Safe Routes
PARTNERSHIP

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO PARKS:
A Toolkit to Increase Safe and Equitable Access to Local Parks and Green Spaces
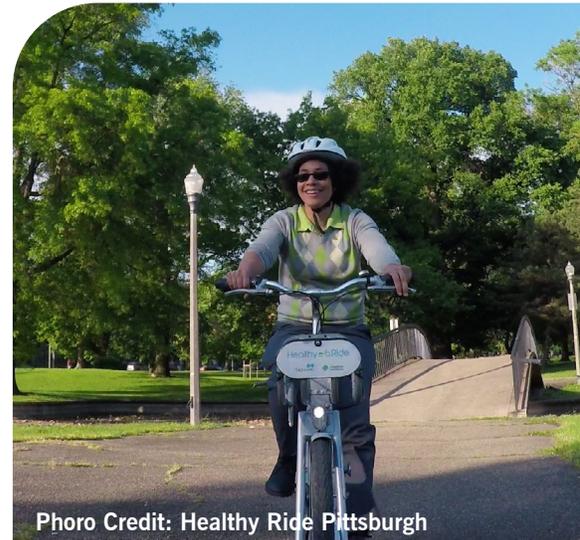

Phoro Credit: Healthy Ride Pittsburgh

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What is Safe Routes to Parks?

Safe Routes to Parks is a movement to make great parks safer and easier for people to access by walking, bicycling, and taking public transportation, especially in low-income communities and communities of color, where less investment has gone into the routes to and the facilities in parks. An important element of a thriving, equitable community is that people can safely and conveniently access well-maintained, well-programmed parks and open spaces. That's because safe places to walk, bike, and connect with parks and nature directly contribute to a community's health and wellness.[1]

Safe Routes Partnership, in collaboration with the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), developed the Safe Routes to Parks Action Framework in 2016 to guide advocates and agency staff through the process of assessing park access, planning improvements, implementing changes, and sustaining the work. Engagement is at the center of that process. Community members, as the local experts on their neighborhoods, are essential to the process of project selection, design, and implementation. Partnering with community leadership acknowledges the wisdom and assets that communities hold and can be the first step toward rectifying past and ongoing injustices built into our communities by racist land use and capital investment policies and practices. These decisions and policies have led to poor health outcomes; less access to safe, high-quality public spaces; decreased physical activity; and, higher rates of traffic-related injuries and fatalities among low-income communities and communities of color. Collectively, we have the opportunity and responsibility to create

conditions that enable all people to build on their community's strengths to ensure high-quality community assets are accessible and safe for people of all ages, abilities, and disabilities.

SAFE ROUTES TO PARKS ACTION FRAMEWORK
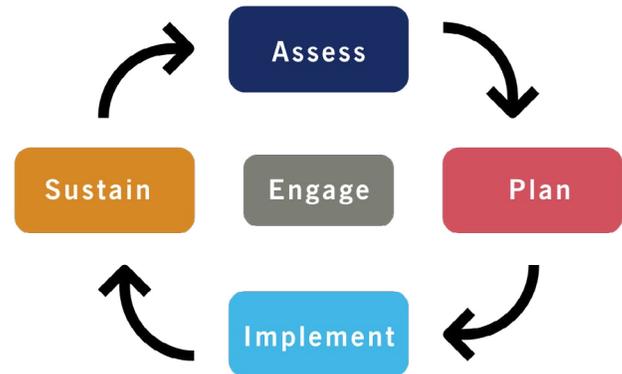
Safe Routes to Parks provides a host of benefits, which include the following:

1. Increased equitable access to parks for people regardless of race, ethnicity, age, or ability
2. Increased opportunities for physical activity
3. Improved safety from traffic and personal violence
4. Decreased environmental impact of daily travel
5. Strengthened community connections

Safe Routes to Parks and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Everyone deserves safe and easy access to parks, but not all people and neighborhoods have that opportunity. In low-income communities and communities of color, getting to and spending time in parks can be daunting. Data show that Black, Brown, and Indigenous people consistently have less access to safe, connected transportation networks and public spaces than white people, and disproportionately experience:

- Low rates of car access in a car-dependent system
- Less access to safe street infrastructure and public space
- Racial profiling and over-policing
- Poor health outcomes[2]

These current injustices have been built through decades of policy and funding decisions that marginalized people of color. Improving safe park access requires thoughtful assessment and inclusion of strategies aimed at overcoming these injustices in each stage of a community's Safe Routes to Parks efforts.

Who This Toolkit is For

The resources included here are primarily developed for parks and recreation agencies looking to support local-level change, guided by their partnership with community members. However, everyone can have a role in supporting this work and benefit from the tools included here. The majority of the tools will be useful and understandable regardless of whether you have a background in parks and recreation. For more guidance for how you can get involved and contribute to this work, please review "Defining Roles and Partnerships."

Safe Routes to Parks for People of All Ages and Abilities

Safe Routes to Parks is important for people of all ages and abilities, including youth, adults, and older adults. The "Older Adults" category can include a wide age-range (some say that it includes people as young as 50!) A 50-year-old does not necessarily need the same accommodations as an 85-year-old, and throughout the age range, people may have different interests when it comes to parks and recreation programming. Even people who are the same age may have vastly different physical abilities. One constant is that people of all ages benefit from more physical activity and access to nature. Additionally, the low-impact exercise from active transportation to everyday destinations can help with both physical and mental health as people grow and age. Safe Routes to Parks can build in everyday physical activity and ensure that people can access nature and the other resources provided by parks and recreation regardless of age, ability, or access to a personal vehicle.

Photo credit: Colby Takeda, Blue Zones Hawaii

What to Expect and How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit includes step-by-step guidance through the Safe Routes to Parks framework to increase safe and equitable access to parks and green spaces. This toolkit was developed specifically for communities in Oregon, however, people from all over the country and backgrounds can benefit from the tools and guidance herein. It focuses on access to parks via active transportation as well as ensuring a high-quality, safe experience within the park itself. As you work through this toolkit, you can expect to learn how to thoughtfully engage your community, assess barriers to safe and equitable park access, identify goals and take meaningful action steps, and consider how to sustain your ongoing Safe Routes to Parks efforts.

The toolkit is divided into five sections to correspond with the five elements of the Safe Routes to Parks framework: Engage, Assess, Plan, Implement, and Sustain. Each of these sections includes reflection questions, a list of steps to take, and specific resources to guide application. To demonstrate how Safe Routes to Parks efforts can integrate with existing projects and programming, there will be blue boxes in each section containing practical connections to the Walk With Ease program. Throughout the toolkit, you will also find stories of successful Safe Routes to Parks funding and implementation in communities in Oregon and across the country, tools for collecting data and authentically engaging your community in parks and recreation planning and programming, and messaging to help you make the case for walkability, park access, and age-friendly community design.

Safe Routes to Parks and Walk With Ease

- Parks and recreation agencies are major service providers for older adults. Whether they are the main provider in their community or part of a broader network, parks and recreation agencies can support overall health and wellbeing by making their facilities and programming more accessible via Safe Routes to Parks. Evidence-based programs such as Walk With Ease and other programming to address arthritis and fall prevention are enhanced by walkable access to parks and recreation facilities.

- Walk With Ease was developed by the Arthritis Foundation to increase physical activity in people with arthritis and chronic pain conditions and reduce the pain associated with arthritis. The program can also be beneficial for others who are looking to increase physical activity, including older adults. The program combines health education, stretching and strengthening exercises, and walking to help people make safe physical activity part of their everyday life. In Oregon, programming is offered in-person and virtually in community and worksite settings, as well as through a self-guided course. Evidence shows that the program improves arthritis symptoms and increases self-efficacy, perceived control, balance, strength, and walking pace.[3]

🔲 Steps to Take towards Safe Routes to Parks

Follow this step-by-step guidance to partner with community members and create safer, more equitable access to parks and green spaces. Generally, these actions build on one another, but they do not necessarily have to occur in the order laid out below. Making safer routes to parks will be an ongoing process as your community makes progress and changes. The steps outlined below and expanded upon in this toolkit provide a framework to strengthen your efforts and support your continued progress.

A. Engage

1. Use the "Defining Roles and Partnerships for Safe Routes to Parks" resource as a roadmap to join or build a coalition of partners to work with on Safe Routes to Parks. This resource will help you:
   a. Look at the people on your staff or in your coalition to ensure there are people who represent the intended beneficiaries and neighborhoods you serve and bring a variety of content expertise.
   b. Organize your ideas for partnerships and plan activities for ongoing connection with the broader community to discuss accessibility to parks and green spaces.
2. As you identify a wide range of partners whose work overlaps with Safe Routes to Parks, explore the resource, "Making the Connection: How Park Access Advances Community Goals," to:
   a. Connect priorities with your new partners and communicate how Safe Routes to Parks can help achieve shared goals.
   b. Adapt talking points and social media graphics when recruiting new partners, and make the case to decision-makers who can give the green light on collaborative projects.
3. For a deeper dive on working with unhoused communities, consult the "Strategies for Working with Unhoused Communities in Parks." Parks are places where all people can recreate, gather, relax, and rest, including individuals experiencing homelessness. If homelessness is a particular challenge in your community, use this resource to:
   a. Think about homelessness from multiple perspectives.
   b. Consider different approaches to talking about and working with unhoused communities.
   c. Gather ideas for educating the broader community about the complexities of homelessness.

B. Assess

1. Use the "Finding and Using Data to Support Safe Routes to Parks" to help you gather local data on health, traffic safety, personal safety, and park use to get a clear picture of what is happening in the community. This resource will help you:
   a. Access existing data sources.
   b. Collect specific data in your community or at your park of interest.
   c. Incorporate both the hard numbers and personal experiences of people who live in the focus area as useful data to guide your work.
   d. Effectively share the information to improve safe, equitable access to parks and green space.
2. Conduct park observations and surveys online, at the park of interest, and in other community gathering destinations. Look at the section "How to collect new data" in "Finding and Using Data to Support Safe Routes to Parks" for ideas and guidance.
3. Organize a walk audit and other on-site assessments to involve more people in identifying the street elements that support or hinder walking or rolling.
4. Identify assessment activities that can further illuminate the assets and barriers to park access.

C. Plan

1. Hold an action planning session with community members and other stakeholders to collaboratively synthesize all of the information you have gathered from assessment and engagement into big goals and potential next steps. Use "Moving from Shelf to Shovel – Creating Action Plans that Actually Get Implemented" to plan and run an action planning session. It includes guidance for planning, a sample agenda, and tables that participants can fill out during the event.
2. Break down the big, community-identified goals into smaller, actionable steps. Think about the following categories:
   a. Engineering and design on the way to the park and within it.
   b. Programming that draws people to the park, encourages physical activity, and is relevant to the needs and preferences of the surrounding community.
   c. Policies and practices that make the park easier and safer to access and be in.
3. Identify partners that can be responsible for each action step and a timeframe for moving each action step forward.
4. Conduct a policy scan to identify the plans and practices that can support community-identified goals. Use "Creating Alignment Between Safe Routes to Parks Goals and Existing Community Priorities: A Primer on Conducting a Policy Scan" to identify plans to look for and how they could align with Safe Routes to Parks.

D. Implement

1. Implement changes and improvements in the short-term (within the next three months) as "quick wins" to generate interest. Use the "Implementing Early Actions" table to think through your quick-win actions and how you can use them to build momentum for future work.
2. Get media attention to highlight the success of early improvements. Use the sample press release to share your story with media outlets.
3. Identify the funding sources to support other desired improvements. Use "Paying for Safe Routes to Parks Implementation" to explore the variety of sources and creative approaches.

E. Sustain

This section of the toolkit connects back to tools and resources from Engage, Assess, Plan, and Implement to help create ongoing and lasting change.

1. Engage early and often with your existing coalition of agency colleagues, community advocates, and decision-makers, and identify ways to expand your support team.
2. Capture data and stories to help show your progress along the way. Take before and after photos, interview community members, and conduct surveys throughout your project to show your early wins so that you can better advocate for long-term change.
3. Connect back to the planning phase to put Safe Routes to Parks goals and action steps into existing and future planning processes. Find ways to replicate the work done in one park to multiple parks.
4. Seek out potential future funding sources that could sustain ongoing engagement, assessment, planning, and implementation.
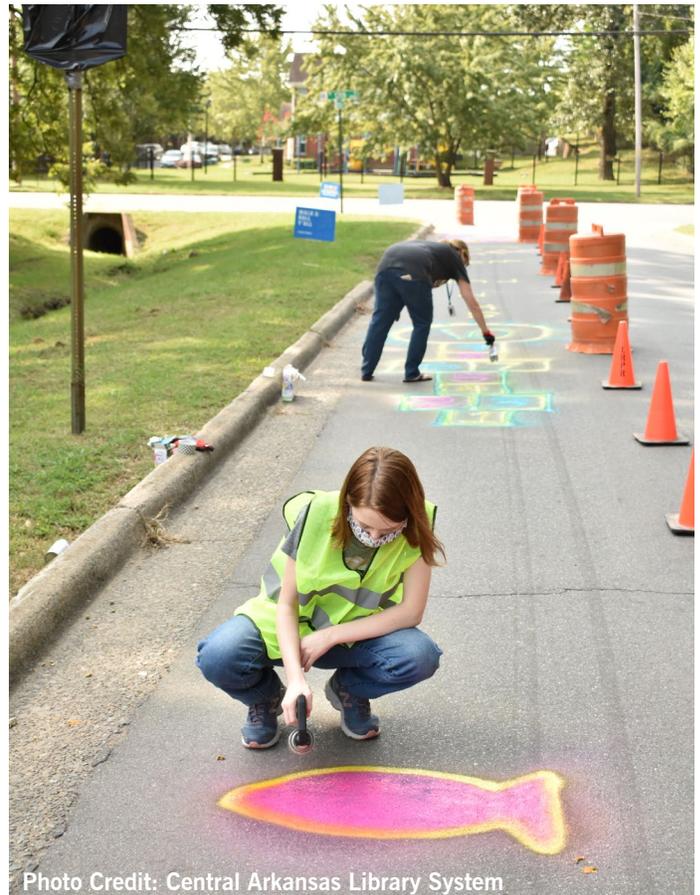
Photo Credit: Central Arkansas Library System

Meaningful, authentic engagement is an essential piece of each step in the process of creating Safe Routes to Parks. It can be the source of ideas and solutions, the process for synthesizing and prioritizing those ideas, a mechanism to implement next steps, and ultimately, an avenue for understanding whether the work was successful.

This section of the toolkit will guide you through how Safe Routes to Parks centers on connecting people to parks and green spaces and how it connects a variety of topic areas. Identifying the aligned work that is already underway in your community enables your team to share resources with other groups and accomplish more than either one group could on their own. The resources included in this section of the toolkit can be useful to parks and recreation professionals to identify partnerships, forge relationships, and collectively advance Safe Routes to Parks efforts to achieve shared goals.

Photo Credit: Cultiva la Salud

Steps to take in this phase:

1. Use the "Defining Roles and Partnerships for Safe Routes to Parks" resource as a roadmap to join or build a coalition of partners to work with on Safe Routes to Parks. This resource will help you build a supportive team that is representative of the community where your project is located. Prioritize historically under-invested communities, Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities, people with disabilities, and older adults.

2. Use the Safe Routes to Parks Coalition Table to organize your ideas for partnerships and building your Safe Routes to Parks team. Peruse the tools in the engagement toolbox at the end of this section, and plan opportunities and activities for ongoing connection with the broader community to discuss accessibility to parks and green spaces.

3. As you identify a wide range of partners whose work overlaps with Safe Routes to Parks, explore the resource, "Making the Connection: How Park Access Advances Community Goals" to connect priorities with partners and communicate how Safe Routes to Parks can help achieve shared goals.

4. For a deeper dive on working with unhoused communities, consult the "Strategies for Working with Unhoused Communities in Parks." If homelessness is a particular challenge in your community, use this resource to think about homelessness from multiple perspectives, consider different approaches to talking about and working with unhoused communities, and gather ideas for educating the broader community about the complexities of homelessness.

Guiding Questions

Questions to ask in this phase of the framework:

- What are the current efforts in your community that align with Safe Routes to Parks?
- Who are the community partners and leaders that I/we can work with? How can I/we show up and support their work?
- Who could be affected by this work and the changes that come from it? How can I/we build authentic relationships with these community residents/ organizations and center their priorities?
- Who has historically been excluded from this work?
- Who stands to benefit the most from this work? Who needs it the most?
- How can I/we support community residents/ organizations to lead this effort?

Walk With Ease Connection

Use Walk With Ease groups to connect with neighborhood residents. As you walk or roll together, discuss their perceptions of accessibility and safety.

If you are working on a virtual Walk With Ease program:

- Include opportunities for people to get involved with local initiatives to improve walkability and access.
- Incorporate information in your communications to get people thinking and talking about park access.
- Make space for people to virtually share stories about their life experiences with walking and rolling as well as the stories and experiences they collect during the program.

