



PARKS FOR **INCLUSION**

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING AN INCLUSION POLICY



NRPA National Recreation
and Park Association

Because everyone deserves a great park



NOT OUR OWN CANTON

Our diversity is our STRENGTH

#Canton

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INTRODUCTION

True to the very philosophy of public parks and recreation is the idea that all people – no matter where they come from, what they look like, the neighborhood they live in or how they identify – have access to quality programs, facilities, places and spaces that make their lives and communities great. Local park and recreation agencies work diligently to make this vision a reality in communities across the country, working to ensure that all people have access to the health, environmental, social and cultural benefits parks and recreation provides.

As local park and recreation agencies work to create healthy, connected and resilient communities, it's imperative that facilities, spaces and places look, feel and are open, welcoming and engaging to all community members. Although many agencies strive for this, it can be challenging to know exactly what a truly inclusive space looks like to the entire community. It can be equally as challenging to have a vision for communitywide inclusion, while lacking the resources to make it a reality. Creating and adopting a formal inclusion policy is a great way to ensure that your park and recreation facilities, programs and activities are accessible, welcoming and inclusive.



WHY DOES INCLUSION MATTER?

NRPA's Parks for Inclusion initiative aims to ensure that everyone has access to the benefits of parks and recreation, with an emphasis on reaching those historically marginalized through practices and policies that limit access to health opportunities, including racial and ethnic minorities (people of color), those with a physical or cognitive disability, those who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community, and new Americans (refugees and immigrants).

It's become clear that these historically marginalized individuals face significant health, environmental and economic disparities in relation to the social determinants of health. The availability and quality of these determinants – housing, jobs, educational opportunities, healthcare, access to healthy food and safe and environmentally resilient places to recreate – impacts quality of life and life expectancy. Park and recreation agencies have the power and the responsibility to create welcoming and inclusive spaces that promote positive health outcomes physically, socially and mentally and connect people to our natural habitats, with an emphasis on reaching our most vulnerable populations and community members.

EQUITY + INCLUSION = A VIBRANT COMMUNITY

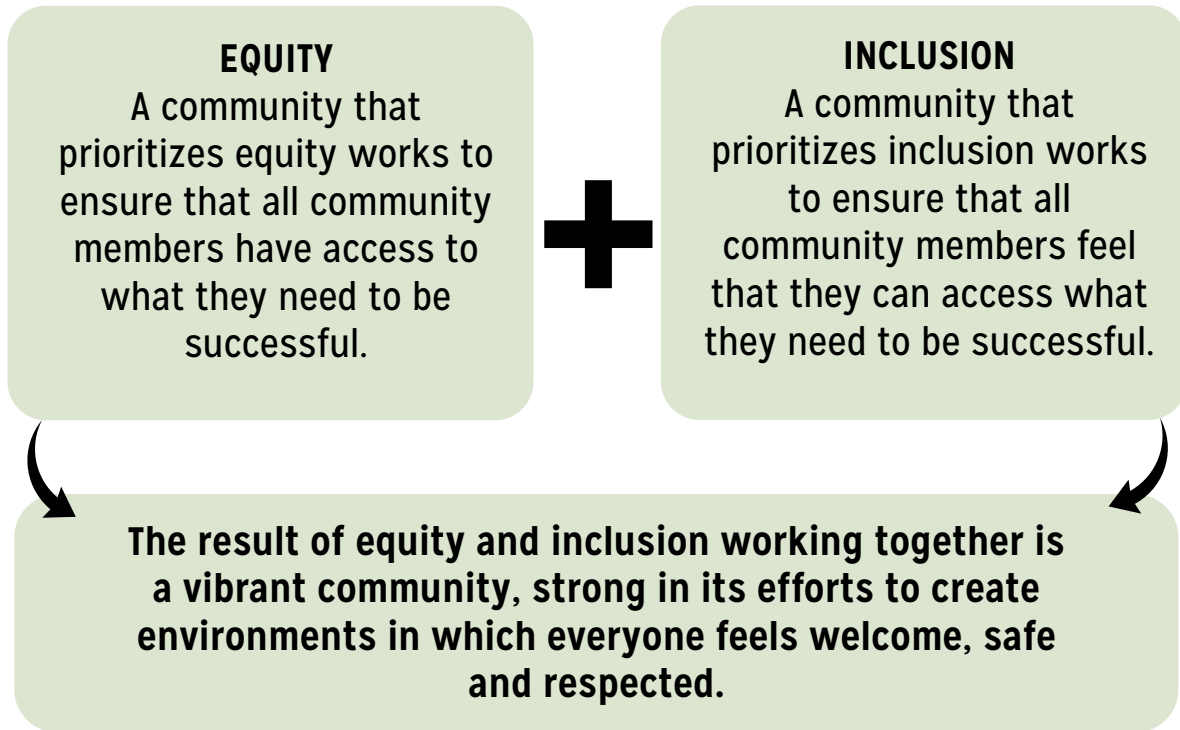
While universal inclusion may be the goal for your park and recreation agency, it's also important to recognize how inclusion and equity are connected and how they impact a community.

