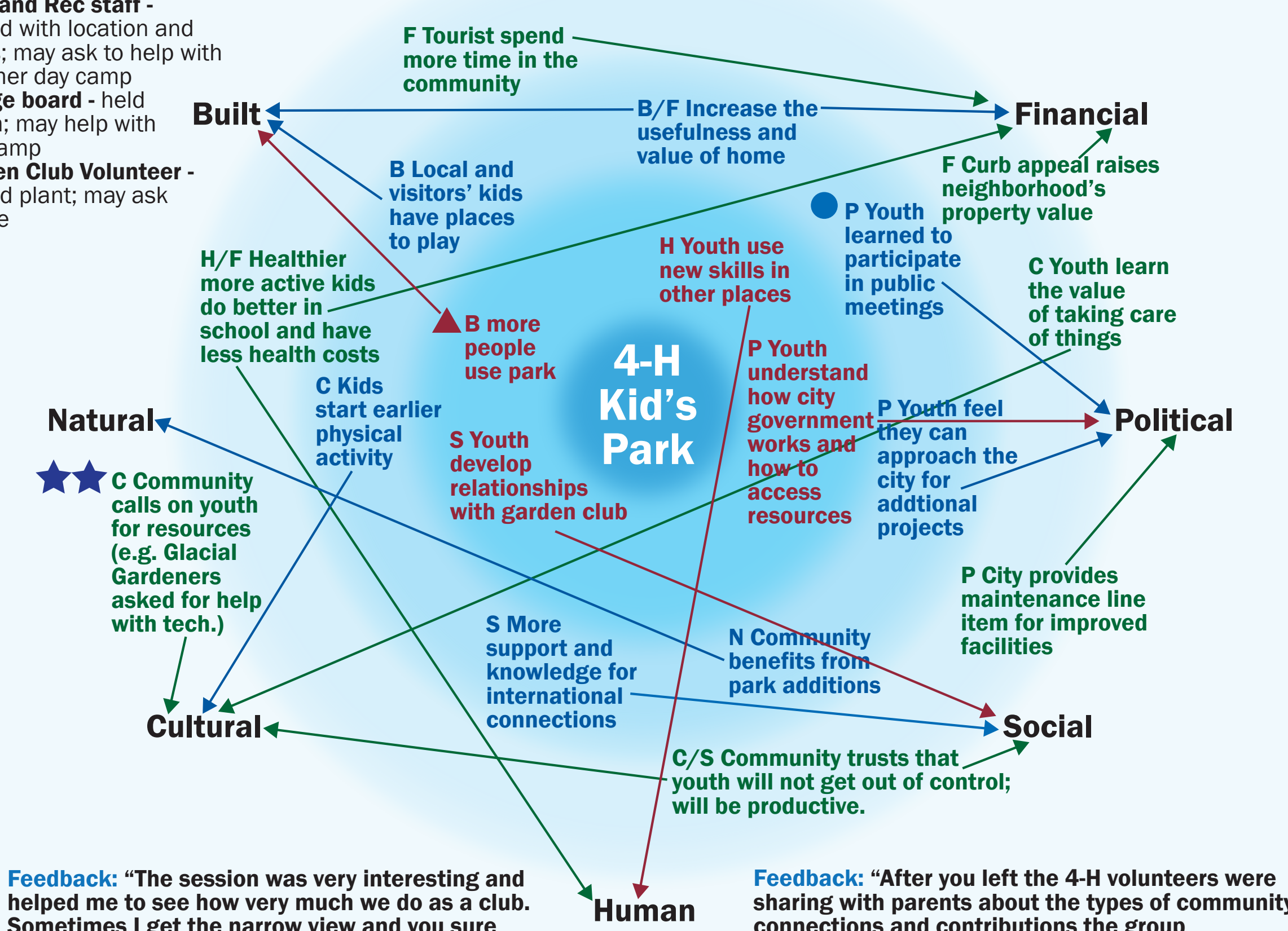**Program or Activity**

Figure 2
Results of the Program

Figure 3
Institutional, Agency or Systems Change

6. Ask: What do you think the most significant change is on the map? Why? Use red to star those items.

7. Initiate a brief discussion on how the map can help with evaluation. Looking at the map and thinking about the impact of your work, what questions about your work would you like to have answered? Are their items on the map for which data is already available?

8. Reflection: What are the implications of what we learned about our impact from the mapping that will be helpful in our next round of our work? What additional stakeholders should we add to our advisory committees or project committees based on how we are impacting the community?

- **Youth members** - made decisions together; will work together on day camp
- **Younger children** - helped rake wood chips; will recruit others for summer day camp
- **Park and Rec staff** - helped with location and funds; may ask to help with summer day camp
- **Village board** - held forum; may help with day camp
- **Garden Club Volunteer** - helped plant; may ask advice

Figure 4
Community Connections Made by Youth

Feedback: "The session was very interesting and helped me to see how very much we do as a club. Sometimes I get the narrow view and you sure widened the horizons for me."

Feedback: "After you left the 4-H volunteers were sharing with parents about the types of community connections and contributions the group discussed. This was very eye opening."

PRESENTERS

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