Photo Credit: Healthy Ride Pittsburgh

ENGAGEMENT TOOLBOX:
More Ideas for Engaging Community in Safe Routes to Parks

Community Engagement Cards: Try this collection of arts-based activities that foster community building through creativity. Each activity is designed to spark curiosity, encourage free expression, and engage diverse people in a variety of settings.

Social Media Messaging: Adapt these social media messages to recruit new partners and build your supportive team, educate the public on how improved park access benefits the community, and generate interest in parks and recreation initiatives.

Messaging for Unhoused Communities: Download this poster with adapted messaging for making unhoused people feel welcome in parks and engaging your community around the issue of homelessness. You can also customize the template in Canva with your own messaging and logo!

Defining Roles and Partnerships for Safe Routes to Parks

Every community has different priorities, but it is always helpful to work together to achieve shared goals. There are a handful of key players that can directly help with and benefit from collaboration on Safe Routes to Parks. Achieving public health outcomes, advancing social and racial equity, and improving the environment are all interconnected. Instead of working in silos, partners can work much more efficiently and effectively together to achieve shared goals.

This resource can help in developing a coalition or engaging with an existing group of agencies and community partners to support Safe Routes to Parks. Every organization, advocate, or agency has a unique role to play, whether it is analyzing data, conducting walk audits, sharing lived experience, advocating for policy changes, or leading a community event. Use this guide as a starting point to recognize the roles of different partners and take advantage of opportunities for collaboration.

When government agencies, decision-makers, and community advocates work together, they can achieve shared goals and accomplish even more than each could do separately. The benefits and advantages of working in a coalition with supportive partners are abundant. Here are some of the top reasons to form a Safe Routes to Parks coalition:

- Diversify your perspective: When you include new partners in your coalition, you will gain fresh ideas, multi-sector expertise, and lived experience. These varying perspectives will enrich your Safe Routes to Parks efforts and make parks and recreational programming more community-led, reflective of community voices and priorities, and accessible to diverse communities.
- Balance your workload: Safe Routes to Parks initiatives take time and energy, but many hands make light work. When you form a coalition, you can work with partners to share responsibilities, delegate tasks, and even out your workloads.
- Broaden your resources: Working with a coalition can also bring additional resources to bear. With access to different funding streams, technologies, staff time, and a reliable volunteer base, your coalition can achieve more fruitful results.
- Increase your efficiency: Collaborating with your colleagues and partners will help to reduce duplicative efforts, combine projects to cut costs, and increase overall productivity.

Government Agencies

Building connections between government agencies can improve efficiency, increase community trust, and multiply resources. Here are some of the different roles both you and your colleagues can play in your efforts to improve park access and recreational programming:

- **Parks and recreation departments** can activate parks and recreation facilities to host engaging community events. They can support and design programs to encourage residents to walk or bike to the park and engage in physical activity at the park. They can also recruit community organizations, pull in colleagues from other agencies, incorporate Safe Routes to Parks priorities into parks master plans, and coordinate with decision-makers to advance Safe Routes to Parks efforts.

- **Planning departments** can help analyze existing traffic data, conduct walk audits, collect community surveys, and lead community meetings/events.

- **Transportation and public works departments** can help identify infrastructure projects that improve safe walking and biking to and within parks and whether those projects are in the city's Capital Improvement Plan, Transportation System Plan, and other relevant transportation planning documents. These agencies can also help develop maintenance practices that promote well-maintained infrastructure for people walking and biking.

- **Public works departments** can build, maintain, and replace park facilities that are desired by the community and promote increased physical activity such as trails, drinking fountains, and bike parking.

- **Public health departments** often work on health promotion efforts to increase physical activity, prevent childhood obesity, and reduce traffic-related injuries. Public health partners can help identify shared priorities and partner on related Safe Routes to Parks programming, like Walk With Ease.

- **Inter-agency collaboration** can include co-planning community engagement meetings to consolidate efforts, respect community members' time, and improve trust with residents. Working across agencies can also bring more resources to bear, including budgets, staff time, and diverse expertise. Working together can also help avoid duplicative efforts and cut costs. For example, if the city is already repaving a road, improvements for walking and rolling to parks can be included in the project instead of adding those desired features in a separate effort at a later date.

Photo Credit: Verde, Cully Walks

Decision-Makers

Incorporating parks and recreation priorities into existing plans and creating standalone Safe Routes to Parks policies, like Safe Park Zone Ordinances and 10-Minute Walk Commitments, requires a unique partnership. Elected officials and lawmakers can bring decision-making authority, funding, and project authorization to Safe Routes to Parks efforts. Here are some of the roles they can play:

- **Lawmakers and elected officials** set policies and issue resolutions that declare priority issues in their communities. They can then direct staff to execute action items that help achieve these goals. For example, passing a Safe Park Zone Ordinance can include directives to agency staff to conduct speed studies near parks and reduce speed through environmental design.

- **Elected officials** can incorporate Safe Routes to Parks action items into park and recreation and partner agencies' system-wide planning and policy, including the Capital Improvement Plan, maintenance plans, park and open space plans, and park and street design policies to increase the sustainability of efforts.

- **People in decision-making positions** can also support cross-sector partnerships by offering letters of support, forming community task forces, and dedicating funding to collaborative projects.

Community-based Organizations, Non-profits, and Advocates

Not all Safe Routes to Parks initiatives start with parks and recreation agencies. Community partners can lead parks projects, advocate for desired changes, offer lived experience, and volunteer their time and energy. Here are some ideas of non-governmental organizations that may share park access goals and be able to lead this work and offer valuable and unique contributions:

- **Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs)** advocate for older adults living in their area, develop community-based long-term care services to meet the needs of those adults, and administer funds to implement services. According to a survey from the National Recreation and Parks Association, 63 percent of park and recreation agencies identified Area Agencies on Aging as their most common partner for delivering services to older adults.[4] There are 16 AAAs across Oregon that administer and support community-based care services.[5]
- Local **AARP chapters** offer opportunities for older adults to connect, a strong source of volunteers, and can be a tremendous resource in planning for age-friendly, livable communities. Oregon has a statewide AARP office that can connect you with local groups and activities.[6]
- Supporting and developing authentic relationships with **Black, Indigenous, and people of color-led organizations and affinity groups** can help reimagine and diversify representation in outdoor spaces and connect park users with culturally-relevant programming. For example, local chapters of Outdoor Afro[7] and Latino Outdoors[8] offer programming, community connection, and nature outings in Portland and Bend, particularly for Black and Latinx communities in Oregon. Remember to show up to support efforts and events organized by community-based organizations and affinity groups, rather than solely expecting residents and organizations to show up for you.

- **Children and youth** not only bring an imaginative perspective, but can also help identify barriers to safe transportation, prioritize and design strategies that increase safe transportation for young people, and conduct youth-led safety education initiatives like Vision Zero.[9]
- **Community members** living and working in the areas surrounding parks can help identify community priorities and share what barriers inhibit or support park access. Cultivate authentic relationships with the people who live, work, and play near the park(s) of focus. Identify ways to support community priorities during and beyond the timeframe of your project or event. Elevate their stories and center their priorities in the work.
- **People with disabilities** bring a much-needed perspective to Safe Routes to Parks efforts in rethinking "walkability," reducing barriers to accessible park space, and identifying features that increase park safety and enjoyment for everyone.

- **Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Service** provides various programs, partnerships, and volunteer opportunities that support healthy, resilient, and active communities. The **SNAP-Ed (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education) program** focuses on nutrition education. SNAP-Ed supports implementing policy, systems, and environmental changes that affect the food and activity environments where people live, learn, work and play.[10] The **Walk With Ease Program** offers classes that reduce the pain and discomfort of arthritis, build confidence in the ability to be physically active, and improves overall health.[11] Local OSU Extension Service programs can help connect with neighborhood residents and offer considerations for accessibility, physical activity, and safety.

- **Safe Routes to School** practitioners actively influence programs, infrastructure, policies, and investments in their communities, with an eye towards children's health, safety, and physical activity levels. Safe Routes to School practitioners activate parks for Park and Walks and meeting locations for Walking School Buses and Bike Trains. Incorporating considerations of Safe Routes to Parks into these activities may be an easy way to expand effectiveness and reach.[12]

- Local **unhoused advocacy organizations and shelters** can help connect individuals experiencing homelessness to services and housing, and help consider strategies for improving safety for all park users.

Conclusion

Developing a coalition of agencies, community organizations and advocates, and decision-makers can elevate your Safe Routes to Parks efforts and help achieve shared goals. Look around you and you'll see all the unique roles, perspectives, and resources each partner has to offer. When working together you can make extraordinary changes in your parks and communities.

Photo Credit: CAN Do Houston

ENGAGEMENT TOOLBOX: Activities for Defining Roles and Partnerships for Safe Routes to Parks

Community Engagement Cards: Try this collection of arts-based activities that foster community building through creativity. Each activity is designed to spark curiosity, encourage free expression, and engage diverse people in a variety of settings.

Safe Routes to Parks Coalition Table: Use this template to organize information about organizations and individual representatives that have and will continue to support Safe Routes to Parks effort.

Making the Connection: How Park Access Advances Community Goals

Parks are places where people can be active, spend time in nature, and connect with friends and neighbors. But the benefits of parks and recreation activities go much further than the physical park itself. Parks and recreational professionals know how multi-dimensional their work is, but how can you communicate that with other agencies and organizations? Your message should help make the connection between park access and the outcomes that advance community goals and improve quality of life.

This tip sheet highlights five overarching messages for parks and recreation professionals to communicate how Safe Routes to Parks can help advance community priorities, with specific talking points to drive home these important values. These messages can help get buy-in from partners, demonstrate which shared goals can be achieved, and show how working together creates stronger success than working alone. Incorporate these messages into funding requests, op-eds, community meeting invites, letters to decision-makers, and social media campaigns.
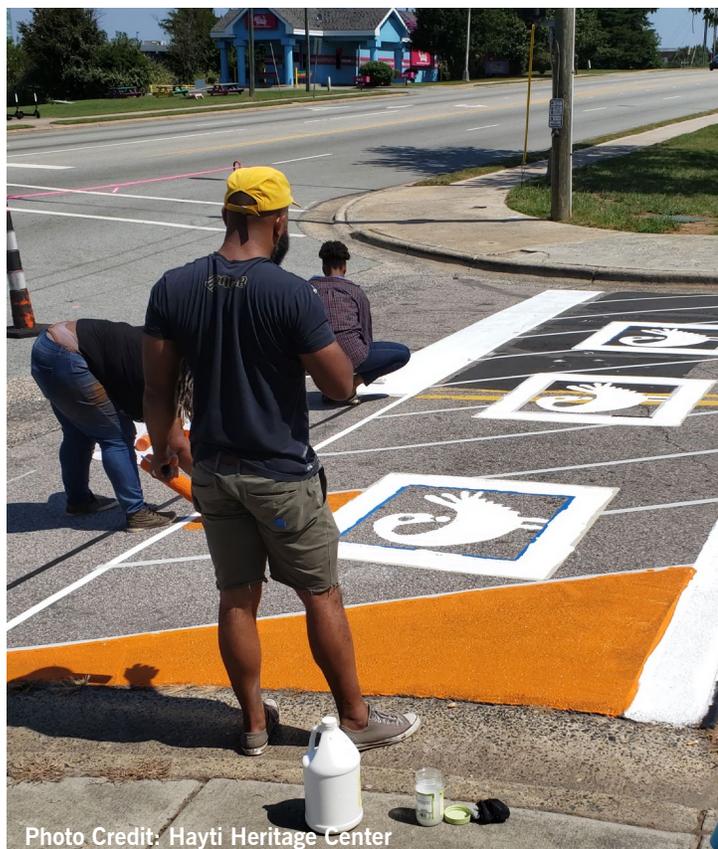
Photo Credit: Hayti Heritage Center

Safe Routes to Parks Supports Individual and Community Health

You work in parks and recreation because you care about getting people outside, to connect with others, to be physically active, mentally stimulated, and engaged in their communities, and your city cares about advancing projects that result in positive health outcomes. Here are a few talking points to help illustrate how parks and recreation support individual and community health goals:

- Having access to high-quality parks and green spaces offers many physical health benefits. Research shows that access to green spaces predicts activity levels and weight-related health outcomes for children and youth,[13] and being able to walk or bike to community recreation sites is a critical determinant for how frequently they are used.[14]
- Time spent in parks and green spaces has vast mental health benefits and can reduce depression, anxiety, and stress.[15] Having access to nature also results in improved psychological well-being and cognitive functioning in youth.[16]
- Not only is outdoor physical activity important for physical and mental health, but it can also be a cost savings mechanism. According to the 2019-2023 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, outdoor physical activity in Oregon resulted in $1.4 billion in health care savings in 2018, or about 3.6 percent of total healthcare costs in the state.[17]

Safe Routes to Parks Reduces Barriers to Park Access and Advances Equity

The work behind park planning and recreation programming is about providing access and enjoyment for all community members. Parks and recreation professionals believe that race, ethnicity, national origin, socio-economic status, or ability status should not determine whether someone has access to a high-quality park close to home. Park access is especially important in communities of color, which are more likely lacking infrastructure, such as sidewalks, crosswalks, and speed humps, to support safe walking and bicycling; where violence and crime are prevalent; and where there are high rates of weight-related diseases or conditions. Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities consistently have less access to safe, connected transportation networks and nature.[18]

If your city is ready to put equity statements and policies into meaningful action, here are some ideas to help make the connection between park access and equitable outcomes:

- Increasing walking and rolling access to parks is significant for families who benefit from meal distribution sites offered by parks and recreation, which is the second largest provider of meals to children, next to schools.[19]
- Health disparities for Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities can be addressed through improved walking and biking park access, culturally-sensitive recreational programming, and park-based community gardens.[20]
- Safe Routes to Parks efforts can help build authentic relationships with community residents, including youth, and organizations that live and work within the neighborhood(s) of focus.[21]
- Reducing barriers to park access can allow more communities to use their local parks, helping to diversify and reimagine park use for people of all races, genders, ages, income levels, abilities, and disabilities.

Safe Routes to Parks Supports Inclusivity for People of All Ages and Abilities

Parks and recreation professionals work to develop inclusive spaces and programming for people of all ages, abilities, and disabilities. If your city wants to improve services for people of all abilities and the growing aging community, use these talking points to connect the dots between parks and recreation programming with the age-friendly and disability-friendly outcomes:

- Safe Routes to Parks efforts make it safe for children, older adults, people with disabilities, and all community members to walk or roll to the park, by improving sidewalks, bike paths, safe crossings, wayfinding signs, and low speeds on surrounding streets.
- Although older adults make up an increasingly large share of the U.S. population, their use of parks is disproportionately low.[22] In the 2019 AARP Age-Friendly Oregon Listening Tour, Oregonians age 50+ ranked walkable and accessible outdoor spaces as a top priority.[23] Reducing access barriers can help increase safe, multimodal park use by older adults and people of all ages.

Photo Credit: Shawano Pathways

- Parks and recreation agencies offer a variety of programming for older adults, including exercise classes, opportunities to volunteer in recreation centers, field trips, tours, vacations, events and festivals, and arts and crafts classes.[24] Physically accessing these offerings via active modes of transportation offers an opportunity for improved health and overall well-being.
- Parks and recreation facilities can also specifically reach out to underserved older adults by providing free or low-cost meals followed by social or physical activity that encourages more involvement from older adults.[25]
- Offering programming for older adults at parks and recreation facilities where play and learning opportunities are also offered to youth and families can help promote intergenerational connection and a sense of belonging.
- A 2017 survey showed that Oregonians with disabilities are less likely to access parks than people without disabilities, and that of the Oregonians who do not participate in outdoor recreation, 50 percent report that they or someone in their household has a disability.[26] Creating more recreational opportunities for people with disabilities and improving park access close to home would benefit people with disabilities and all Oregonians.

Photo Credit: REV Birmingham

Safe Routes to Parks Improves Transportation Planning and Safety Issues

Parks and recreation professionals are responsible for creating high-quality parks and recreation programming. For people to access these wonderful community facilities and services, they need routes to parks that are safe from traffic and personal dangers. If your community wants to improve transportation design and public safety, here are a few ideas to show how your work to improve safe park access aligns with other transportation planning and safety initiatives:

- In a 2017 survey, Oregonians reported that it is very important (46%) or somewhat important (37%) to have a recreation facility within a 10 minute or less walking distance from their home.[27] Safe Routes to Parks efforts can help communities reach their 10-minute walk goals, by reducing distance and barriers between where people live and recreate.
- Safe Routes to Parks efforts can help address infrastructure and design inequities in Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities, by improving sidewalks, crosswalks, and speed humps, to support safe walking and bicycling.[28]
- Parks can be an effective part of Safe Routes to School, offering a safe place to walk or roll off-street and in nature. A park near a school can also be a great location for families who do not live within walking distance to meet and participate in a walking school bus for at least a portion of their daily journey to school.
- Research shows that after distance, safety most influences the decision to participate in physical activity and walk or bike.[29] Safe Routes to Parks efforts can help address violence and crime to increase safe access to and within parks.[30]
- Safe Routes to Parks provides opportunities to engage more authentically with community members to identify real and perceived safety threats in and around parks. Community-led park initiatives can lead to community ownership of efforts and continued support of park maintenance and safety over the long-term.[31]

Safe Routes to Parks Supports Environmental Sustainability and Resilience

Parks and recreation professionals are passionate about restoring green spaces, preserving parks, and providing open spaces for community members to enjoy. Here are some ideas that demonstrate how Safe Routes to Parks ties in with your community's environmental goals.