EQUITY: When we talk about equity, we're talking about encouraging behaviors, systems or policies to ensure fair and just treatment of all community members, regardless of race, background, ability, income, or beliefs. We know that one size does not fit all and that every individual starts on a different playing field. Creating opportunities that meet individuals where they are and address their unique needs is key to ensuring that all members of society are entitled to the same positive health outcomes. A community that prioritizes equity works to ensure that all community members **HAVE** access to what they need to be successful, and that resources are distributed based on need.

INCLUSION: Inclusion efforts aim to build a culture of belonging by actively inviting the contribution and participation of all people. We believe every person's voice adds value and creating environments in which all people can gain access to facilities and participate in programs where they feel safe, welcome, and respected creates balance, growth and opportunity in the community. A community that prioritizes inclusion works to ensure that all community members **FEEL** that they can access what they need to be successful.

A community built on equity and inclusion is strong, diverse and vibrant. Together, equity and inclusion break down barriers, close gaps and meet the needs of all constituents to ensure positive outcomes across the community.

NRPA'S VISION FOR EQUITY AND INCLUSION



To achieve inclusion in parks and recreation, a great first step is to recognize differences as unique, rather than reach for one definition of "success." Our differences are not the obstacles, rather, a lack of knowing how to approach differences to ensure everyone succeeds is the obstacle. NRPA operates on the statement that equity is giving everyone what they need to be successful, while equality is treating everyone the same, regardless of their abilities.

WHAT IS EXCLUSION?

While the focus of this guide is inclusion, it's important to recognize what exclusion can look like. So often, in doing what we think is best, we don't realize we're missing a critical opportunity to provide an inclusive environment. Some examples of exclusive behavior when designing an inclusive environment include:

- **Communication**, including using small print or no large-print versions of written material and not offering Braille or materials capable of working with screen readers. Other examples include a lack of closed captioning in videos and oral communications without an interpreter (like American Sign Language) or not providing materials in multiple languages.
- **Community Engagement**, such as not providing adequate opportunities for people from different backgrounds to bring their voice to the table, share concerns and express their unique needs during planning processes or community meetings.
- **Physical**, meaning structural obstacles like a lack of ramps, doorways that cannot accommodate wheelchairs, reception desks that are too high for a seated person to be seen, gendered restrooms or locker rooms (male and female, rather than single occupancy or gender neutral), inadequate facilities in low-income communities, etc.
- **Programmatic**, such as a lack of culturally sensitive program times (such as women-only pool hours), lack of accessible equipment, lack of staff knowledge regarding participants with disability, failure to communicate directly with participants about needs.
- **Social**, including not employing those with differing abilities, stereotyping, stigma, prejudice and discrimination, a lack of cultural events, etc.
- **Transportation**, including a lack of accessible transportation provided by the agency or a lack of accessible parking spaces.



WHAT IS A POLICY AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A policy is a written document that outlines an agency's dedication to a topic and that helps to ensure community inclusion. A well-documented and comprehensive policy:

- Provides guidance about how to achieve goals, strategies and objectives
- Sets clear expectations and rules for staff and community members (e.g., community members enrolling in programs with clear policies know what they are signing up for, what is allowable and unallowable, etc.)
- Provides a framework for clear and consistent action and reaction (e.g., when responding to a complaint, policies ensure that communication will be relayed consistently)
- Sets rules and guidelines for decision making in routine situations that may arise at park and recreation facilities or within programs (e.g., during extreme weather events, programs may be canceled according to policy)
- Holds organizations accountable for their decisions and actions
- Supports sustainability and long-term change (e.g., staff turnover can be common in the park and recreation field, having policies in place ensure that work will continue to be prioritized and remain of high quality)

The purpose of this guide is to provide your agency with best practices, real-life examples and steps to help you implement an inclusion policy and create sustainable changes across your agency.

