

Equity in Planning

Charting a Path Toward Safer Park Access



Equity in Planning: Reflecting the Community's Priorities

The planning stage of the Safe Routes to Parks framework is an opportunity to identify the actions and steps needed to accomplish the initiative's goals. Naturally, it is crucial that equity considerations be incorporated into planning from the beginning.

The goals of the planning stage of the Safe Routes to Parks framework are to develop priority areas, set goals and specific actions, identify policy improvements, and integrate them into agency and jurisdiction plans and policies. This stage provides the opportunity to figure out how to accomplish the ideas gathered with community residents during the engagement and assessment stages. This Safe Routes to Parks plan sets forth a course of action to make the community's ideas for improving park access a reality. During this stage, you work together to determine priorities and select strategies that will improve safe access to green space and focus resources in the places that need them most.

Everyone deserves safe and easy access to parks, but not all people and neighborhoods have that opportunity. Safe Routes to Parks is especially important in communities 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. 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. This provides an opportunity to achieve optimal health for every person regardless of the color of their skin, their level of education or the job they have, their gender or sexual identity, whether or not they have a disability, or the neighborhood they live in.¹ This fact sheet offers ideas and examples of strategies to advance equity that can be included in the **Plan** stage of Safe Routes to Parks efforts.

Working Toward Equitable Planning

Planning for Safe Routes to Parks can include creating new or updating existing policies, incorporating Safe Routes to Parks priorities into local plans, making recommendations for budgetary changes, and planning for traffic safety improvements, crime and violence prevention, and programmatic events that activate the park. During the development of strategies for the planning phase, it is crucial to ensure that these action steps fairly and justly include communities in the planning process. Collaborating with the community in priority setting and strategy selection fosters a sense of ownership of the process and ensures key insights are incorporated into the plan. This deep involvement can encourage stewardship of local parks and garner community support for the plan that is being developed. Here are some types of equity strategies, most of which emphasize different aspects of prioritizing underinvested parks, to include in Safe Routes to Parks planning efforts in your community.

- ❖ **Equity analyses of community data should drive Safe Routes to Parks priorities and investments.** Analyzing data can expose neighborhoods and areas that have been historically under-prioritized and underinvested in.

Take Action: As you determine focus areas, set goals, and identify specific actions that prioritize and invest in communities that need the most support, include qualitative data on the lived experiences of community residents alongside quantitative data.

- ❖ **Policies and other action steps that influence Safe Routes to Parks related investments, whether infrastructure, maintenance, or programmatic, should direct these resources to communities that need the most support.**

Take Action: Create and/or review and update existing policies, plans, and programs with specific language that directs investments for safe access to parks to communities that need the most support. Be mindful of unintended consequences that policy changes may have on existing parks in historically disinvested communities. For example, if changes in policies are not supported by funding, some parks may not be able to meet the new requirements and may face consequences, such as closures.

What is Safe Routes to Parks?

Safe Routes to Parks aims to improve accessibility for people walking, bicycling, and taking public transportation, creating routes that are safe from traffic and personal danger for people of all ages and abilities, and ensuring that well-maintained and well-programmed parks are conveniently located within a 10-minute walk (approximately one half mile) from where people live.² Safe Routes to Parks provides advocates with the tools to champion safe and equitable access during consideration of park siting, community engagement, allocation of funds, planning, and implementation of traffic and public safety initiatives, as well as park improvements. Over the long term, with increased safety and accessibility, Safe Routes to Parks seeks to increase park usage and improve health and wellbeing for people of all ages, races, abilities, and income levels. To learn more, visit [Safe Routes to Parks](#).

- ❖ **Local government budgets should prioritize park maintenance and new park development in communities lacking safe access to green space.**

Take Action: Work with local governments to appropriate or reallocate budget funds to implement Safe Routes to Parks solutions and invest in communities that need the most support. Analyze local government budgets to identify opportunities for existing funds to support implementation of Safe Routes to Parks solutions in neighborhoods and communities that need the most support. For example, work with local law enforcement agencies to refocus officers' time to participate in community events to build relationships with neighborhood residents.



Equitable Park Planning in Action

In its 2016 annual budget, the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board (MPRB) selected their capital improvement projects in neighborhood parks and trails based on an equity matrix.³ In 2017, the MPRB expanded on this and created a [second matrix](#) for selecting regional parks improvement projects.⁴ This matrix is designed to evaluate MPRB regional parks and trails to ensure that public money is allocated to those community spaces that have historically received lower levels of investment, where funding would bring significant benefits to park users.⁵ MPRB's equity criteria rank community and park asset characteristics as the basis for prioritizing these investments.⁶ Park characteristics include: historic investment, use intensity, ADA considerations, natural resources, and trail quality.⁷ It is extremely important to invest in communities with the most need, and therefore, MPRB places a higher collective point total on the community characteristics, which include racially concentrated areas of poverty, park access, and neighborhood safety.⁸ Also, each new request or potential budget cut now has to be reviewed through an equity lens.⁹



References

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6. Ibid.
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9. Alec Weis, et al. "Applying a Racial Equity Lens to Our Parks." National Recreation and Parks Association, National Recreation and Parks Association, 6 Feb. 2018, www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2018/february/applying-a-racial-equity-lens-to-our-parks/. Accessed 25 May 2018.