- Safe Routes to Parks efforts can help communities develop maintenance practices to keep the park safe from hazards and free from graffiti, trash, and overgrown plants.
- Safe Routes to Parks planning often involves creating more green spaces and infrastructure in and around parks. After all, more green spaces provide increased opportunities for communities and people to reap the physical and mental health benefits of spending time in nature. Parks with green infrastructure features, like wetlands or lakes, can help to increase physical activity and park use.[32]
- Poor stormwater management and flooding can deter people from walking and biking to and around parks, particularly in wetter Oregon communities. Flooding can be mitigated through Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) solutions that are nature-based methods for reducing and treating stormwater flooding. Not only do GSI solutions offer conservation and environmental restoration benefits, but they can also reduce park access barriers. By mitigating flooding concerns in parks,

communities can experience an increase in physical activity and park usage.[33] Bundling stormwater and infrastructure improvements can also allow for multiple municipal funding streams to be tapped, helping to reduce costs.

Conclusion

Improved access to parks and recreation programming can help advance larger community goals related to health, equity, inclusivity, safety, and the environment. Parks and recreation professionals have an opportunity to make those connections with effective messaging and talking points. A big part of the message you want to get across is that you have the potential to create more meaningful and lasting change when working together, instead of alone. For more ideas on aligning with other agencies and organizations, check out the "Defining Roles and Partnership for Safe Routes to Parks" factsheet.

ENGAGEMENT TOOLBOX: Connecting the Dots on Social Media

In addition to using the talking points provided in this resource, parks and recreation professionals can take the conversation online with social media posts. Adapt these social media messages to recruit new partners and build your supportive team, educate the public on how improved park access benefits the community, and generate interest in parks and recreation initiatives.

Strategies for Working with Unhoused Communities in Parks

Parks are places where all people can recreate, learn, gather, and rest, including individuals who do not have homes. Some of the most vulnerable individuals who are experiencing homelessness turn to public parks as a sanctuary for safety and rest. At its core, Safe Routes to Parks seeks to increase park usage and improve health for people of all ages, races, abilities, disabilities, and income levels, and as a concept, does not discriminate against unhoused people. Yet, in communities across the country, the presence and associated challenges of unhoused people also undermines feelings of safety, security, and desire to use local parks. The causes and impacts of homelessness are multifactorial, and we cannot pretend to offer a silver bullet solution. Rather, this section of the toolkit invites parks and recreation professionals to think through multiple perspectives on how unhoused people living in parks affect overall park access and use in a compassionate and practical way.

2019 marked the third straight year of national-level increases in homelessness, and Oregon was no exception.[34] In fact, Oregon has a disproportionately large population of individuals experiencing homelessness in comparison to the rest of the country, due to an inadequate housing supply, increased housing costs, and a population of chronically unhoused people who require specialized housing and social services.[35] A 2019 report commissioned by the Oregon Community Health Foundation shows that while the state's total population represents 1.3 percent of the total U.S. population, the population of unhoused people in Oregon represents 2.6 percent of the total U.S. unhoused population.[36] The report also found that homelessness disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities in Oregon – a disparity that mirrors national data.

Historical injustices and racist housing and land-use policies, combined with current economic and public health crises have created a situation where unhoused or housing-insecure Oregonians are increasingly reliant on public places for rest. This has naturally led to increased camping at public parks and trails, which can result in public safety issues, social conflicts between park users, as well as health and environmental concerns. Parks and recreation professionals can begin to think through these issues by looking at current laws in place and considering strategies for talking about and working with unhoused individuals.

Take a Closer Look

If homelessness is a particular challenge in your community and parks, use this resource to think about homelessness from multiple perspectives, consider different approaches to talking about and working with unhoused communities, and gather ideas for educating the broader community about the complexities of homelessness.

Oregon Law Around Camping in Public Parks

Camping on public property is prohibited in many of Oregon's cities and counties.[37] State law requires that local jurisdictions develop humane policies for the removal of camps from public property and requires that certain elements, like written 24-hour notice and storage of personal items, be included in local policies.[38] In communities where camping on public property is prohibited, law enforcement may remove homeless camps from public property under certain conditions and with 24-hour notice. Homelessness is not against the law, however, and the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that cities cannot clear unhoused people from parks and public spaces if there are more unhoused people than there are beds available.[39]

Photo Credit: Nick Fewings on Unsplash

Talking About Unhoused Individuals

It is important to approach the complexities of homelessness and related camping, resting, and living in public spaces from a solution-driven and compassionate place. The way people talk about issues influences their perception of them, which means parks and recreation professionals and partners working on Safe Routes to Parks can model the solution-oriented mindset by being deliberate about word choice and how to communicate about unhoused people. When talking about individuals who are experiencing homelessness, be sure to emphasize personhood over housing status. Use terms like "unhoused people" or "unsheltered individuals," instead of referring to groups of individuals as "the homeless." For example, you wouldn't want to say "they're a diabetic," but "that person who has diabetes," and instead of "juvenile delinquent," you might say "young adult impacted by the justice system." In these examples, having diabetes or involvement with the justice system may be one condition of a person's life, but is not the defining attribute. Similarly, a person is not defined by their lack of permanent address. When discussing public safety or park appearance concerns, specifically call out the issues that need to be addressed, such as drug paraphernalia or litter, instead of referring to an activity or person as "unwanted" or "undesirable." And as parks professionals and advocates consider actions they can take to preserve public safety and quality of parks, they must also be taking actions that preserve the dignity of all park users, including alternatives to sweeps, providing harm-reduction services, and fostering connection between

Photo Credit: Nick Fewings on Unsplash

unhoused and housed individuals.

Alternatives to Sweeps and Removal

Removing people and campsites from parks can be detrimental to individuals experiencing homelessness, causing them to disperse, and potentially lose access to their personal belongings and essential services. It can also be harsh on cities' budgets. A 2019 audit of the City of Portland's camping sweep and cleaning efforts revealed that it cost the city nearly $3.6 million a year.[40] Instead of costly camp sweeps and forceful removal of individuals from parks, consider alternatives that connect people with services, and promote safe park usage by all community members.

In Modesto, California, a 12-acre city park was selected to serve as a designated space where individuals experiencing homelessness could congregate and sleep without penalty.[41] The designated camping park was equipped with portable restrooms, handwashing stations, and dumpsters for trash. Although it was a short-term solution, the community saw an immediate improvement in its other park facilities. In the meantime, the city was able to enforce no sleeping rules in all other public spaces under their stewardship and worked with partners at the county, faith-based organizations, and homelessness advocates to prepare the Modesto Outdoor Emergency Shelter (MOES), which is more suitable for helping individuals on a path to housing security.

In Eugene, Oregon, the city partners with local community-based organizations to offer coordinated mental health response services, as well as designated rest areas. CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets) is a community-based public safety system to provide mental health first response to those in need. It is an effective non-policing strategy for working with individuals experiencing crises involving mental health, homelessness, and addiction that has been built into the city's emergency call system.[42] The city also offers a rest stop program, which provides a temporary option for a limited number of people experiencing homelessness to legally camp overnight in
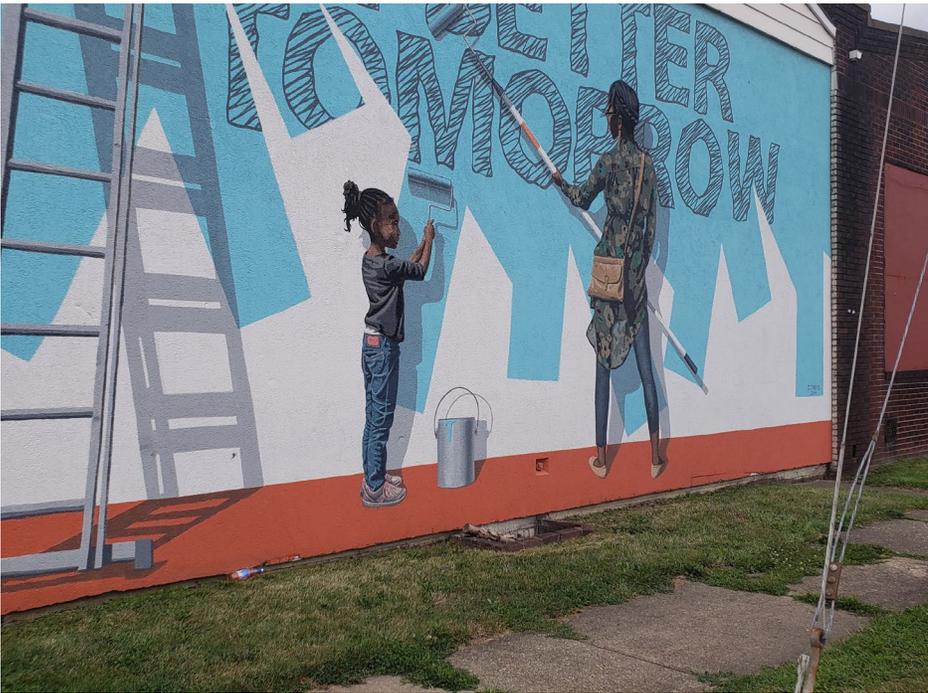
designated areas of the city.[43]
Local non-profits like Community Supported Shelters also partner with the city to offer legal, designated sleeping places for people who are without a conventional form of housing.[44]

Public safety in and around parks can also be addressed by changes in park design and programming.[45] Increased visibility, through improved lighting and brush clearing, improves both the perception of and actual safety for all park users, including vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness. And installing and maintaining public restrooms provides an appropriate space for all park users to maintain privacy and have basic needs met.

Partnerships to Reduce Harm and Provide Services

Substance abuse and related waste are common health and safety concerns in parks. Unhoused individuals are at high-risk for substance addiction, as it is a contributor and byproduct of living unhoused. In 2019, nearly half of the people living unsheltered on Portland, Oregon's streets reported living with substance abuse issues, either alcohol or drugs, and one in four people sleeping outside reported having both a mental illness and substance use disorder.[46]

While parks and recreation professionals may not have entered their fields to tackle complex issues of homelessness and substance abuse, they can contribute to short-term and long-term solutions. From equipping staff with overdose-reducing drugs to offering training that help deepen understanding of the homelessness and substance abuse epidemics, parks and recreation professionals can help with reducing harm and conflict in parks. For an upstream approach to prevention, they can also play a role in offering pain management classes and practices, like Walk With Ease, Tai Chi, and spending time in nature, to help individuals reduce toxic stress and find

community connection.[47] Establishing partnerships with public health, treatment providers, and unhoused advocacy organizations can be critical in meeting some of these challenges, by providing health services and connecting individuals with housing and treatment solutions. These partners can also help communities explore effective interventions like harm reduction and syringe service programs (SSPs), also known as needle exchange programs, which are important parts of the public health response to outbreaks of overdose and infectious diseases. The Oregon Health Authority has a centralized list of harm reduction facilities, as well as a planning and resource manual to support the development of local harm reduction and SSPs.[48]

Fostering Connection Between Unhoused and Housed Individuals

Balancing frustrations from housed park users with hardships faced by unhoused park users is no easy task, but public education can be an important piece of addressing homelessness in parks. Education and outreach efforts can help raise public awareness that each person experiencing homelessness is unique, and unhoused people are part of the community. NRPA offers some ideas for generating community support with interpretative signage, public statements, pamphlets, and community forums.[49]

To help build bridges between housed and unhoused individuals, parks and recreation professionals can also plan family-oriented activities and events that draw in more of the surrounding neighborhood, increase park use, strengthen the community, and deepen understandings of the root causes and daily life of homelessness. Host activation events that help spur regular activity at the park and help housed park users feel more comfortable using that space. Partner with the local community and faith-based organizations to organize food distribution and community meal events with proper permits, sanitation services, and trash disposal. By deepening collective understanding of the barriers and challenges around homelessness, parks can become a much more inclusive and accessible place for all people.

Conclusion

Tackling the complex issues of homelessness is not easy and there are many perspectives to consider. With tools for using person-first language, learning about public camping laws, and identifying proactive approaches to harm-reduction and public education, you can start to rethink overall park access for housed and unhoused park users. Parks and recreation professionals can work with other agencies and community partners to determine which holistic solutions work best in each unique community.

Photo Credit: Jon Tyson on Unsplash

ENGAGEMENT TOOLBOX:
Messaging for Community Building

In a 2019 article featured by NRPA, Milo Neild, M.S., and Jeff Rose, Ph.D. offer recommendations for messaging for public education, homelessness awareness, and generating community support.[50] Statements like, "All members of the community are welcome to use public parks and open spaces," and "Each person experiencing homelessness is unique." can help parks and recreation professionals seeking to engage the community around the issue of homelessness and deepen collective understanding. Include these messages in pamphlets, interpretive signage, on social media, and at community meetings.

Download this poster with adapted messaging, or customize the template in Canva with your own messaging and logo!

Our Parks Are for Everyone!

In our parks, all people are welcome to recreate, relax, and rest.

Public parks and open spaces can be a more comfortable space for those experiencing homelessness.

Anyone can experience homelessness and each person experiencing homelessness is unique.

Those experiencing homelessness are part of our community. All members of the community are welcome to use our parks and open spaces.

ASSESS

Activities in the assessment phase give your team the information they need to have a full picture of barriers to safe and equitable park access and the assets that they could build on to address those barriers. Use the strategies included in this section to find existing data as well as collect specific, local data that can guide your work. This is also an opportunity to establish baseline measurements that you can then compare to data collected after you make improvements to measure success. All of the following steps are opportunities for parks and recreation professionals to support community leadership and skill-building. Work with community members to determine what information they want to find and support their efforts to collect that data.

Steps to take in this phase:

1. Use the "Finding and Using Data to Support Safe Routes to Parks" to help you gather local data on health, traffic safety, personal safety, and park use to get a clear picture of what is happening in the community. Organize the information into a simple four by four matrix in the State of Park Access Table.
2. Conduct park observations and surveys online, at the park of interest, and in other community gathering destinations. Look at the section "How to Collect New Data" in "Finding and Using Data to Support Safe Routes to Parks" for ideas and guidance.
3. Organize a walk audit and other on-site assessments to involve more people in identifying the street elements that support or hinder walking or rolling. Use the Safe Routes to Parks Walk Audit Toolkit to plan and conduct a successful walk audit.
4. Identify assessment activities that can further illuminate the assets and barriers to park access.

ASSESSMENT TOOLBOX: More Resources for Assessing Safe Routes to Parks

Community Survey Template: A community survey can help quickly identify the key assets and barriers to park access that neighborhood residents experience. Use the customizable Safe Routes to Parks community survey template.

Community Visioning: These are an opportunity to bring the broader community together to build a shared vision for park access in the neighborhood. Use this checklist to help plan and host engaging and thoughtful Safe Routes to Parks community visioning activities.

Safe Routes to Parks Evaluation Guide: This factsheet outlines examples of different approaches to evaluating park access as well as tips for success.

Guiding Questions

Questions to ask in this phase of the framework:

- What does the community identify as their assets and strengths?
- What do people want for their community? What do they need?
- What are the barriers to park access?
- How are people currently accessing parks? (Walking, rolling, using transit, driving, etc.)
- What information do you need to make a case for this work?
- Picture the headline that paints a portrait of success: what does it say? What data do you need to collect to tell that story and show progress?

Photo Credit: Healthy Ride Pittsburgh

Walk With Ease Connection

- Do Walk With Ease programs increase the demand for walkable communities? Ask program participants in your community. You can include a short before and after survey to gauge whether the program has increased people's interest in walkable places and park access.

- Hold a walk audit during a Walk With Ease walk or even just have the group take note of park and trail use during their participation. For virtual programs, include materials for a self-guided walk audit that participants can do alone or with friends and family.

- Ask people how they get to the location for the Walk With Ease program or how they get to a location where they can do their walking. Is transportation or lack thereof a barrier?

- Ideally, participation in Walk With Ease encourages people to walk outside the program, too. Creating a community that is walkable supports people with arthritis, kids, and people of all ages, abilities, and disabilities to get around and get physically active as they move throughout their communities.