Even if your park and recreation agency already has existing policies around inclusion, there is always room for evaluation, growth, expansion and customization based on learning about the changing climate of your community, and its unique needs, challenges and strengths.

TARGET AUDIENCES

While some guidelines, like the Americans with Disabilities Act, have laid the foundation for formal policy creation, the most impactful inclusion policies go above and beyond these legalities to address and meet the needs of those most vulnerable community members. NRPA's Parks for Inclusion initiative focuses on four historically marginalized groups:

- Racial and ethnic minorities
- Those with physical and cognitive disabilities
- The LGBTQ+ community
- New Americans, or refugees and immigrants

Research and data show that these groups face higher health and economic disparities, lack access to healthy and safe environments and are most in need of advocates and support systems in communities across the country. While these groups are explicitly recognized through NRPA's Parks for Inclusion initiative, your agency's inclusion policy should address the most vulnerable populations in your community, acknowledging all local, state and federal guidelines for protected classes. In order to ensure that all voices are represented in your inclusion policy, it's critical to have a strong community engagement strategy.



RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITY INCLUSION

In the United States, significant health disparities exist between Caucasians and people of color, who more commonly face obstacles to health and quality of life, such as poverty, lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education, housing and healthcare. Systemic practices and policies that unfairly discriminate against people of color have contributed to poorer economic and health outcomes for racial and ethnic minorities. People of color are more likely to have chronic diseases, such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and poorer mental health, and more likely to live in neighborhoods affected by crime, violence and incarceration.

Parks have the power to address these disparities and create more equitable systems by ensuring that all community members have access to the benefits of parks and recreation. Agencies can support racial and ethnic minorities by conducting a community needs and equity assessment (see below) to identify areas most in need of additional resources and investment and creating a plan to abolish practices that are unjust.



SAMPLE LANGUAGE FOR RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITY INCLUSION POLICY

The City of Burlington Diversity & Equity Strategic Plan seeks to eradicate institutional and structural racism and ethnic-based discrimination within the City of Burlington. The Plan's mission to institutionalize inclusion, equity and justice for all is intentionally broad and far-reaching, and at times seems impossible to attain. The legacy of overt racism and ethnic-based discrimination in our country restricts opportunities for people of color and immigrant and refugee migrants. This legacy also obscures from view the economic benefits of a more multiracial and multiethnic Vermont and the multicultural marketplace beyond our state borders.

Essential for success is the need for Departments to work together in conjunction with partners, particularly historically marginalized communities. Meaningful community engagement encompasses residents from historically marginalized communities who see themselves – and are seen as – full partners in the decision-making, program-planning, and policy-making processes that impact their lives in significant and sustained ways.

Equitable public-sector policy and service delivery are first steps toward developing the tools City employees need to make Burlington a place where all community citizens can achieve, participate, and thrive. Engaged citizens enjoy the benefits of a prosperous and sustainable economy and enhanced quality of life.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Launch a structured, concerted, internal listening initiative of one month in length whereby the ideas, successes, and challenges of City personnel around diversity, inclusion, and equity related to race and ethnicity may be heard safely and built upon.
- Train senior leadership on the concepts and practical applications of diversity, inclusion, and equity related to race and ethnicity in the promotion and delivery of City services.
- Adjust the function and responsibilities of the Public Engagement Specialist to focus on civic engagement capacity building for constituents of diverse backgrounds, incorporating the grassroots support of AmeriCorps members serving the City.
- Create a “cheat sheet” outlining key programs and compliment and complaint processes, such that all City employees with public contact become conversant in these programs and processes. Delivery of this document would be made at a formal meeting with the nuances of the program and processes explained.
- Broaden Core Team membership to include individuals outside of City government. The Core Team should include the Mayor, Chief-Of-Staff, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), City Attorney, Human Resources Director, and three persons of color. Non-City employees would be compensated for time spent on the Core Team.
- Explore restructuring the relationship between the community and economic development office (CEDO), its multiple sub departments, and City government.
- Examine the effectiveness and efficacy of the “dual allegiance” system of governance within some Departments.
- Accord the Mayor the power to directly appoint and supervise the Superintendent of the Burlington School District. The magnitude and complexity of this recommendation merits further comment.

Source: City of Burlington, Vermont, Diversity & Equity Strategic Plan

PHYSICAL AND COGNITIVE DISABILITY INCLUSION

The role of parks and recreation for those with disabilities and their caregivers is crucial. Research has shown that those with physical and cognitive disabilities have significantly higher prevalence rates for most chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure and high cholesterol, as well increased chances of stroke and arthritis. People with disabilities also consistently report higher rates of obesity and smoking, and a lack of physical activity and outdoor connection.