Photo Credit: Healthy Ride Pittsburgh

Finding and Using Data to Support Safe Routes to Parks

Data can seem boring, hard to work with, and even intimidating. But if you know what to do with it, data can be the power booster that Safe Routes to Parks efforts need to make changes for safer, more equitable park access. Collecting and using data is an essential part of Safe Routes to Parks because it gives information about what is happening in communities, which can spark ideas for solutions and inform how to move toward them. Data can help you identify community priorities, advocate for change, and measure success. This resource provides ideas for ways to access and collect data as well as ways to effectively share the information to improve safe, equitable access to parks and green space. It includes curated lists of linked resources for national, state and local data; quantitative and qualitative data collection tools; and platforms to present your data.

How Data Supports Safe Routes to Parks

Data helps identify the gaps, assets, and needs of a community- whether you are asking residents about their experiences getting to a park or recording how far people have to walk without a sidewalk to access a public greenspace.

1. Once you identify that information, data can be used to identify action items and prioritize improvements in a way that is equitable rather than based on how many resources people have to advocate for their particular project of interest.
2. Data also bolster advocacy efforts by helping make the case for improvements and funding. Does the community you are working in have higher rates of obesity or pedestrian fatalities and fewer sidewalks than other areas? That can help make the case for investments in better infrastructure.
3. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, data collected at the beginning and throughout your Safe Routes to Parks work allows you to measure the success of your work and evaluate outcomes. You can use this information to demonstrate success and advocate for more of this work in your community.

Community Members Lead Park Access Assessment

CAN DO Houston enlisted and trained residents to lead the assessment process of their park access efforts. These community leaders worked with their neighbors to select parks to focus on, conducted Safe Routes to Parks walk audits at each of the parks, and developed a survey to understand the barriers to accessing the parks and potential solutions to overcome those challenges. The Near Northside Park Safety Survey captured information on safety, quality, features, and access to the parks. This survey occurred in conjunction with walk audits and was also distributed to neighbors who hadn't participated in the walk audits. CAN DO Houston worked with the neighborhood leaders to analyze the data to identify the principal challenges to safely accessing the parks. The group then prioritized improvements to increase access, including reducing driver speeds, lack of crosswalks, fixing cracked sidewalks, adding signage and streetlights, and removing a fence that serves as a physical barrier to the park.

There are two main categories of data: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data is information that can be expressed in numbers while qualitative data express more abstract concepts through words. For example, when you are assessing access to parks, quantitative data may be the number of miles of sidewalks or how many lighting fixtures line the way to park. Qualitative data may illuminate people's thoughts and feelings about the infrastructure, like whether they feel safe walking to their neighborhood park and why. Both types of data can help give you a fuller picture of assets and gaps, but may not give a full picture on their own.

Photo Credit: Cultiva La Salud

Where to Find Existing Data

Local quantitative data sources

It is likely that your local, county, regional, and state government agencies regularly collect data on a variety of relevant topics and may have it available via an open data portal on their website. However, the data may be housed within different departments, so here are some key places to look for data that you can use for Safe Routes to Parks. You can reach out to these agencies to determine what data is available, how to access it, and if there are existing tools available to easily analyze the data.

- Public works departments, engineering departments, or regional transportation commissions may keep infrastructure inventories that include locations and characteristics of sidewalks, bike lanes, crosswalks, and other elements that affect Safe Routes to Parks. You may be able to obtain traffic volume data as well. To understand opportunities for future improvements, find out the department's paving and repaving schedules. Are there opportunities to advocate for improvements when the department is already adding paint or changing street infrastructure for pavement improvement or stormwater projects?
- Traffic counts: The Oregon Department of Transportation collects traffic counts for state highways and has links to several local jurisdictions' traffic counts.

- City and county transportation spending: The Association of Oregon Counties and the League of Oregon Cities are required to annually report county Highway Fund and city transportation expenditures respectively to the Oregon State legislature.
- Parks and recreation departments may have data on park attendance and usage, infrastructure inventories, and maintenance schedules.
- Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan: The state updates this plan every five years and uses data and surveys to inform their recommendations. The supporting documents include surveys of specific segments of the population, including older adults, families with children, as well as Latino and Asian residents. Other relevant reports include a survey of Oregon public recreation providers to understand their challenges and assets as well as a report conducted by Oregon State University's College of Forestry that estimates the health benefits for Oregonians from their participation in 30 outdoor recreation activities in 2017.
- Local and state law enforcement as well as your state or local transportation department may keep crime and crash data as well as data on traffic speed.

- Oregon Transportation Safety Data Explorer: This GIS map shows a host of different kinds of data such as crash data from 2014 to 2018, transportation projects, Safe Routes to School funded infrastructure projects, Oregon Schools, and traffic data.
- Public health departments at the city, county, and state-level collect information on a wide variety of health indicators like obesity, air quality, rates of physical activity, road safety, and more.
- Oregon Health Authority: The Public Health Division collects and analyzes data on a variety of health behaviors, diseases, and injuries.
- Safe Routes to School practitioners are doing very similar work to actively influence programs, infrastructure, policies and investments in Oregon communities. Ask if your local Safe Routes to School program has conducted walkability assessments at or near parks. Safe Routes to School practitioners may have data on how community members are using parks as part of their route to school, or they may have assessed reasons why some residents use parks less or not at all.

**Photo Credit: Verde, Cully Walks**

National quantitative data sources

There are many resources for national data on public health and transportation, and we encourage you to check out this factsheet for those broader resources. Below are some more specific data sources and reports relevant to Safe Routes to Parks:

- Benchmarking Report on Bicycling and Walking in the United States: This report from The League of American Bicyclists highlights national data on walking and biking in the context of public health and equity. It also includes a collection of state and city-specific data.
- Dangerous by Design: This report from Smart Growth America puts pedestrian fatality data in the context of how much people are walking and ranks states, metropolitan areas, and congressional districts by how dangerous it is to walk.
- National Equity Atlas: This database provides information on demographic change, racial inclusion, and economic benefits of equity nationally as well as for the 100 largest cities, 150 largest regions, and all 50 states.
- Park Score: This resource from the Trust for Public Land brings together a variety of data to evaluate park systems based on access, investment, acreage, and amenities in nearly 14,000 cities, towns, and communities.
- Strava Metro: This resource collects community-sourced data on active transportation trips via smartphone and GPS devices to visualize trends and patterns of how people move through their communities.
- StreetLight Data: This website houses data from anonymized location records from smartphones and navigation devices. They map that data onto the road network with land use and demographics data to make the data useful for planning.

How to Collect New Data

Local quantitative data collection methods

- System of Observing Play and Recreation in Communities (SOPARC): This is a structured approach to observing and cataloging park use. NRPA has a basic intro to the method of counting and categorizing activity in the park and here is a more in-depth guide from the RAND Corporation.

- Go Counter: This is a mobile app from Rails-to-Trails Conservancy that allows you to count people and their specific activity on a trail and then save and export that data. You can upload your count data to their Trail Traffic Calculator to get Annual Average Daily Traffic and Annual Traffic Estimates.

- Manual bike, pedestrian, and trail user counts: Here is a 2-hour bicycle-pedestrian count sheet from Metropolitan Area Planning Council covering the cities and towns of metropolitan Boston. Think about the information you want to collect and make sure you shift what you are recording to fit that. Consider whether you want to record whether people are wearing helmets or using a bike share bike.

- Automatic trail counters: There are a variety of temporary and permanent trail counter devices. Some are sophisticated enough to distinguish between whether people are walking or biking and in which direction they are moving. For example, the City of Arlington, Virginia uses 32 automatic trail counters along several recreation trails and on-street bike lanes. Bike Arlington maintains a page with the location of all counters and information about them, including information on factors that can affect count accuracy.

Photo Credit: Verde, Cully Walks

Building Residents' Capacity for Assessment and Advocacy

In Modesto, CA, a coalition of community members and nonprofit organizations, including Tuolumne River Trust and Catholic Charities, were working on park access in the Modesto Airport Neighborhood in 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic hit. As the city shut down, it became clear that community members would have to meet virtually to continue their work. The coalition developed a survey to understand whether people would have access to the technology and knowledge necessary to participate virtually. Through the survey and individual conversations, the committee found that half of the participating residents had access to a computer or tablet, and a majority of the leaders had little knowledge of the technologies required to fully participate in virtual meetings. The coalition decided to take the time to teach people how to use online tools and applications so that they could fully participate. They then expanded these skills learning activities to topics such as how to write an email, how to use a search engine, and how to use Google programs (documents, sheets, slides, and forms). As part of this training, community members designed a bilingual survey to assess the barriers to park access and assets that they could build on in their plans for the future.

Qualitative data sources

Collecting qualitative data provides an opportunity to engage with community residents and convey that you value their lived experiences and input. Community members are the ones experiencing their community and using the infrastructure that constitutes the routes to parks, so they are the ultimate experts in Safe Routes to Parks work. Incorporate community experience into data that you use for decision-making, advocacy, and measures of success. When people see their desires and ideas of what success looks like manifested in the work that is being done in their community, they will feel more bought into the whole process. Strike a balance between inviting imaginative community engagement and clearly sharing how that engagement will be incorporated into projects, with consideration of your city's budget and staffing capacity. This engagement creates a solid foundation for community members to advocate for their priorities, knowing they will be listened to, and sets a model for community-informed decision-making in the future.

Your local parks, public works, public health, or transportation departments may already have data from surveys or other engagement activities that they would be willing to share with you. If they do not have it already, they may be interested in working together to collect that information.

Photo Credit: **Verde, Cully Walks**

- **Community Survey**: A community survey can help quickly identify the key assets and barriers to park access that neighborhood residents experience. Use the customizable Safe Routes to Parks community survey template.
- **Walk Audits**: These are an opportunity for community members to go for a walk together, noting what makes their streets feel comfortable for walking and what needs improvement. Walk audits can be informal and casual, or can include city councilmembers, traffic engineers, and detailed forms. This Safe Routes to Parks Walk Audit toolkit provides guidance and sample materials to hold your own walk audit that will help you improve safe access to parks for people walking and biking. AARP also has easy-to-use worksheets.
- **Health Impact Assessments**: This process of analysis is a useful tool to help make the case for the many benefits of Safe Routes to Parks. While the positive health impacts of parks and green space may seem obvious, often decision-makers want data to help weigh the costs and benefits of a change or to select among different strategies to benefit health. This factsheet offers a snapshot of a tool to help park advocates engage stakeholders and gather data in support of safe, equitable park access.
- **Community Visioning Events**: These are an opportunity to bring the community together to build a shared vision for park access in the neighborhood. Use this checklist to plan and host engaging and thoughtful Safe Routes to Parks community visioning activities.

You can also collect qualitative data by talking and working with the community. There are many simple, creative ways to collect feedback to questions in group settings. Activities that you use for engagement, like these community engagement cards that outline arts-based activities can both foster community building and help you collect useful information to guide Safe Routes to Parks work in the community. Another approach is to use photography as a way to tell stories and document needs. Identify the questions you want to answer and then provide the materials for participants to take photographs that express their answers and point of view. Participants can further expand on the image with written or spoken descriptions. This is a useful tool for self-advocacy that allows people to more fully express themselves through images.

Creative Outreach During COVID-19

In 2020, Blue Zones Klamath Falls- Healthy Klamath, a public health organization housed within a local health system, was working on making Klamath Falls, Oregon's extensive trail system more accessible and easy to navigate. During the pandemic and associated shutdowns, they found creative ways to engage with community members to identify the barriers that keep people from using the trail system and prioritize which trails to begin the installation of a new wayfinding system. They experimented with including informational materials and surveys with material distribution occurring in response to COVID-19, like senior meal pick-ups or school packet pick-ups. Later in the pandemic, staff wanted to prioritize the voice of older adults, so they went to the senior center where people were picking up meals and asked them for feedback on the trail and park access (while taking all health precautions). They also went out to the trails and asked people about their experiences, what they loved, and what could be improved.

**Photo Credit: Blue Zones Hawaii**

How to Share Data, Frame the Story, and Choose Messengers Effectively

Data may help change minds, but stories change hearts. Once you have all of your data, you need to show how it fits into a larger story about the community to make it compelling and memorable. That is how you will build support for your work and influence decision-makers to make policy and funding decisions that make park access safer and more equitable.

One way to do this is to tell individual stories and weave in the data you have collected to emphasize community members' experiences and anecdotal observations. Bring it together with a photo or a video to connect the human stories with the numbers.

You can also present the qualitative and quantitative data onto a map of the neighborhood(s) you are working in. This connects the data to places and provides important context for Safe Routes to Parks work. You can use the following resources to share different levels of detail in map form:

- Google Maps: This site allows you to plot a route and add labeled pins to a sharable map.
- OpenStreetMap: This is a free, crowdsourced map where community members maintain data about roads, trails, and other destinations. It can also be integrated into other mapping sites.
- ArcGIS story maps: This free resource allows you to build a custom, interactive map for digital storytelling.
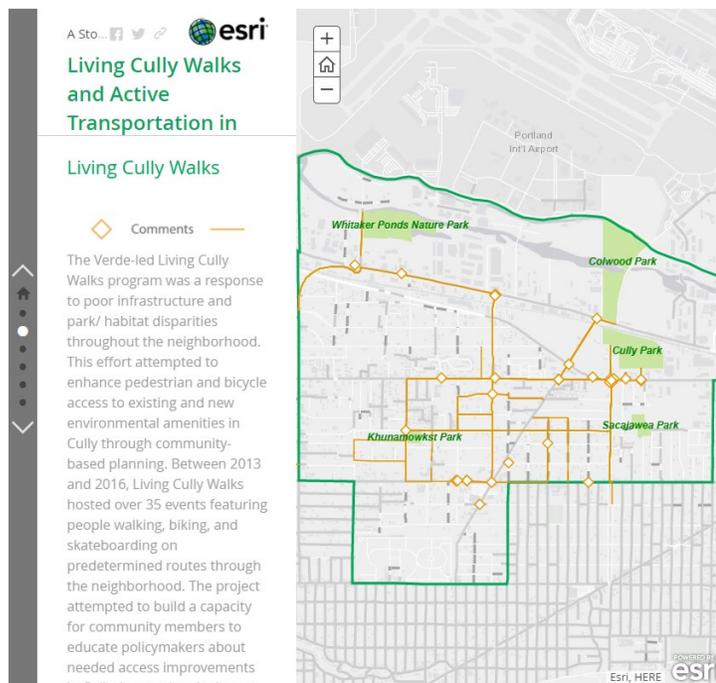
Putting Stories on the Map

Living Cully Walks, in Northeast Portland, Oregon, put together a story map to highlight transportation gaps. The map shows completed and scheduled active transportation projects compared to comments on gaps in the network during their 30+ outreach events. When you view the map online, you can click along the street network to reveal more information.

Use this opportunity to help community members build advocacy skills by working with them to put together these resources and workshopping testimony for people to present at council meetings where they can share their story along with the data that supports their experience. If you used artistic engagement methods, host an exhibit that features presentations from some of the artists. Invite decision-makers to the exhibit, and if they can't come to you, go and present the art to them at their next public meeting.

Anyone can benefit from these opportunities to share their stories, but it is especially impactful for the people who are most impacted by the inequities in park safety and access to share their stories. For example, children, people with disabilities, and/or people of color are particularly effective messengers, because they can speak to the specific barriers that keep them from accessing public goods and why that matters. Not only are they some of the most impacted populations, but they are also underrepresented in elected positions and have important perspectives that most elected officials do not have. Encouraging these messengers to share their stories whether through public testimony, written word, or art can illuminate community need and effectively carry the message to decision-makers and the public as a whole.

Conclusion

Although most people support park access in the abstract, using a variety of types of qualitative and quantitative data can help make the case for investing in and improving safety, just access to parks in and with communities most in need. By strategically selecting messengers, sharing stories, and using data to illuminate both need and proposed solutions, advocates and communities can work together to improve Safe Routes to Parks.

ASSESSMENT TOOLBOX: More Activities for Assessing Safe Routes to Parks

State of Park Access Table: Use this template to organize the information that comes from engagement and assessment into a simple four by four matrix.

Safe Routes to Parks Evaluation Guide: This factsheet outlines examples of different approaches to evaluating park access as well as tips for success.
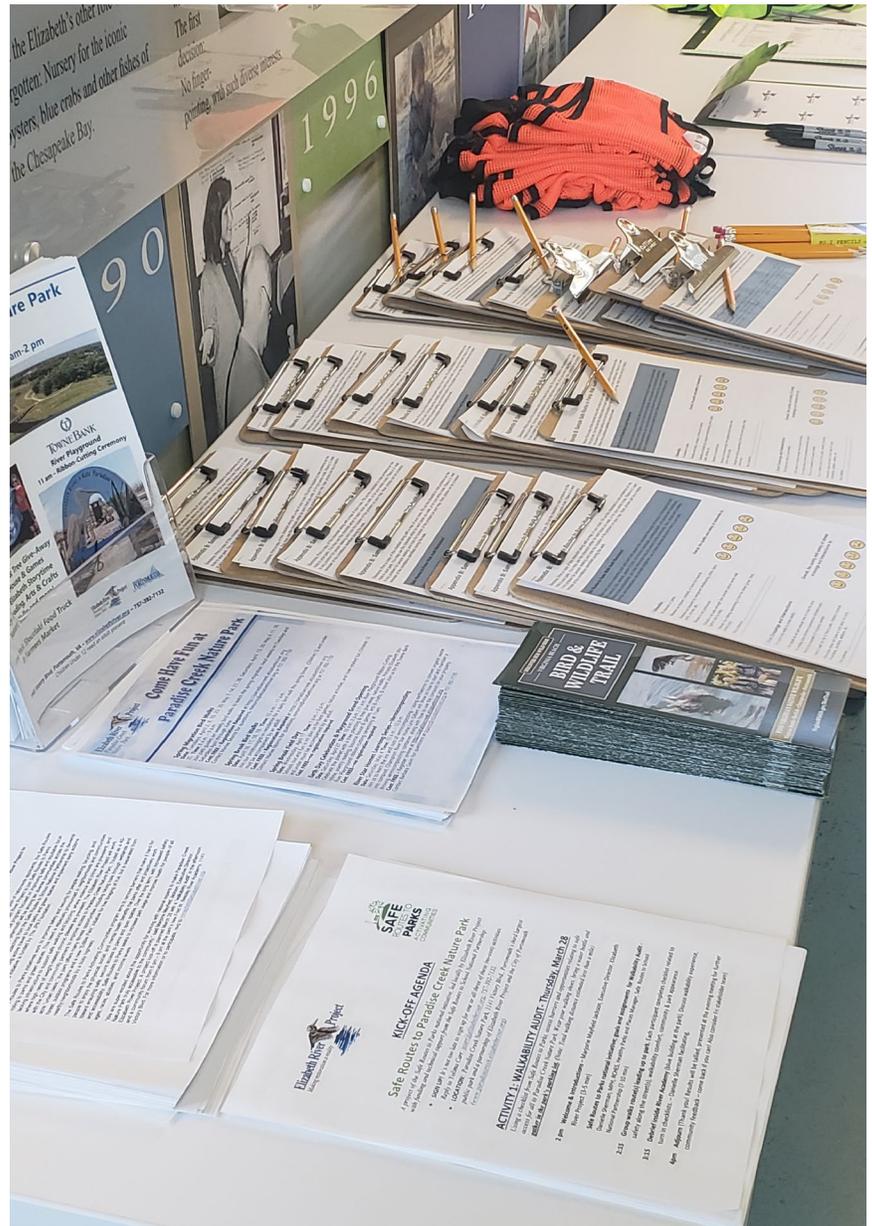
This part of the framework focuses on identifying goals and action steps based on the information that comes from engagement and assessment. Use all of the information you have to help community members to identify clear, actionable goals, and work with the broader coalition to break down those goals into action steps.

Photo Credit: Blue Zones Hawaii

PLANNING TOOLBOX: Planning Safe Routes to Parks

Community Action Planning Sample Agenda: Use this agenda template to organize your community action planning session. Customize it with your logo and specific details.

Safe Routes to Parks in Complete Streets Policies: Read this factsheet for ideas to incorporate Safe Routes to Parks priorities into Complete Streets policies and implementation.

Steps to take in this phase:

1. Use "Moving from Shelf to Shovel – Creating Action Plans that Actually Get Implemented" to plan and host a community action planning session that will help synthesize all of the information you have gathered from assessment into big goals and potential next steps. Summarize the community-identified goals to improve future park access, why community members prioritized this goal, potential smaller steps to reach this goal, and the supporting plans, policies, or efforts that may help in the Goals for Improving Safe Routes to Parks Table.

2. Break down the big, community-identified goals into smaller, actionable steps. Think about the following categories:
   a. Engineering and design on the way to the park and within it.
   b. Programming that draws people to the park encourages physical activity, and is relevant to the needs and preferences of the surrounding community.
   c. Policies and practices that make the park easier and safer to access and be in.

3. Identify partners that can be responsible for each action step and a timeframe for moving each action step forward. Use the Implementation Planning Table to break down each community identified goal into specific action steps with a clear timeframe, the specific lead party responsible for implementation, and ideas for measuring success.

4. Conduct a policy scan to identify the plans and practices that can support community-identified goals. Use "Creating Alignment Between Safe Routes to Parks Goals and Existing Community Priorities: A Primer on Conducting a Policy Scan" to identify plans and policies and how to review them. Organize your findings in the Policy Scan Table.

Photo Credit: CAN Do Houston

Guiding Questions

Questions to ask in this phase of the framework:

Based on the information gathered during assessment…

- What are the opportunities for improvement?
- What are the resources that you can build on?
- Where do the opportunities and resources overlap?
- What are the priority elements of the community's vision for park access in their community?
- What would success look like? How could it be measured?

Photo Credit: Elizabeth River Project

Walk With Ease Connection

- How can programming like Walk With Ease further take advantage of public parks and outdoor spaces? What barriers are there?
- How can the walking skills and social connections built through Walk With Ease feed into further programming that supports access to and use of parks and green spaces? Can walks with fellow participants, family, or friends be a vehicle for building social connections and reducing isolation?
- Find ways for programs like Walk With Ease to serve as a springboard for improving community walkability beyond parks. For example, you could survey Walk With Ease participants to understand what would make them feel safer while walking. If they mention vehicle speeds, there are multiple ways to slow down cars such as decreasing the speed limit (policy) or narrowing the travel lane (engineering).

Moving from Shelf to Shovel – Creating Action Plans that Actually Get Implemented

You have held engagement events, collected data, and built close partnerships. Now it's time to bring them all together to refine clear goals and specific action steps for an action plan that will actually get implemented in both the short and long-term. This resource provides guidance for organizing and hosting community action planning that will help your coalition synthesize the ideas you have collected into clear next steps for making this vision come to life and identify who is responsible for each piece of implementation. Use this guide as a starting point to structure your time and activities so that you can get the most out of action planning. At the end of the action planning process, you should emerge with specific goals for park access and safety along with action steps and accountability measures to meet those goals. This collaborative process to identify goals and assign responsibilities will build a sense of ownership and increase the likelihood of implementation.

There is no right or wrong way to develop an action plan, but a tried and true strategy is to host a meeting where people gather to prioritize ideas, identify responsible parties, and establish timelines. This fact sheet walks you through organizing a productive action planning meeting and can easily be adapted to virtual settings using the online tools included below.

Photo Credit: Cultiva la Salud

Pre-meeting Work and Questions to Consider

Your preparation for this meeting will help ensure that all of the participants emerge with the beginnings of an action plan that will actually get implemented and a clear understanding of what comes next. Below is guidance to think through how to present the information that has been previously collected, who should be in attendance, and the structure of the meeting.

Define the goal

Think through the questions below to clarify the goals of the plan that will ultimately come out of the action planning process, who the primary audience is, and who will take ownership.

- What does this plan ultimately aim to achieve? What vision should it help bring to life?
- Where will this plan ultimately "live" and who/what organization will take ownership? It could potentially help shape community organization's strategies or programs. It could also become part of a larger government plan such as a parks master plan.

Organize the data

Determine the most important information to share with meeting attendees so that they are well informed enough to think about the next steps. Share the barriers that rose to the top during assessment and how this process can build on community-identified strengths. You can use the State of Park Access table in the toolbox to organize that information.

- Review all of the feedback and information from surveys, interviews, data collection, and walk audits, then group the information into categories that make sense for your group. For example, you can group the information based on who will be responsible for implementing the change or the approximate timeline or ease of tackling the issue.
- You can have as many or as few categories as seems appropriate. This step will help streamline the information for participants.

Think through the guest list

Ensure that you are inviting the right people because the people in attendance will influence the outcome of the action planning. You need a diverse group that represents 1) the neighborhood residents, 2) decision-makers, 3) city/county agency staff, and 4) organizational partners. Each of these groups can provide valuable insight. Make sure that everyone understands the purpose of the meeting, their role in the activities, and what you hope to accomplish. Include that information as part of their invitation and the introduction at the beginning of the event.

- People with knowledge of the neighborhood are essential to this process. Center people who grew up there, have lived there for a long time, work there, and/or are highly respected by the community.
- Explore what coalitions and community-based organizations are already leading this work. How can you show up and support these community leaders to lead action planning? Are there existing spaces you can join to support Safe Routes to Parks work?
- Who can you invite to make sure you have broad representation? Who has been missing from previous events or engagements? Consider how you can address any barriers and support everyone's full participation. Some examples include:
  - Locating the event near transit
  - Arranging free child care
  - Providing a meal
  - Organizing live interpretation for non-English speakers and/or people who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Invite local Safe Routes to School practitioners and staff from the city's parks and recreation, transportation, public works, and public health departments. Be clear about what their role will be at the event and what the goals are.
- Reach out to city councilors, the mayor's office, and/or the city manager to personally invite them to participate.

Plan the structure

Below, you will find a sample agenda. Within that agenda, you can decide how you want to structure group activities to best reach your desired outcomes. For example, you can let people self-select groups based on their interest in specific topics or you can assign participants to topics based on their backgrounds and experience.

Are there participants who may be better equipped to discuss certain topics? Think through whether it would be better to assign people with relevant experience to the same group to tackle a topic or to mix up people from different backgrounds to increase creativity and sharing.

Sample Agenda (Two hours total)

Below is a sample agenda in the left column and notes with suggestions for facilitators in the right column. Use this template to create an agenda that you can share with participants.

This agenda can be split into two one-hour sessions. The first day can end after "Prioritize," when each of the groups has finished brainstorming and prioritized their top three to five goals to address community-identified challenges. Day two can then begin with a recap of the top ideas followed by the plan portion of the agenda.

Photo Credit: Cultiva la Salud

Agenda Items	Facilitator Notes and Suggestions
Welcome (10 min) • Official welcome and introductions • Project introduction and purpose of this event • Agenda overview	• Introduce the project, the purpose of the event, and what you hope to accomplish in the allotted time. • Clearly outline the purpose and the parameters of the goals and action items. Explain who will be using the plan and how. For example, this action plan may be developed with the city for the parks and recreation department. It may connect to a community-wide goal to increase safety for kids while walking. • If there are elected officials in attendance, thank them for attending and even consider inviting them to say a word of welcome to express their support for this work.
Set the Stage (10 min) • Overview of community-identified assets and barriers to park access	• Present an overview of ideas from community members about barriers to park access and ideas for solving them. and introduce the coming activity (10 min) • This is an opportunity to provide context. Highlight things that are missing and if there is anything that needs to be clarified. Consider sharing a factsheet summarizing this information at the meeting so people can reference it throughout the event.

Agenda Items	Facilitator Notes and Suggestions
Prioritize (45 min) • Split into groups based on themes that emerged from community assessment to identify goals that address the assets and barriers to park access • Activity to prioritize top three to five goals	• Split into groups based on themes that emerged from community assessment. Potential themes could be traffic speed, connectivity, programming/park activation, or maintenance/beautification. • In groups, identify strategies to address the barriers and concerns within that theme. Don't worry about money or feasibility. Just get out as many ideas as possible. The bigger the better! Use materials such as post-it notes, markers, and big sheets of paper to help people record the ideas. • Vote or use a process with sticky notes or colored sticker dots to prioritize the top three or five. • Groups can internally vote for their top three or five. Alternatively, all participants can do a "gallery walk" to review the ideas from each category and put a sticker dot next to their top three or five from each category • Use the Goals for Improving Safe Routes to Parks Table to clarify the goals, context, and ideas for supporting resources.
Plan (40 min) • In groups, identify action steps for each of the three to five priority goals. Identify a timeline and assign responsibility for making the action happen.	• Identify what intermediate steps need to happen to achieve each priority goal/strategy. Pick a timeline and assign responsibility for making it happen. While many actions will likely depend on collaboration, selecting one responsible party will clarify who is responsible for ensuring follow-through. • Note on time frames: Establish a standard range of time for short-, medium- and long-term so that everyone can be on the same page. For example, short-term (0-6 months), medium-term (6-12 months), and long-term (1-2 years). • Use the Implementation Planning Table for each goal to break it down into action steps. • Encourage people to keep breaking down the goals into smaller steps. The smaller and more specific they can be, the more likely it can be done. • Identify any steps that could be completed in the short-term to act as a catalyst for further engagement and building interest in implementing this action plan.
Closing and Next Steps (15 min) • 90-Day Challenge • Thank you • Next steps	• 90-Day challenge—what action could you take in the next 90 days (about three months) to move this forward? • Have people write down their actions that they can take in the next 90 days to move this work forward. Provide post-it notes and encourage them to share with their neighbor. They can then stick it on a wall together and read everyone else's ideas. • Thank people for attending and share the next steps.

ASSESSMENT TOOLBOX: More Activities for Assessing Safe Routes to Parks

State of Park Access Table - Use this template to organize the information that comes from engagement and assessment into a simple four by four matrix.

Goals for Improving Safe Routes to Parks Table - Use this template to summarize the community-identified goals to improve future park access, why community members prioritized this goal, potential smaller steps to reach this goal, and the supporting plans, policies, or efforts that may help.

Implementation Planning Table - Use this template to break down each community identified goal into specific action steps with a clear timeframe, the specific lead party responsible for implementation, and ideas for measuring success.


Photo Credit: Central Arkansas Library System

Adapting to a Virtual Platform

This agenda can be adapted to a remote format using virtual platforms. Here are some online tools to help make it successful.

- GoogleDocs: This online word processor allows for multiple people to edit a document at once. This can be useful for note-taking so that multiple people can add to the notes and it is saved for future use. You could provide a matrix for each group to fill out and they can collaboratively do it on this platform.
- Google My Maps: Create custom maps and drop pins to highlight specific assets or barriers. Multiple people can edit a map to add pins and descriptions.
- IdeaBoardz: This simple platform replicates the experience of putting sticky notes on a board or wall. Use it to organize notes into different categories and color-code them. Everyone can interact on the same board to add ideas and "vote" for specific notes. Consider having each group working on a separate theme start their own board. They can then vote on the top goals to address their theme.
- Poll Everywhere: Get instant, shareable feedback during your virtual meetings with this polling platform. Participants can ask questions and "upvote" each other's questions as well. People can use their computers as well as their phones to participate.
- Zoom: This video conferencing platform allows a 40-minute group meeting of up to 100 participants for free. Paid plans extend the time and number of potential participants. A useful feature is the option to form break-out rooms that can emulate the experience of breaking into smaller groups from a larger meeting.
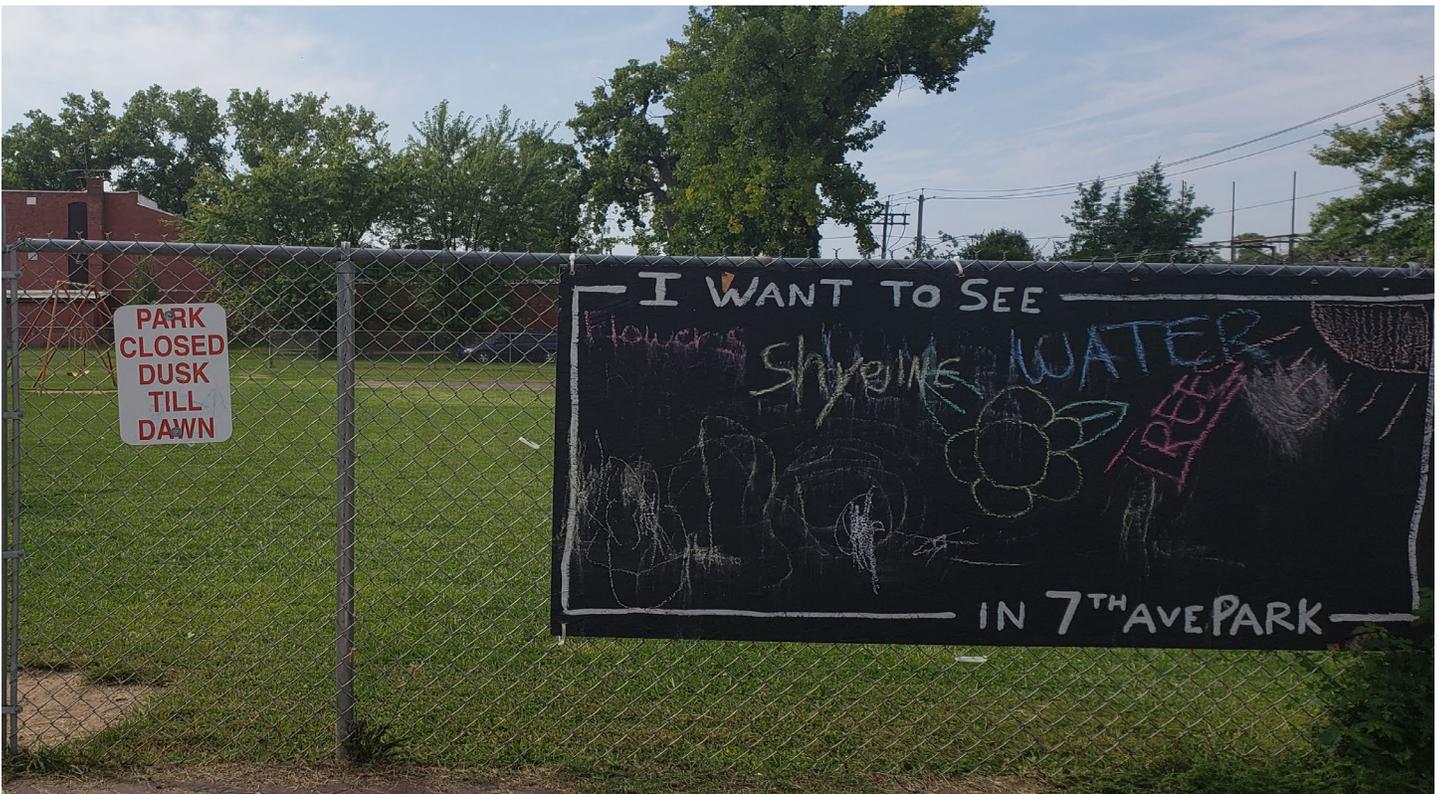
Post-event Considerations

After the event, thank people for attending, and share what your follow-up steps will be. Let them know where this information will go. Will it be included in a larger plan? Is your city or county staff willing to incorporate action items identified to help achieve those larger goals? You should have valuable ideas for next steps, feasible timelines, and specific people and organizations who could take on responsibility for portions of implementation.