Local agencies can support inclusion and equity for those with disabilities by:

- Ensuring accessibility to parks, recreation centers, swimming pools, nature trails and other facilities.
- Offering resources and support not typically available to those with cognitive disabilities.
- Designing inclusive programming for those with physical and cognitive disabilities.

Engagement of those with physical and cognitive disabilities and their caregivers is a critical component of the planning process to understand unique needs and ensure that all community members have equitable opportunities to participate in activities and utilize public facilities.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE FOR PHYSICAL AND COGNITIVE DISABILITY INCLUSION POLICY

The Town of Coventry Parks and Recreation Department provides inclusion services and programs that allow persons with and without disabilities to recreate together in environments that are safe, fun and respectful.

Inclusion is the process of including all persons, regardless of their ethnic origin, socio-economic level, color, language or abilities. Inclusion is a synthesis of many different movements, including educational reform, civil rights, human potential, family supports and deinstitutionalization. Inclusion is not a legal term and does not appear in state or federal law or regulation, but federal legislation and Supreme Court rulings do support and regulate the concept of inclusion.

Inclusion is possible and sustainable in the recreation field when the key players work collaboratively in program design, implementation and evaluation. It is imperative for general recreation professionals and therapeutic recreation specialists to collaborate in providing the necessary services and supports for the inclusion process to be successful.

Supports and adaptation required for inclusion vary depending upon the individual needs and abilities of the person. Both the types and levels of support will be based on these variables. Some persons may require 1:1 staff support throughout the program while others might require a specific behavioral support program in order to be successful. Sign language interpreters, accessible van transportation, modified equipment, ramps, specially trained program instructors, adaptive devices and equipment are some of the supports that may be necessary. Merely bringing persons together with various abilities does not ensure that the inclusion process will be successful. Careful planning, program implementation, training, support and evaluation are all required for the inclusion process.

Inclusion is a place, program, event or an activity where everyone belongs, everyone is accepted, everyone supports their fellow peers and in return their peers and other members of the community support them. Inclusion is a process where everyone benefits.

Inclusive recreation happens when persons, with and without disabilities, are included on an equal basis in a program, event or activity of their choice. It also means creating an environment that allows social interaction between individuals with and without disabilities.

Source: Town of Coventry, Connecticut, Parks & Recreation Department



LGBTQ+ INCLUSION

In the LGBTQ+ community, research shows that lack of physical and social activity opportunities contributes to health disparities linked to social stigma, discrimination and denial of civil and human rights. Social discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community has been associated with high rates of psychiatric disorders, substance abuse and suicide. LGBTQ+ youth are 2 to 3 times more likely to attempt suicide, and lesbians and bisexual females are more likely to be overweight or obese. Additionally, a recent study also shows more teenagers are identifying themselves with nontraditional gender labels, such as transgender or gender-fluid, and those same teens are reporting significantly poorer health, including mental health, than their peers. Despite these challenges, park and recreation agencies are well-suited to offer programming that promotes positive social experiences, builds self-confidence and creates a network of support.

Park and recreation agencies can meet the needs of the local LGBTQ+ community by:

- Creating welcoming and inclusive facilities and programs that provide safety and comfort to the LGBTQ+ community.
- Considering all types of interactions and uses of park and recreation facilities when working with LGBTQ+ people, from changing rooms and restrooms, to addressing patrons with proper pronouns, program registration materials, etc.
- Designing programming that supports and engages LGBTQ+ individuals to create a more inclusive and welcoming agency.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE FOR LGBTQ+ INCLUSION POLICY

The City of Portland is committed to providing a safe and inclusive workplace for all employees, to creating spaces which are welcoming to all visitors and to treating all people with respect and dignity. All users, including but not limited to parents with children, people with personal attendants and individuals regardless of their gender identity or gender expression, benefit when they have access to restrooms of their choosing, including both gender-specific and all-user restrooms. This policy describes the requirement for designating Single-Occupant Restrooms in City-controlled facilities as All-User Restrooms. The policy also describes the requirements for incorporating All-User Restroom design into all newly constructed or substantially renovated City-controlled facilities in order to provide safe, equitable, healthy and convenient restroom for all users. The policy further directs bureaus to assess the feasibility of providing All-User Restrooms in all City-controlled facilities, including potentially converting existing Multi-Occupant Restrooms into All-User Restrooms.

Source: City of Portland, Oregon, Facilities and Property Management

WOMEN

MEN

You have the right to use the restroom, locker room, or other single-sex facility consistent with your gender identity or gender expression.

Individuals cannot be asked to show identification, medical documentation, or any other form of proof or verification of gender.

Any person who abuses this policy in order to assault, harass, intimidate, or otherwise interfere with an individual's rights under this policy will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

This policy does not provide a right to a member of the public to use a facility that is reserved for the exclusive use of employees.

NYC Commission on Human Rights | Citywide Administrative Services

Visit nyc.gov/humanrights or call 311 and ask for the Commission on Human Rights. City employees may also learn more by speaking with their EEO Officer.

Photo Credit: Gertrude Ederle Recreation Center, New York City Department of Parks & Recreation.

NEW AMERICAN INCLUSION

For the new American community, immigrants and refugees report experiencing intense feelings of loss after leaving their native country and may even go through a period of cultural bereavement and distress. In addition, refugees and immigrants face barriers around job opportunities, housing, healthcare and language, making it difficult to acclimate to a new culture and life.

Park and recreation agencies can help relieve some of this stress through programming and providing opportunities for social engagement and hands-on learning experiences with community members from diverse backgrounds. These opportunities can help to increase self-esteem and create a sense of belonging and community. Programming also creates an increased understanding of a new language and culture, and acceptance of cultural diversity in the whole community. Agencies should also consider language barriers and make the necessary accommodations when promoting programming and services offered, conducting community engagement activities and planning improvement projects.

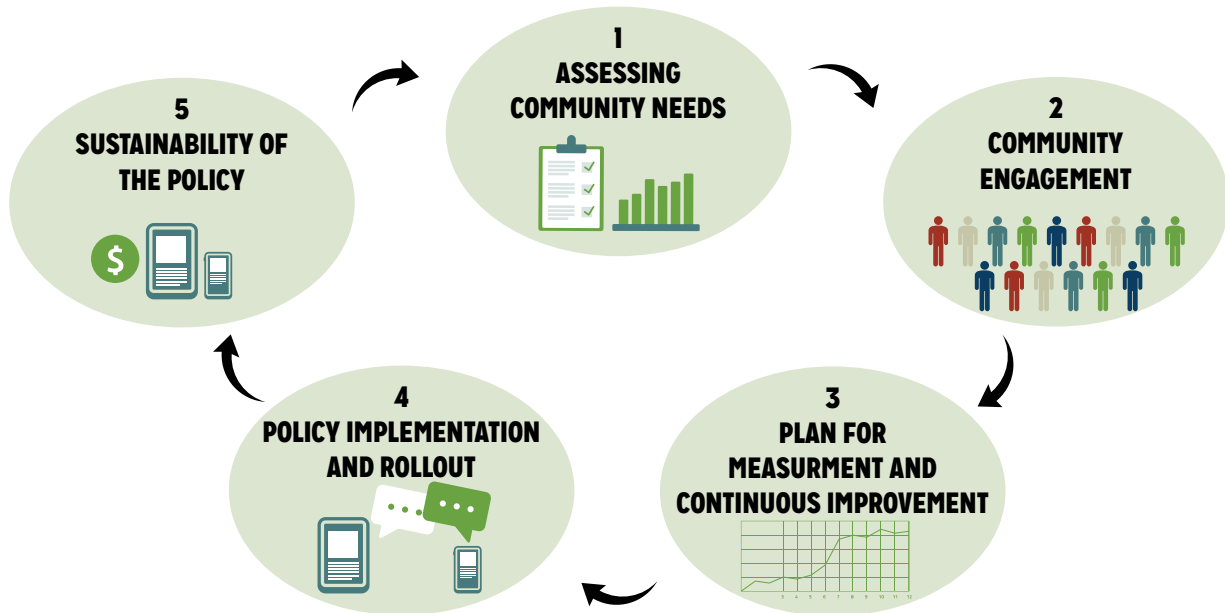
SAMPLE LANGUAGE FOR NEW AMERICAN INCLUSION POLICY

Seattle is home to a diverse and unique immigrant community. While programs engaging immigrant communities, refugee populations, and others that have been historically underrepresented have been successful, there is currently no dedicated funding for new recreation opportunities in underserved communities. Through a strategic policy plan, the city and park and recreation department work to ensure that programs are accessible, welcoming and equitably utilized by communities of color and immigrant and refugee populations by developing partnerships that include race and social justice as fundamental to their operations and business practices. The goal of increased access to recreation opportunities for historically underrepresented communities strengthens the overall plan.