Conclusion

Incorporating community members and other stakeholders in the action planning process strengthens the resulting plan by building a sense of ownership and buy-in from the beginning. This process of action planning also increases the likelihood of implementation by breaking down big goals into actionable steps and establishing clear accountability measures. Creating safer and more equitable park access is a big task, but with a specific and actionable plan, your community can make their vision a reality.

Photo Credit: Bike Fort Collins

Creating Alignment Between Safe Routes to Parks Goals and Existing Community Priorities: A Primer on Conducting a Policy Scan

While park access may seem like the most important thing to advocates passionate about the issue, sometimes they can make more progress by tying park access goals to existing community priorities. A policy scan is a tool to review the plans, policies, and official practices of local, regional, and statewide agencies that align with or affect Safe Routes to Parks.

Understanding what policies, plans, and other guiding documents already exist in your community can provide valuable context to reference when advocating for new goals, initiatives, or funding. Look for ways that park access and equity goals can connect with goals and priorities in established plans and policies. Those connections can be used to illustrate how working on park access can help accomplish previously stated goals and build momentum for both. If specific commitments are already in plans, advocates can reference them, ask their elected officials why they are not being implemented, and find ways to more officially hold people accountable for implementation. If your community's current policies or plans don't have the commitments you are looking for, then you know that is an opportunity to advance Safe Routes to Parks commitments.

This fact sheet provides guidance for reviewing existing policies and plans, what documents to collect for the review process, and examples of how some of the most common ones connect to Safe Routes to Parks.

Photo Credit: Healthy Rides Pittsburgh

Refine Your Goals

There will be lots of information to look through, so you want to enter this process with a sense of curiosity and creativity. Safe Routes to Parks is at the intersection of many sectors so you are looking for the ways that these documents specifically address the overlap that constitutes equitable connectivity and access to parks and green spaces. This can include improvements to the parks themselves and improvements to active transportation routes, but look specifically at how they connect and how that increases access and equity.

In the context of Safe Routes to Parks, advocates are typically looking to:
- Improve safe connections for active transportation and transit on the routes to parks and green spaces.
- Increase physical activity and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Prioritize equitable funding and implementation of park improvements and the connections to them.
- Increase community engagement in project prioritization, design, and implementation.

What to Look For

As you read, keep an eye out for goals, commitments, or other statements that relate to your goals or interests. These items may appear in places that you do not necessarily expect, so keep an open mind. You can use the template at the end of this factsheet to take notes on the policies you read. As you review, keep the following questions in mind:
- What vision is this document setting forth or committing to?
- How will it be completed?
- Who (what department) is responsible for implementation?
- Is there a system of accountability? Is anything being measured?
- Is there a deadline?
- Is there a system for prioritizing projects? Is equity a priority?

Phtoto Credit: Elizabeth River Project

Standard Policies and Plans and Where to Look for More

Every community is different; not every community has the same plans or policies and sometimes they go by different names. Below is a list of the most common, relevant documents to look for and a summary of what they are. These are typically publicly available on government websites.

Local-level

- **Comprehensive Plan**: A comprehensive plan outlines long-term goals and associated policies to meet a community's development goals. In Oregon, all cities and counties are required to adopt a comprehensive plan that incorporates citizen participation and aligns with statewide planning goals which, for example, includes Citizen Involvement, Land Use Planning, Recreational Needs, and Transportation. For more information on the goals explore this website. These plans are reviewed and updated periodically to ensure they align with community goals.[51]

- **Bike and Pedestrian Plan**: Bike and Pedestrian plans, which can also be separated into a plan for each mode, provide an overview of existing conditions, set a vision for what the biking and walking networks will be in the future, and identifies strategies and projects to reach those goals.
  - **Connecting to Safe Routes to Parks**: In Newport, OR, the Newport Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan, passed in 2008, identifies seven evaluation criteria to prioritize potential bike and pedestrian infrastructure projects. One of the criterion is Land Use, which considers whether a project connects to key destinations such as parks, schools, and employment within one fourth to one-half mile.[52]

- **Safe Routes to School Master Plan**: Safe Routes to School is a movement that aims to make it safer and easier for students to walk and bike to school. Safe Routes to School Action Plans identify local concerns, priorities, solutions, and potential funding sources for comprehensive Safe Routes to School programming.
  - **Connecting to Safe Routes to Parks**: The Eugene-Springfield Safe Routes to School 2019-2021 Strategic Plan highlights a partnership with Eugene Parks and Recreation to increase equity in education initiatives. This partnership allows Safe Routes to School coordinators to provide bikes for students with disabilities at every bike safety class offered by the program. They also highlight participatory activities that encourage Safe Routes to School that take place at established, community park events to reach a broad audience.

- **Shared Use of Facilities Agreement or Joint Use Agreement**: Shared use, also known as joint use, occurs when one entity agrees to open or broaden access to their property and/or facilities for community use, such as recreational activities. The partnerships can be formalized through agreements or informally based on historical practices. Formal arrangements are often documented through an agreement that sets forth the terms and conditions for the shared use of the property or facility. Successful partnerships generally rely on pooling resources to expand community access and use public space more efficiently. These agreements can meaningfully expand play and

recreation opportunities, particularly for areas with low park access. Parks and recreation departments may take on shared responsibility for maintenance of these existing facilities on school grounds, which is far less expensive than building new facilities in areas with limited park access. For more detailed tools and resources for shared use agreements, read this factsheet on shared use that also includes common challenges and keys to success. For more details on the potential forms of shared use policies, read this factsheet on the spectrum of shared use policies and agreements.

- **Connecting to Safe Routes to Parks**: In Tualatin, OR the parks and recreation department has a shared use agreement with the school district to share investment in and use of two school facilities. These facilities include a sports field and cross country running trail.[53] This ensures public and student access to high-quality outdoor assets.

- **Park Master Plan**: Park Master Plans set a vision for the park system as a whole as well as specific plans for individual park or recreation sites, and operational and maintenance planning. For information on system-wide master plans that are grounded in equity, read this resource from the National Recreation and Parks Association.

- **Urban Trails Master Plan**: Urban Trails Master Plans provide guidance for a network of trails. Typically, urban trails are separated from on-street traffic and connect with the broader pedestrian and bicycle network.

- **Vision Zero Action Plan**: Vision Zero is a movement to eliminate traffic fatalities and severe injuries.[54] Vision Zero Plans include system-wide assessments of data on traffic deaths and serious injuries as well as plans for how to eliminate them.

- **Complete Streets Policy**: Complete Streets policies demonstrate a commitment to consider all modes of travel, especially walking and rolling, during the planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of transportation networks.[55] Complete Streets policies can come in a variety of forms: ordinances or resolutions adopted at the state or local level; executive orders adopted by elected officials; or policy of the jurisdiction's department of transportation.[56] For specific guidance on how to align Complete Streets policies and practices with Safe Routes to Parks, read this factsheet: Safe Routes to Parks in Complete Streets Policies.

- **Connecting to Safe Routes to Parks**: In Tigard, Oregon, the Complete Streets Policy Implementation Plan specifically includes trails and pathways that function as transportation facilities as part of a larger system or are identified in other transportation plans (Transportation System Plan as well as Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan). Many of the implementation plan activities include updating other city plans, such as the Parks Master plan where it commits to incorporate active transportation and transit access elements into the next update as well as study potential funding opportunities to support shared parks and transportation objectives. Implementation of goals shared by other plans is also built into proposed performance measures. For example, one performance measure is the percentage completion of Transportation Systems Plan, Greenways Plan, and/ or Parks Master Plan- identified trails.

- **School District Wellness Policy**: School wellness policies are important tools to address childhood obesity and promote healthy eating and physical activity through changes in school environments.

County/Region

- **Community Health Improvement Plan**: Community health improvement plans (CHPs) are documents with long-term, systematic plans to address community health based on community health priorities.
  - **Connecting to Safe Routes to Parks**: In Klamath County, Oregon, the 2019 Community Health Improvement Plan states the objective to increase physical health and well-being while decreasing the obesity rate. Two strategies to support those objectives are:
    1. "Increase coordination and implementation of physical activity opportunities in schools and parks.
    2. Increase connectivity of trails and protected walk/bike lanes to increase community opportunities for active transportation and recreation."[57]
- **Regional Transportation Plan**: A Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) guides investments for all modes of transportation (motor vehicle, transit, bicycle, and walking) as well as the movement of goods throughout the region over a 20- to 25- year period. These plans are made by Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) which are transportation planning agencies that focus on urban areas and dictate how to spend federal transportation funding. MPOs typically revisit and revise the RTP every five years. For more information, read this factsheet: Boosting Active Transportation Through Regional Transportation Plans.

State

- **Oregon Transportation Plan**: The Oregon Transportation Plan (OTP) is the long-range plan for the state's public transportation system. It acts as the foundation to guide system development and investment through the Oregon Department of Transportation and other transportation agencies throughout the state. This state-wide plan flows into local and regional plans which then helps prioritize projects and funding for implementation. Within the larger plan, there are several specific plans such as a **Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan** and **Public Transportation Plan**.[58]
  - **Connecting to Safe Routes to Parks**: Goal five of the Oregon Public Transportation Plan focuses on supporting the overall health of Oregonians, which includes providing opportunities for physical activity in everyday life. To support that goal, policy 5.1 is to "Provide access to healthy lifestyle options by supporting the ability of people to reach goods and services such as groceries, recreation, parks and natural areas, health care, and social opportunities via public transportation."[59]
- **Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan**: Each state must prepare a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) every five years to qualify for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). In Oregon, this plan goes beyond the LWCF program to guide other Oregon Parks and Recreation Department grant programs as well as systems planning and development. Find the current plan and supporting documents here.

Phtoto Credit: Elizabeth River Project
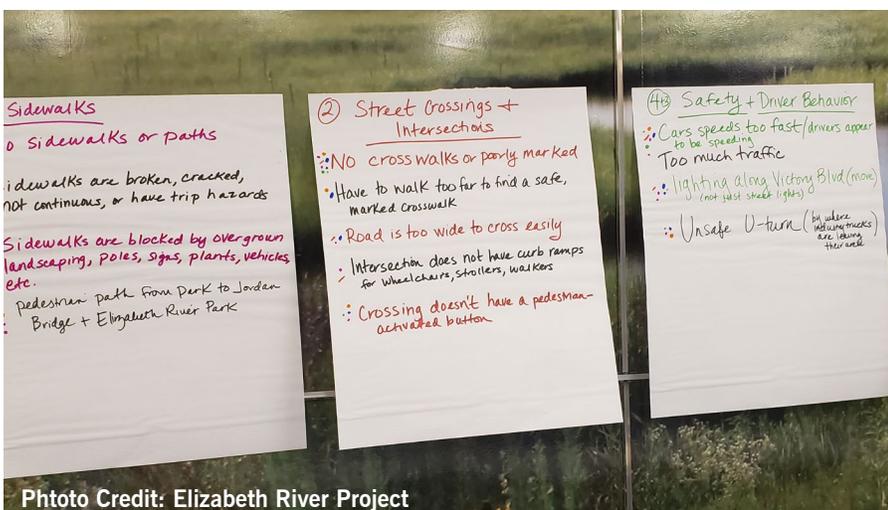
PLANNING TOOLBOX: Policy Scan Table

Use this template to record the information you find about policies and plans that affect or could affect safe and equitable park access. Specify where you find relevant information so it is easy to find again.

After all of the analysis and planning, it is time to bring the community's vision to life. Implementation means taking the steps that can build toward achieving big community goals. In the short-term, identify the projects or programming that could be an early "win" to build excitement and support for future work. This section of the toolkit focuses on potential funding to support implementation actions. It includes an overview of local funding sources, strategies that local governments use to fund park and transportation projects, federal grants, and alternatives to new funding. The alternatives to new funding include different examples of project prioritization and potential alignment for creative uses of existing funding.

Steps to take in this phase:

1. Implement changes and improvements in the short-term (within the next three months) as "quick wins" to generate interest. Use the "Implementing Early Actions Table" to think through your quick-win actions and how you can use them to build momentum for future work.
2. Get media attention to highlight the success of early improvements. Use the sample press release to share your story with media outlets.
3. Identify the funding sources to support other desired improvements. Use "Paying for Safe Routes to Parks Implementation" to explore the variety of sources and creative approaches.

ASSESSMENT TOOLBOX: Implementing Safe Routes to Parks

How Advocates Can Support the Implementation of Safe Routes to Parks: This factsheet provides four ideas of how to meaningfully involve community advocates who want to support Safe Routes to Parks improvements along with specific examples of how this worked in communities.

Aligning Safe Routes to Parks with Safe Routes to School: Read this factsheet for specific ways that Safe Routes to Parks and Safe Routes to school can work together toward implementing safer and more equitable access to everyday destinations.

Guiding Questions

Questions to ask in this phase of the framework:
- What is actionable?
- What can be achieved within 30 days? 90? One year?
- What quick wins can be implemented to build interest in improved community walkability and park access while keeping partners engaged?
- How can more community residents be part of the implementation?

Northeast Portland Residents Design Wayfinding System

In Northeast Portland, Oregon's Cully neighborhood, a community-designed wayfinding system was installed to help guide people safely to parks. The idea for a wayfinding system came from nearly two years of community engagement, where community members expressed the need for visible signage with information on how to safely get to parks. Community artists helped bring the whole design together by having Cully youth design artwork that will wrap around four informational kiosks. Over 150 residents gave feedback on temporary signage and permanent signage was installed by the Portland Bureau of Transportation in 2019. They installed 28 eight-foot signs with arrows pointing towards Cully's five green spaces: Sacajawea Park, Cully Park, Colwood Golf Course, Whitaker Ponds, and Kunamokwst Park. The signs also include maps with highlighted walking and biking routes, as well as the time and distance to each park. Ten four-foot-tall signs are interspersed between the larger signs and include health facts about active transportation in English and Spanish. The project moved forward with support from Metro's Regional Transportation Options grant, the Regional Arts & Culture Council, the Portland Bureau of Transportation, and Safe Routes Partnership.

Walk With Ease Connection

- Are there opportunities to bring Walk With Ease programming to the parks and green spaces near larger populations of older adults and people experiencing arthritis?
- How can additional programming and funding for work with older adults and people experiencing arthritis further improve their access to parks and green spaces?
- Share maps of walkable routes in the community for people participating virtually or in the self-directed version.
- When there are new walkability improvements in the community, use it as an opportunity to promote Walk With Ease programming.

Photo Credit: Verde, Cully Walks

Paying for Safe Routes to Parks Implementation

Safe Routes to Parks lies at the intersection of active transportation and parks and recreation. Allocating funding to the connections that get people to their local park or greenspace allows residents to benefit from the multitude of health and safety benefits that come with safe and equitable access to nature. This factsheet focuses on public funds that can go toward Safe Routes to Parks work, the strategies to move existing funding toward improving safe and equitable park access, and the partnerships that can help facilitate both. Resources and examples primarily focus on walking and rolling, however, transit is included within the opportunities for collaboration at the end.

Parks are typically funded through budget appropriations, taxes, bonds, fees, and service charges. They are also supported by a variety of other funding streams such as grants (federal, state, and philanthropic), public-private partnerships, and other creative support like civic groups and friends of the park groups.[60] Active transportation is funded through a combination of federal, state, regional, and local sources at varying amounts depending on the location. The most common local funding sources, beyond what may be included in capital budgets, are bonds, taxes, fees, and fines.[61]

Local Funds for Safe Routes to Parks

General funds, capital improvement budgets, and departmental budgets come from the taxes and fees collected by a jurisdiction.