Source: Seattle, Washington, Park District Investment Initiatives 2015



BEST PRACTICES FOR DEVELOPING AN INCLUSION POLICY



ASSESSING COMMUNITY NEEDS – WHAT SHOULD YOUR POLICY ADDRESS?

Every community is unique. While NRPA's efforts are focused on providing resources and health and wellness opportunities for four target populations, your agency's plan may choose to focus on other historically marginalized groups or target audiences based on the need you see within your community. Assess your community's needs by analyzing data on poverty levels, food access, chronic disease rates, availability and accessibility of park and recreation facilities and programs, language preferences/linguistic isolation, environmental factors/ environmental justice concerns, age (very old and very young individuals), crime and violence, historical injustices and oppressive policies, and economic mobility, which are all important considerations when identifying targets. Helpful data sources include:

- [U.S. Census Data](#)
- [CDC Health Indicator Data](#)
- [The Social Vulnerability Index](#)
- [500 Cities Data](#)
- [EPA Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool](#)
- Your Community's Local Public Health Department Data

Evaluating how (and how much) your agency invests in neighborhoods, plans new projects and creates relationships with partners is also critical, as these can often be influenced by people in positions of power. As you build your policy, keep your target audiences top of mind, and craft language that supports their individual needs.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN AND PRINCIPLES

For park agencies especially, assessing your community's needs also helps to inform universal design features in your park and recreation facilities. Universal design is the design of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, background or ability. By considering the diverse needs and abilities of all throughout the design process, universal design creates environments that meet peoples' needs.

In 1997, a set of [seven principles](#) were designed to inform universal design:

Principle 1: Equitable Use: The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

Principle 2: Flexibility in Use: The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

Principle 3: Simple and Intuitive Use: Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

Principle 4: Perceptible Information: The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

Principle 5: Tolerance for Error: The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

Principle 6: Low Physical Effort: The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

Principle 7: Size and Space for Approach and Use: Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation and use, regardless of user's body size, posture or mobility.

These principles, in addition to the policy language, can help to guide your planning process, ensuring that all community members have equitable access to your park and recreation facility.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS?

When developing your policy document, consider how to engage the whole community, and how to ensure that everyone has a voice and the opportunity to be represented. Encouraging community buy-in and support will lead to a smooth and consistent implementation. Engage key stakeholders, representatives from target audiences and partners from the public and private sectors by:

- Surveying a diverse set of community representatives about needs, challenges and wants. Gaining a better understanding of what the community expects from its local park and recreation agency is a key component of developing any policy. Consider meeting community members where they are to ensure all voices are heard, conducting focus groups, having a public feedback period or incentivizing constituents to attend meetings.
- Organizing a kickoff meeting for staff and key community members who represent multiple levels of interest. Key community members can include directors of service organizations, faith-based leaders, educators and community members who can speak first-hand to the importance of inclusive policies. Including representatives from target audiences is a crucial part of creating an achievable and sustainable inclusion policy. A great way to do this is to utilize NRPA's Community Engagement Guide for best practices and strategies to facilitate successful community outreach and engagement.
- Allowing the group to provide continuous feedback and to stay engaged throughout the inclusion policy process by reviewing drafts, asking questions and communicating openly. After feedback has been received, complete a final draft of the policy that will be adopted and shared with the organization and community.

You should only create your inclusion policy after the group of staff and community members has met and those individuals have had a chance to voice their ideas. For more information and tips on implementing an effective community engagement strategy, utilize NRPA's Community Engagement Guide, released in spring 2019.

SAMPLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

As the first step, the City (Eugene, OR) solicited feedback from employees, community members, and an outside diversity consultant to assess successes, barriers, and opportunities. Based on the information provided, the City adopted a vision that recognizes diversity and equity as the cornerstone of excellence in effective public service. The feedback confirmed both a commitment to diversity and equity and a need for a more strategic and coordinated program to better align the City's mission and vision with its work.