- **General Funds** are the common pot of funding that pay for a wide range of city services. The sources of revenue that generate the General Fund are varied. For example, in the City of Portland, OR, taxpayer dollars are deposited in the General Fund, along with utility license fees, business license fees, transient lodging taxes, state shared revenues (from cigarette and liquor taxes), interest income, and miscellaneous revenues and beginning cash balances. General funds can pay for a range of things including police, fire, engineering, planning, parks, community development, and administration. This portion of the budget consists largely of discretionary funds, since the Mayor and City Council can allocate the funds to programs and services in any area.[62]
- **Capital Improvement Program** is the budget that supports capital projects and equipment. A capital project refers to a project that maintains or improves infrastructure above a set cost. A capital improvement plan (CIP) is a multi-year plan that prioritizes specific capital improvement projects to be funded by this fund. This plan is typically updated every few years.
- **Departmental Budgets** are developed to guide the spending for each department of a city. In Portland, the parks and recreation budget is developed with guidance from the mayor, commissioners, staff, and representatives from the Portland Parks Board.[63]
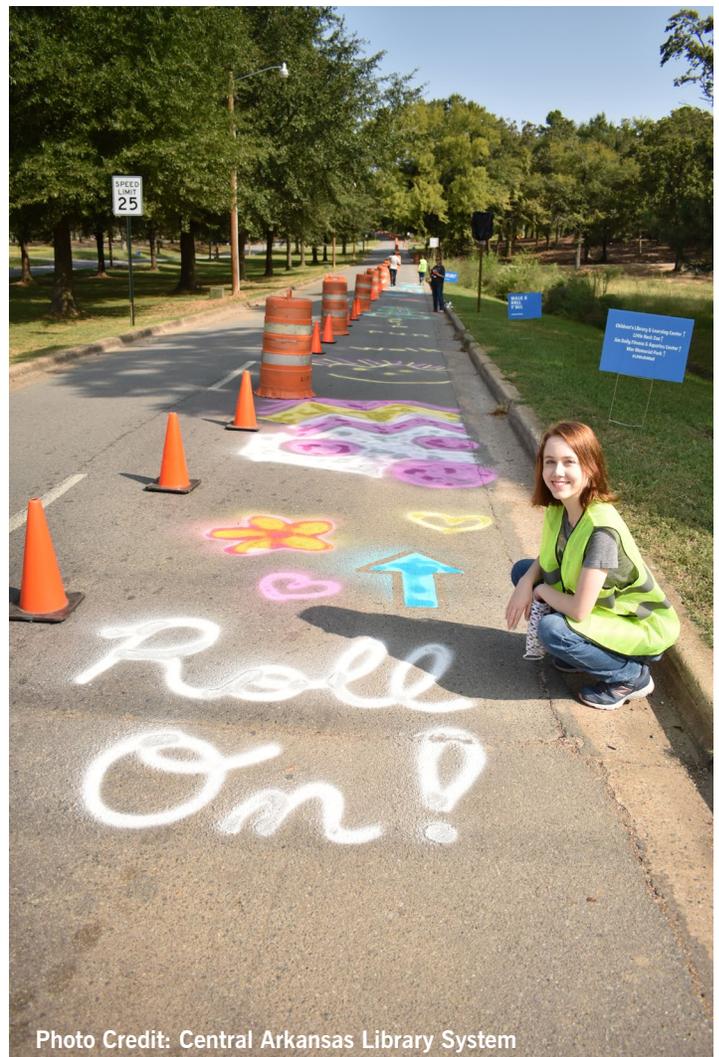
Photo Credit: Central Arkansas Library System

Other Government Financing Strategies

In addition to general funds, cities have a variety of financing tools available to pay for investments to parks and active transportation, including bonds and fees.

Bonds

Bonds are long-term loans that are repaid over time with interest. There are many types of bonds, but in the context of local Safe Routes to Parks initiatives, municipal bonds are the most relevant. Bonds are useful because once the bonds are purchased, local governments receive a large amount of funding upfront that they can then use to pay for large projects such as a park, trail, and active transportation infrastructure. Repayment is then spread over the following years.[64] The repayment period of a bond typically aligns with the projected lifespan of the infrastructure it is funding and can be paid back over 20-30 years, though the range varies by the bond.

Two types of municipal bonds can be used for infrastructure: revenue bonds and general obligation bonds. The key differences between these types of bonds are what they finance, their interest rates, and how they are paid back.

- **Revenue bonds** are loans that fund projects that will generate income to pay back the loan. For example, Montgomery County, Maryland used a revenue bond to build a swim center. They paid for it using revenue from leasing the building.[65] Revenue bonds are seldom used for active transportation projects since projects for people walking and biking do not typically cost money to use, and thus don't generate revenue. Revenue bonds have higher interest rates since the debt is less secure (the pledge to repay the debt is backed by future revenues, which have not been collected yet), which makes their overall cost more expensive.
- **General obligation bonds** are backed by the "full faith and credit" of the issuing government, which means that governments will be required to use (almost) any means to pay back these debt obligations, including raising taxes. Projects financed by GO bonds do not need to generate revenue like revenue bonds, and there is no collateral needed to secure the funding. The issuing government pledges to pay back the debt from its general fund, which acquires revenue from property taxes, income taxes, sales taxes, and more. The bond issuer, the city or state, often makes its payment on the debt before paying for other expenses, and that is required by law in some states. Depending on the local or state laws, these bonds are either approved by elected officials through legislation or by public vote.[66]

Fees

- **System Development Charges (SDCs)/ Transportation Impact Fees** are fees assessed by local governments on new development (and redevelopment) projects that go toward the costs of providing public infrastructure and services to the new development's users. These funds are frequently used to pay for transportation infrastructure both on- and off-street.[67]

Park and Recreation Funds Improvements for All Ages

Eugene voters approved a $39 million general obligation bond in 2018 to fund parks and recreation improvements throughout the community. Bond proceeds are designated for park renovation, trails, lighting, restrooms, irrigation, pools, and recreational facility projects. The 2018 bond is supporting projects that benefit people of all ages in Eugene, including older adults who frequent Campbell Community Center. Built in 1962, Campbell Community Center is the second oldest senior center on the west coast and is a gathering spot in one of Eugene's most popular parks, Skinner Butte Park. The park is situated by the 12-mile Ruth Bascom Riverbank Path System, which provides walking and rolling connections between the cities of Eugene and Springfield. The City of Eugene was able to use $5 million from the 2018 bond to double the square footage of the senior center and add a health and wellness center, allowing more space for older adults to access services and programs that promote healthy and active living.

- In 2020, a Southeast Portland, Oregon park was renovated and renamed after a Black woman community leader and historian, Verdell Burdine Rutherford. The first Portland park to be named after a Black woman, Verdell Burdine Rutherford Park was renamed (formerly Lynchview Park) and revamped with funding from the 2014 Parks Replacement Bond, as well as the city's parks SDCs.[68] During the city's public engagement for the project, 60% of community members surveyed said they accessed the park by walking. Irrigation improvements, public art, a new playground area, and paved pathways for easy walking and strolling were all added to the park in spring 2020.[69]

- In late 2020, the City of St. Helens, Oregon broke ground on a sidewalk and crossing project that will improve walkability to and around Campbell Park. The project evolved after the city had received public input that crossings and walking conditions near Campbell Park were unsafe for community members trying to cross the road to access the park and other amenities. With some new subdivisions in the area, the city was able to use SDCs earmarked for transportation projects to fund half of the $600,000 sidewalk project.[70]

Funding Parks and Connections

In 2018, the City of Tucson passed Proposition 407: Parks + Connections, a $225 Million General Obligation bond package to fund parks and the connections to them. It all started in 2015 with a failed county bond measure. In 2015, Pima County proposed a county-wide bond that included a broad array of funding for things such as libraries, animal shelters, parks, and active transportation. For the active transportation portion, Living Streets Alliance, a local nonprofit in Tucson working on active transportation, prepared a project list based on neighborhood walkability assessments they had done in Tucson. Although the bond measure failed, the numbers showed significant support for certain parts of this package in the city of Tucson. In 2018, a series of bonds held by the city were set to retire (or paid off), so the city had the opportunity to replace them with new bonds while keeping taxes at their current level. Due to a decades-long lack of sufficient funding and strong support from the Mayor, parks were the priority. Additionally, the city had just written a parks master plan. As part of the planning process, the city had administered a comprehensive survey which indicated that biking and walking was the number two issue concerning parks. Parks and connections became the focus of the package. The connections projects focus on improving safety and mobility to connect people to parks, schools, transit opportunities, and shopping centers. Practically, that means new sidewalks, safer crossings on major streets, off-street biking and walking paths, and traffic calming on residential streets. The three main categories of connection projects are Greenways and shared-use paths; pedestrian safety and walkability; bicycle safety and mobility. Many of the connection projects were identified from the mobility masterplan. For more details on the project list, explore this story map. The program will be implemented over ten years (2019 to 2028).

Targeted District Funding

- **Local Improvement Districts (LID)** are a financing tool that allows a group of property owners to share the cost of infrastructure improvements such as installing sidewalks, paving streets, or improving stormwater management. Through the LID financing is available for up to 20 years and the first payment is not due until the work is done. In Portland, Oregon, the city will manage the design and construction of the project.[71] For guidance from the Portland Bureau of Transportation on how to form a LID in your neighborhood, read this.

- **Urban Renewal Areas (URAs) and Tax Increment Financing (TIF)** are useful for areas that are in need of revitalization and could see increased economic activity as a result. In a URA, a portion of property tax revenue is allocated specifically to improvements within the area. TIFs allow the local government to borrow money based on future property tax revenue. The idea is that property tax revenue will increase because of the improvements made with the borrowed funding and that increased revenue can repay the borrowed money.

Using Urban Renewal Funds to Improve Open Space

Redmond, Oregon used Urban Renewal funds to transform a city park into an open-space corridor that connects the city hall and the downtown commercial core. Centennial Park was originally constructed in 2010 and then doubled in size only nine years later. Now, the park offers mid-block bump-outs for pedestrian crossings, bike racks, and a "fix-it station," and other amenities to improve walking and rolling access. Centennial Park is a gathering place year-round and features a water feature during warmer months and a skating rink during the winter.


Photo Credit: Hayti Heritage Center
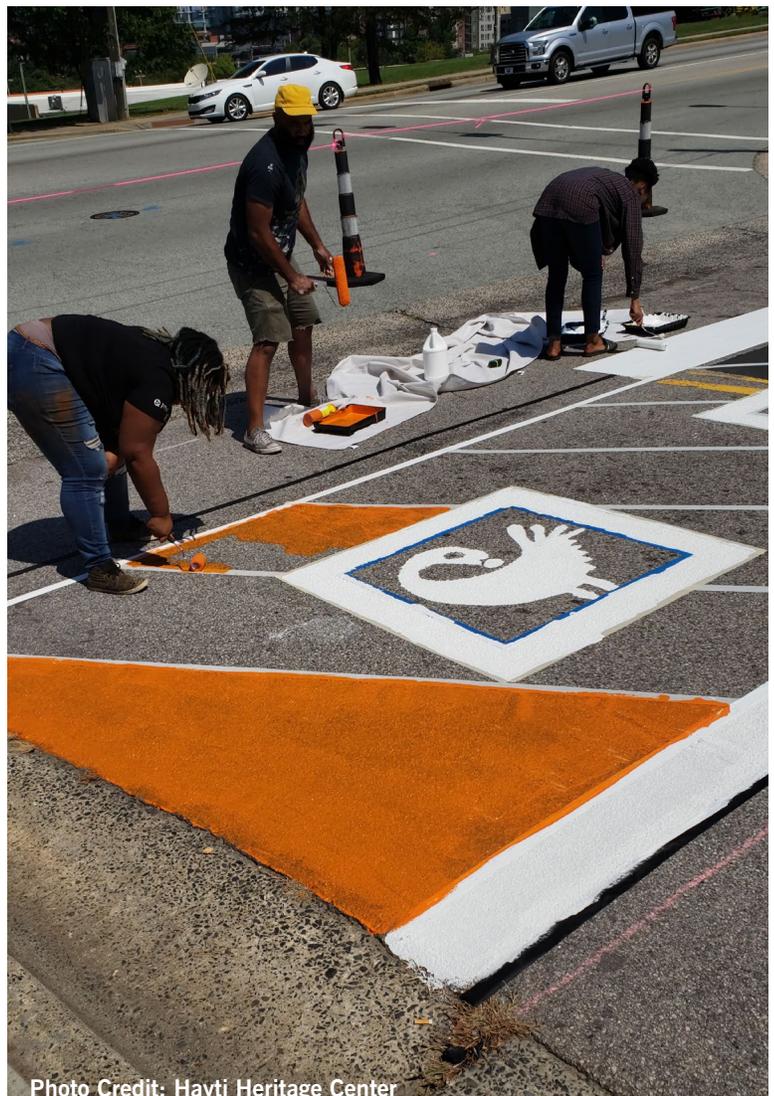
Photo Credit: Hayti Heritage Center

Federal Funding

- The **Transportation Alternatives Set Aside,** also known as the **Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)** is a portion of money set aside from the Federal Surface Transportation Block Grant program. Projects and activities eligible for this funding include smaller scale bike and pedestrian projects such as Safe Routes to School, recreational trails, and stormwater management. Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) is responsible for administering the funding by disbursing it to local governments.[72] The grants require a local or state match of 20%.[73] Three MPOs (Metro, Eugene-Springfield, and Salem-Keizer) receive a direct allotment of this funding.[74]

  - Salem, Oregon used TAP funding to help develop the Peter Courtney Minto Island Bicycle and Pedestrian Bridge and Trail, which connects 1,200 acres of parks and more than 20 miles of off-street trails across the state's capital city. The bridge adjoins three downtown riverfront parks and includes a bicycle and pedestrian counter. The dream for a bicycle-pedestrian bridge in Salem had been decades in the works. The city approved plans for the project in 2010 and finished construction in 2017, with a dedication from longtime Oregon Senate President Peter Courtney, the bridge's namesake.[75] The total project cost reached $10 million, which was covered in part by the city's TAP funding awarded through state and MPO grants. The project was also supported by Urban Renewal Agency funding and grants from the Oregon Parks and Recreation District and Business Oregon.[76]

- **Community Development Block Grants** are federal grants awarded to spur community development through projects like community centers, installing public facilities, and other economic development projects. For example, Athens-Clarke County, Georgia used CDBG funding to build out a social trail between public housing and a parks and recreation center.

- The **Land and Water Conservation Fund** is a Federal grant program administered by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. It awards $1.5 million every other year. These grants can either acquire land for public outdoor recreation or develop basic outdoor recreation facilities. In 2018, LWCF funds were used in Oregon for a variety of improvements such as rehabilitating a restroom, building a natural playground, replacing a bridge, and building a new neighborhood park. Eligible entities include cities, counties, parks and recreation districts, metro, Indian tribes, and Oregon State agencies.[77]

Planning to Prioritize Equity

Portland Parks and Recreation developed a five-year Racial Equity Plan to guide the implementation of racial equity goals adopted by the City Council. The goals identified within the plan include increasing workforce racial diversity and racial equity training; improving outreach and engagement with communities of color and refugee and immigrant communities, and increasing access to city services that are culturally and linguistically responsive to these same populations. There are specific metrics for success outlined in the plan to build accountability and assess how well they are executing the plan.[82]

Alternatives to New Funding

If new sources of funding are not in the cards, look at ways that current funding can be more equitably distributed as well as support Safe Routes to Parks connections and goals.

- **Project prioritization:** Project prioritization is a process by which agencies determine which projects to fund and implement with the limited resources they have. This is an opportunity to make priorities around equity and safety part of an official process that moves funding toward projects that address those priorities.

  - The City of Oakland uses equity as one of nine factors to prioritize projects in their Capital Improvement Program. The City of Oakland's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) determines the City's investments in construction, repair, and/or replacement of assets such as parks, streets, bicycle paths, recreation centers, and libraries. Every two years, the city develops a new CIP budget that is then included in the overall City Budget. The departments of transportation and public works do outreach to gather community input for potential projects and then prioritize which ones to fund based on the score from a prioritization model. The CIP Prioritization Model, approved by the Oakland City Council in 2018, scores projects using nine prioritization factors, with Equity (investment in underserved communities) and Health/Safety (Improve safety and encourage healthy living) garnering the most possible points (16 each). Staff present the scores and recommendations to the City Council as part of the budget development process which includes public meetings and opportunities for public comment.[78]

Photo Credit: REV Birmingham

- **Project bundling**: If there are already plans for routine maintenance or other improvements on portions of the routes to a park, find ways to tack on low-cost improvements that align with the community's stated needs.

  - In Birmingham, Alabama, two neighborhoods with rich histories of Black residents, small business enclaves, and churches are very close to Memorial Park. The park has great amenities, but there was virtually no bicycle infrastructure that allowed people to safely ride to the park. REV Birmingham, a non-profit community development organization, saw an opportunity to leverage the city's new Complete Streets policy to advocate for safer bike routes. They reviewed the paving plans and schedules to identify opportunities where bike improvements could be made to connect these neighborhoods to the thriving park. Two years later, when the city repaved a portion of that corridor, they stripped a bike lane and narrowed the travel lanes to slow car travel.