Source: City of Eugene, Oregon, Diversity and Equity Strategic Plan 2009-2014

CREATE A PLAN FOR MEASUREMENT AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

With any program, policy or new initiative, agencies should strive to continuously improve to better serve their communities. To measure your policy's effectiveness and ensure successful implementation, you should solicit regular feedback from staff, community members and partners. Identify what economic, health and social indicators your agency will monitor to measure progress. Establish a realistic and attainable timeline for meeting your goals and determine how you'll evaluate your progress. Determine how you will acknowledge and celebrate successes, and how you'll adjust if you fall short of expectations. Consider reporting on your work to the public – sharing results periodically holds your agency accountable in working toward your goals. Examples of inclusion indicators are as follows:

- Programs that reflect the reality that all participate in different ways.
- Agency leaders and staff participate in training to address the needs of all community members to assure beneficial access to facilities and programs.
- Agency staff is seen as integral members of the community in roles regarding needs-based support.
- There is ongoing self-evaluation to monitor progress toward an inclusive environment that benefits the whole community.
- A sense of community building and culture, demonstrating that inclusive facilities are ones where everyone is accepted and believes they belong. One way to create community in parks and recreation is to have “ice-breaker” activities that facilitate the community getting to know each other. Agencies that help all members feel connected are part of a culture that embraces diversity and difference.

POLICY INTEGRATION AND ROLLOUT

The implementation and rollout of the policy are equally as important as the specific language used in it. You will need to ensure that all levels of leadership and staff are made aware of the new inclusion policy and understand the reason behind such policies. Demonstrating that the development of the policy involved key stakeholders, community members and diverse voices is important so that staff and community members can be assured that the policy has buy-in.

A key to successfully implementing an inclusion policy across your agency is to remain consistent with surrounding messaging. Although having a strong policy of any kind that can stand on its own is important, it is also vital to the implementation of the policy that the language is supportive in other areas of your organizational materials. There are several ways to ensure agency materials remain consistent, including reviewing documents or manuals that outline responsibilities,

core competencies or agency mission and values, focusing on a standard theme of inclusion or equity. Strategies to consider for effective integration include:

- Set up training sessions for staff, as they will be impacted by this policy. Communicate not only what the policy is, but also the “why” and “how.” Talk about why the policy is being adopted and provide training on how sites will implement the policy. Include strong rationale in all programmatic onboarding and staff training materials and provide time for discussion among participants and staff.
- Share the new policy and what it means for your agency with all community members. Consider sharing this inclusion policy to community boards or committees outside of your department. Consider including information in a newsletter, on a bulletin board, in your local newspaper or on your local radio station. Share what the policy is, the process of creating it, the goals identified and why it’s important to the community.
- Stay positive as you get started. Expect to receive some push back but stay focused on the long-term vision of your policy and your agency’s leadership role in your community’s inclusion movement.

ENSURING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF YOUR INCLUSION POLICY

In addition to creating a formal policy of your agency’s inclusion efforts, it’s important to take steps to ensure that policy will be sustained over time. Agency’s should consider establishing and maintaining an organizational and environmental infrastructure that supports the long-term implementation of the policy, including developing a system for management, oversight, implementation, communication and monitoring of the policy and its established goals and objectives.

Furthermore, agencies should consider funding implications, including costs incurred through staff training and onboarding, infrastructure improvements, community engagement events, evaluation and metrics tracking, and communications expenses. They should develop an annual budget that accompanies the inclusion policy and any associated costs.

KEY COMPONENTS OF AN INCLUSION POLICY

INTRODUCTION TO THE POLICY

Having a clear introduction to your agency's inclusion policy will provide relevant context to your audiences. By outlining how this inclusion policy connects to the National Recreation and Park Association's Parks for Inclusion initiative, it also sets the tone that this work is part of something bigger and backed by strong leadership. Use the introductory section as an opportunity to educate readers and build their support for this work. Staff and the community will become familiar with the rationale behind your inclusion policy and be able to speak to your agency's role in creating a more inclusive and equitable park and recreation system throughout the community.

SAMPLE POLICY INTRODUCTION LANGUAGE

The City of Lake Oswego believes that including all people in the fabric of society strengthens community, strengthens individuals and enhances quality of life. Persons with disabilities should have a continuum of choices, opportunities and services provided in the community. The City of Lake Oswego will promote inclusion and opportunities for choice to enhance the quality of life for its residents, including persons with disabilities.

Source: City of Lake Oswego, Oregon, Parks & Recreation



GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Defining the specific goal or goals you are striving to achieve through the implementation of your inclusion policy will help to guide the language used throughout the rest of the policy. Once the goals or desired outcomes are defined, strategies to support success of the goals can also be outlined. Sample language can be as follows: "In the case of X issue, these strategies can be implemented."

SAMPLE GOALS AND STRATEGY LANGUAGE

Goal: Agency Inclusion – Cultivate a culture that encourages participation, community collaboration, flexibility and fairness to enable individuals to excel to their full health and wellness potential.