- **Planning for future funding**: If a project is in a larger plan, it is more likely to be included in future funding proposals. Research the timing for new plans and plan revisions in your jurisdiction so that you can get involved and advocate for specifically including safe and equitable access to everyday destinations such as parks. For an idea of what policies to review, read "Creating Alignment Between Safe Routes to Parks Goals and Existing Community Priorities: A Primer on Conducting a Policy Scan" in the Plan section of this toolkit.

Align Efforts for Creative Funding

Public funding for parks is limited. Consider public funding designated to other efforts that can also apply to parks-related improvements. For example, stormwater, climate resiliency, affordable housing, and public health investments may be used in local parks to improve quality and access while also achieving the goals of those specific programs.[80]

Stormwater

Stormwater management infrastructure can also double as safe street improvements. For example, a bioswale, a landscaping feature that helps collect and clean stormwater runoff, can do double duty as a bulb-out/ curb extension, which extends the sidewalk to narrow the roadway, which slows traffic.[81] Additionally, landscaping for water management can pair well with a bench to create a pocket park. "Green streets" combine stormwater and complete streets.

Schools

Schools are invested in the safety and well-being of students and can be important partners in future development and well-being for communities.

- **Shared use**, also known as **joint use**, occurs when one entity agrees to open or broaden access to their property and/or facilities for community use, such as recreational activities. The partnerships can be formalized through agreements or informally based on historical practices. Formal arrangements are often documented through an agreement that sets forth the terms and conditions for the shared use of the property or facility. Regardless, successful partnerships generally rely on pooling resources to expand community access and use public space more efficiently. These agreements can meaningfully expand play and recreation opportunities, particularly for areas with low park access. Parks and recreation departments may take on shared responsibility for maintenance of these existing facilities on school grounds, which is far less expensive than building new facilities in areas with limited park access. For more detailed tools and resources for shared use agreements, read this factsheet on shared use that also includes common challenges and keys to success. For more details on the potential forms of shared use policies, read this factsheet on the spectrum of shared use policies and agreements.

- For additional, specific ideas for how to align Safe Routes to Parks implementation with Safe Routes to School, read this factsheet.

Storm Water, Safe Biking, and Green Space in a Portland Pocket Park

In Portland, Oregon, stormwater upgrades helped improve a pocket park and increase safety for a neighborhood bikeway. This project came together through a collaboration between several parties interested in complementary outcomes. The Portland Bureau of Transportation wanted to divert traffic at this block to enhance an existing bike boulevard, the neighborhood was interested in making park improvements, and the Bureau of Environmental Services wanted to decrease unnecessary impervious surfaces and enhance opportunities for stormwater management. To achieve all of these goals, they used funding from the EPA Innovative Wet Weather Program to narrow the travel lanes, decrease the impervious surface area, and improve the park as a neighborhood destination. Residents of the neighborhood participated in the design process and requested more seating areas and a kiosk.[79]

Photo Credit: City of Portland Oregon Environmental Services

Beaverton Builds in Coordination Between Parks and Schools

In Beaverton, Oregon, the Safe Routes to School coordination team includes a representative from Tualatin Hills Parks and Recreation as well as other city and county departments. The team meets monthly to discuss projects and events as well as update each other on programming that may be of interest to the group. This allows for easier coordination and support for projects and programming. For example, when the parks and recreation department applies for grants to support infrastructure improvements that align with the school district's goals, the school district writes a letter of support to strengthen the application. The coordination committee has also allowed members to strengthen working relationships across departments, setting the stage for future collaborative work. They worked together to install a temporary, "pop-up" traffic safety playground (also known as a "traffic garden") on a basketball play pad that is currently unused. Leah Biado-Luis, the Safe Routes to School Coordinator, presented the idea to the coordination team at their June 2020 meeting. She shared photos of a similar concept in Portland, explained the rationale and benefits, and explained that they were seeking a location for installation. The parks and recreation department followed up the next week to offer potential locations. They are now coordinating to plan for a permanent installation in 2021. Implement a Traffic Playground to engage students and families, and support educational programming at your park using Oregon Metro's Safe Routes to School step-by-step guide.[83]


Photo Credit: Leah Biado-Luis
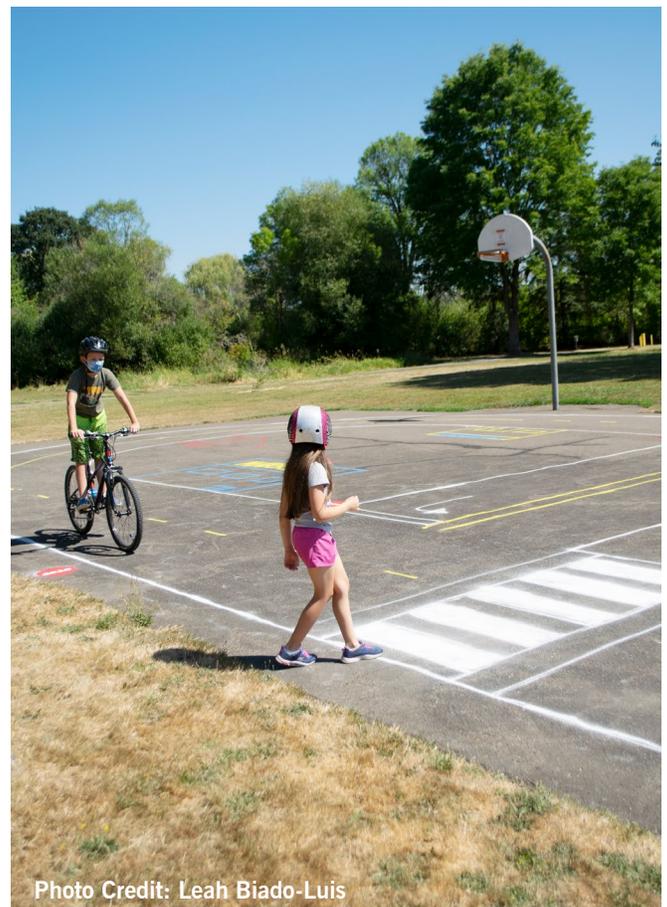
Photo Credit: Leah Biado-Luis

Partnerships

- Partnerships with **local "friends of the park" groups** that depend on volunteers can also pay off. Giving these groups the rights to clean and manage the city-owned land can both save on costs and help build community ownership of the park space.
  - In Brownsville, Texas, Keep Brownsville Beautiful leveraged $75,000 in city general funds and $67,000 in grants and awards to coordinate volunteer hours estimated to be worth over $3 million.[84]

Transit

- **Transit:** Communities of color, low-income communities, older adults, and people with disabilities are simultaneously less likely to have access to high-quality, accessible outdoor spaces and more likely to not have access to personal vehicles. While this factsheet has primarily focused on financing the improvements within walking and biking distance, there is also significant value to increasing the range of natural areas and parks that people can access via public transportation. From the perspective of parks agencies, adding transit options can help manage traffic and get around limited parking at popular destinations.[85]
  - **Shuttle programs:** There are many examples of shuttles funded by various stakeholders connecting people to popular natural spaces. One example in Oregon is The Columbia Gorge Express which takes people from Portland, Oregon 30 miles east to Multnomah Falls in the Columbia River Gorge. It is supported by federal transportation funds allocated by the Oregon Department of Transportation in addition to the minimal fare. It began as a pilot program and now has ongoing weekend service. It stops at The Gateway Transit Center in Portland, connecting it directly to bus and rail lines.
  - **Filling transit gaps:** In Los Angeles County, California, The Topanga Beach Bus connects from Woodland Hills (about 30 minutes from the coast) through Topanga Canyon to local beaches and links up with two Metro lines along the way. The service began as a summer initiative from County Board Supervisor Sheila Kuehl's office and became a project of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works. This low-cost connection to public beaches now operates 7 days a week all year. It is still funded through Supervisor Kuehl's office.[86] The general fare is $1 per trip. Senior citizens and people with disabilities get a 50 percent discount.[87]

- **Connecting youth to recreation:** In Clark County, Washington, the regional transit provider (C-TRAN), county parks and recreation department, and two school districts collaborate to provide the Youth Opportunity Pass (YOP). YOP provides free, unlimited access to C-TRAN and two community centers for all middle and high school students from participating school districts.[88] This program began in 2015 as a pilot program and is still popular among students. The community centers provide recreational opportunities with basketball courts, fitness centers, and game rooms. C-TRAN busses connect to a variety of parks. The passes, which are valued at more than $300, are paid for through C-TRAN's general fund. Although it is available to all students in the two school districts, students must apply for the pass. This process ensures that pass-holders are interested and likely to use the program. The program not only increases the accessibility of recreational spaces, but it ensures that there are both indoor and outdoor options for any season. This program also introduces kids to transit at a young age, potentially instilling a life-long practice, while also increasing choice ridership.[89]

Photo Credit: NW Goldberg Cares

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLBOX: Planning Implementation Actions and How to Involve Volunteers

Safe Routes to Parks Press Release: Use this template to draft a press release that you can share with local news agencies and drum up interest in your work.

Implementing Early Actions Table - Use this template to plan one or more early action(s) and how it can build momentum for future work.

People Powered Improvements: How Advocates Can Support the Implementation of Safe Routes to Parks - This factsheet provides four ideas of how to meaningfully involve community advocates who want to support Safe Routes to Parks improvements along with specific examples of how this worked in communities.

- **Using transportation right of way**: Look into opportunities to add small park spaces or linear parks in the right of way owned by transit agencies.
  - In Lynwood, California 5.25 acres of vacant lots owned by Caltrans along the I-105 freeway has been transformed into a linear park with a walking trail, exercise stations, a playground, and a community garden.[90] It also filters significant stormwater runoff and connects LARIO Trail (a 28-mile regional bike and equestrian trail).[91]
  - In Detroit, Michigan, NW Goldberg Cares, a community development corporation, transformed a vacant lot with a bus stop into a pocket park called REST & RIDE PARK. Their vision was to provide a safe and enjoyable space for residents and visitors to wait for the bus that runs through their neighborhood.[92] They raised $12,500 to win a matching grant through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's Public Spaces Community Places initiative.[93] They used that funding to add a sheltered bus stop, plants and flowers, rubber mulch pathways, and a mural by a local artist that shows residents waiting at the bus stop.[94]

Conclusion

With creativity and collaboration, there are many ways to fund the implementation of Safe Routes to Parks improvements. Whether it is a matter of seeking out new funding or creatively using existing resources, creative partnerships and alignment with existing priorities will help support implementation.

While it may seem counterintuitive to think about sustainability when you have just begun, it is an effective strategy to sustain your Safe Routes to Parks efforts. Thinking about long-term plans at the beginning of a project helps ensure that your processes are organized to continue supporting the changes that community members want. This section of the toolkit connects back to tools and resources from Engage, Assess, Plan, and Implement to help create ongoing and lasting change. Follow the "steps to take in this phase," and use the guiding questions to build sustainability into your Safe Routes to Parks plan each step of the way.

From fostering community connections to ongoing data collection, each step of the Safe Routes to Parks framework offers opportunities for built-in sustainability measures. It takes time and effort to make meaningful community change but taking steps early on can help you keep up the momentum and anticipate challenges ahead.

Steps to take in this phase:

1. Engage early and often with the existing coalition of community advocates, agency colleagues, and decision-makers, and identify ways to expand the support team.
   a. Discuss with partners whether they can continue to collaborate on this work in the long-term and at what level of involvement
   b. Look back at the resource, "Defining Roles and Partnerships for Safe Routes to Parks," to see who might be missing from your coalition and consider how you can further broaden your skills, resources, experience, and impact.
   c. Show up for partners and give back to your volunteers. Ask your coalition what other projects they are working on, and identify ways you can support their work. Compensate community members for their time and expertise, provide technical skills training, and offer staff time to other agency priorities.
2. Capture data and stories to help show progress.
   a. Take before and after photos, elevate community storytelling, and conduct surveys throughout the project to show early wins so that you can better support residents advocating for long-term change. Refer back to "Finding and Using Data to Support Safe Routes to Parks," for more ideas on ways to measure success.
3. Connect back to the planning phase:
   a. Use the policy scan to connect Safe Routes to Parks goals and action steps with existing and future planning processes.
   b. Find ways to replicate the work done in one park to multiple parks.
4. Search out potential future funding sources that could sustain ongoing engagement, assessment, planning, and implementation.
   a. Consider the mutual benefits of Safe Routes to Parks by revisiting "Making the Connection: How Park Access Advances Community Goals." Use the talking points to pursue funding from public health, government, and philanthropic grants.
5. Use this template to brainstorm ideas for sustaining your Safe Routes to Parks efforts.

Guiding Questions

Questions to ask in this phase of the framework:

- What does the community want in the long term?
- What are their priorities for continuing this work?
- How can you support community members to take/maintain ownership of this work?
- Which partners will be able to continue working on this? How much time or other resources can they commit?
- What funding sources and/or policies could help sustain this work in the long-term?
- What information would be useful to have before and after to understand the impact and measure success?

Walk With Ease Connection

- Can Walk With Ease support a lifestyle change of using neighborhood parks for daily physical activity and a daily dose of nature?
- How can communities continue to support daily physical activity for residents? How about people with disabilities? Older Adults?

Using Data to Create a Compelling Case for Safe Routes to Parks

In Wenatchee, a rural city in central Washington, community members shared that they did not feel safe walking to the local park because cars did not stop at the stop signs. As part of the assessment phase of their Safe Routes to Parks work, community residents conducted intersection observations to count the number of cars that came to a complete stop at stop signs. Of the 91 cars they observed over an hour, 78 of them did not come to a complete stop at the stop signs. Advocates decided to work with the city to install flashing LED lights at the stop signs to improve their visibility and increase safety for people walking through the intersection. Following the installation of the LED flashing stop signs, 115 cars were observed, and 86 cars came to a complete stop; a dramatic improvement from before the LED flashing lights were installed. That information before and after the improvements helped them demonstrate success and will help them make the case for future safety improvements.

Photo Credit: Salem Leadership Foundation

Photo Credit: Salem Leadership Foundation

Sustaining Park Access with Community Connections and Sponsorships

Salem Leadership Foundation in Salem, Oregon, was working to improve access to and the experience within Woodmansee Park, especially for older adults using the many care homes and senior centers in the area. They were able to make several physical improvements such as trail repair and adding sidewalks with curb-cuts to improve access for wheelchairs. To sustain their momentum, they knew they would have to maintain the space. The team identified "work parties" as an easy and low-cost way to make smaller improvements and maintain the park. They reached out to businesses, churches, and other organizations to acquire monthly sponsorships for park clean-ups. When scheduled in advance, the City of Salem can provide a trailer with cleanup supplies and can also haul away debris. By acquiring sponsorships, they could set a schedule for regular maintenance with city support.

To take advantage of all the benefits that parks and green spaces offer, people have to be able to access them. The tools and strategies presented in this toolkit offer a strong foundation to build a sustainable, community-driven movement that increases safe and equitable park access. The stories from Oregon and across the country highlight the power of collaboration and the proven strategies that coalitions can use to address community barriers and build on community strengths. While ensuring easy park access will be an ongoing process as your community grows and changes, taking the steps outlined in this toolkit can set your community on the path to support and prioritize healthy and safe access to nature and walkable spaces for all.
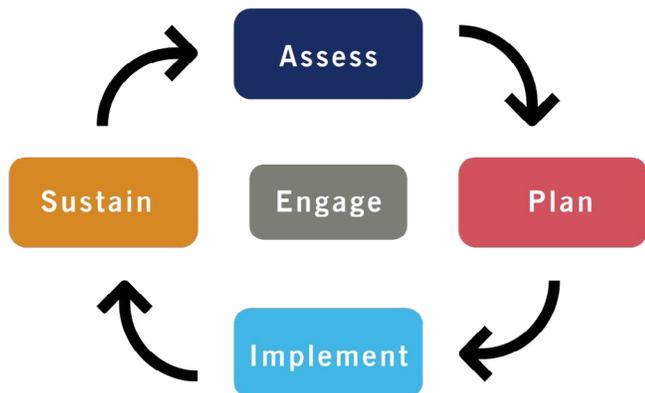

Photo Credit: Verde, Cully Walks

Appendix of Templates

Below is a list of the templates included throughout this toolkit organized by section of the Safe Routes to Parks framework. For more context for how to use these tools, go to the corresponding section in the toolkit.

Engage

- Safe Routes to Parks Coalition Table
- Social Media Messaging
- Customizable poster with messaging for unhoused communities

Assess

- Safe Routes to Parks Community Survey

Plan

- Safe Routes to Parks Community Action Planning Agenda
- State of Park Access Table
- Goals for Improving Safe Routes to Parks Table
- Implementation Planning Table
- Policy Scan Table

Implement

- Implementing Early Actions Table
- Sample Press Release

Sustain

- Sustaining Safe Routes to Parks Table

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