Strategy: Cultivate a supportive, welcoming, inclusive and fair recreation environment through:

- Encouraging and expanding employee use of wellness programs already in place
- Expanding the new employee orientation process to provide for additional inclusion training and development
- Developing a community outreach campaign to target marginalized groups, inviting them to participate in programs
- Establishing a centralized budget for all reasonable accommodations
- Continuing support of regular meetings between community affinity groups, and conducting focus groups to collect feedback on issues regarding inclusion



ACKNOWLEDGE STAFF DIVERSITY, TRAINING, ORGANIZATIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORTS

Within your policy, outline how your agency will educate and train staff about the importance of creating welcoming, safe and inclusive facilities, spaces and programs. Take into consideration the populations your agency serves and different situations that may arise in your community (trauma, bullying, violence, etc.) – where does your staff need additional support to successfully meet your goals and communicate your message? Invest adequate time not only in educating staff about the policy and the process of creating it, but also in explaining the reasoning behind it. Equip and empower staff with the tools needed to have conversations with one another, with community members and with participants.

In addition to training and fostering an environment of understanding across the organization, agencies should aim to hire staff that's representative of the community served, especially target populations. Staff reflecting the culture and diversity of the community is an effective way to build trust and strengthen relationships with vulnerable populations.

In addition, identify the organizational and environmental supports needed to effectively implement policies that promote inclusion across the community. Is funding needed to support training? Are materials needed to create physical changes to the environment that promote inclusion? Use the policy guide as an opportunity to share how your agency is making organizational and environmental changes to promote inclusion.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

POLICY TEMPLATE

To assist local park and recreation agencies with the development of a formal inclusion policy, NRPA has created a policy template. The template contains sample language and guidance around the critical components that should be incorporated into an inclusion policy including an introduction, goal setting, staff training and supports needed, and measurement and tracking. Use the template as a guide as you develop your own unique inclusion policy.

To download a copy of this editable policy template, visit www.nrpa.org/ParksForInclusion



PARKS FOR INCLUSION VISION STAND

This vision stand is designed to focus on the strengths your agency and programs bring the community, and how you can leverage partnerships to create program sustainability and an inclusive environment.

To download a copy of this editable vision stand document, visit www.nrpa.org/ParksForInclusion



NEXT STEPS

Inclusion policies can and should be ever-changing documents to reflect the changing demographics in communities over time and the growing collection of resources and supporting documents for inclusive practices. NRPA's Parks for Inclusion resource database is a great place to stay in touch with inclusive practices and information. Check it out at www.nrpa.org/ParksForInclusion. Among numerous other resources, you'll find one-page documents, each focusing on target marginalized audiences, as well as the *9 Guidelines for Disability Inclusion in Parks and Recreation*, a guide to creating inclusive environments for those with physical and cognitive disabilities. You'll also find resources to help staff model tolerance, deal with empathy and respond to incidents of bias within programs or facilities.

GLOSSARY

NRPA provides these definitions for historically marginalized audiences, including those with physical or cognitive disabilities, the LGBTQ+ community, racial and ethnic minorities, and new Americans (refugees and immigrants).

- Individuals with a disability include those with:
 - Hearing difficulty (e.g., deaf or having serious difficulty hearing [DEAR])
 - Vision difficulty (e.g., blind or having serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses [DEYE])
 - Cognitive difficulty (e.g., because of a physical, mental or emotional problem, having difficulty remember, concentrating or making decisions [DREM])
 - Ambulatory difficulty (e.g., having serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs [DPHY])
 - Self-care difficulty (e.g., having difficulty bathing or dressing [DDRS])
 - Independent living difficulty (e.g., because of a physical, mental or emotional problem, having difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping [DOUT])
- New Americans include immigrants, refugees and/or noncitizens living in America
- LGBTQ community (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer), defined as:
 - Lesbian: A woman who is attracted to other women.
 - Gay: A man who is attracted to other men.
 - Bisexual: An individual who is attracted to both genders.
 - Trans: An umbrella term that seeks to incorporate individuals whose gender identities do not match their biological sex, for example, someone who is born male-bodied and identifies as a woman.
 - Queer or Questioning: Individuals who experience fluidity in their experience of sexuality or gender and, therefore, do not identify strictly as LGB or T. The term 'Queer' can also include those who do not identify as either gender.
- Racial/Ethnic communities, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, are composed of several different race categories – black, American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, other, and two or more races. Hispanics are also considered a minority, although Hispanic or Latino, is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as an ethnicity rather than as a race. Other considerations include religious communities, such as Muslim, that practice cultural traditions based around gender.





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