

Rejuvenating Neighborhoods and Communities Through Parks—A Guide To Success



National Recreation
and Park Association

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Executive Summary

Unleashing the Potential of Parks for Revitalizing Neighborhoods and Communities

The practice of developing or redeveloping parks and open spaces, which become catalysts for revitalizing neighborhoods and communities, is spreading throughout the United States.

Some examples:

- Marvin Gaye Park in Washington, D.C., once known as “Needle Park” due to drug use and sales, has been restored to a place for children to play and neighbors to gather.
- High Line Park in New York City, characterized by an abandoned, elevated rail spur overlooking the Hudson River, has become a first-class urban amenity for the three neighborhoods it crosses.
- Lou Walker Park, a three-acre park located next to a stormwater drainage ditch in DeKalb County, Georgia, was renovated for use as a playground site with “playground graduates” moving on to attend a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) program during the summer months.

Inspiration and Information for Revitalizing Parks and Neighborhoods

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) created this toolkit in support of citizens living in communities across the country, advocates supporting the public park movement, and public park and recreation agencies. All these groups can play a significant role in park renovation and neighborhood revitalization.

Recognizing the uniqueness of each neighborhood and community as well as the variations in the roles of citizens, advocates, and agencies, this toolkit is intended to provide both inspiration for moving park projects forward and information related to techniques and strategies that help assure the success of such efforts. This toolkit is organized into seven sections.

- **Recalling the Concept.** There was a time when parks and community centers played a key role in neighborhood and community well-being. This section recalls that role and provides evidence of the renewed impact of parks and open space in today’s society.
- **From Concept to Catalyst.** This section explores various roles that individuals, community groups, and professionals can play—serving as catalysts for park projects that result in community revitalization.
- **Information as Foundation and Springboard.** Gathering information about a neighborhood and its residents serves as a foundation for making better choices and provides a basis for securing funding and resources for the project. This section focuses on securing information from existing sources.
- **Neighborhood Insights and Ideas.** The potential for a park project to bring community revitalization is closely related to the genuine involvement of people living in the area. Both more traditional methods as well as newer approaches to insight gathering are included in this section.
- **Input to Implementation.** Integrating the information, input, and ideas into a workable plan for resource development and implementation of the project is naturally a key aspect for success. This section addresses that process.

- **Outcomes to Impact.** Today's emphasis on making optimal use of resources leads to a requirement to assess and demonstrate the impact of any park or project on important needs or issues. Techniques for outcomes assessment are included in this section.
- **Cycle of Success.** This section addresses the wide range of actions and activities necessary to ensure that the initial success of the effort is continued throughout the life span of the park or project.

Recognition and Appreciation for the Parks Build Community Partners

Much of the information and many of the insights in this toolkit are based on their collective experiences and expertise in connection with the Marvin Gaye Park project in Washington, D.C.



In 2008 NRPA launched a community revitalization program, Parks Build Community, to revive inner-city communities through purposeful park restoration and sustainability, with the understanding that the health of a park is directly connected to the health and beauty of its surrounding neighborhoods.

NRPA's initial program effort was Marvin Gaye Park. It resulted in a sustainable model for restoring blighted urban areas around the country. The Marvin Gaye Park project and its success are due in large part to the leadership of Washington Parks & People—most especially Steve Coleman and Autumn Saxton-Ross, working in partnership with NRPA. The generosity of other national partners, Playworld Systems, PlayCore, Landscape Structures, and Kompan, led to the revitalization of Marvin Gaye Park. It was rededicated and reopened as a place where children can play and experience their community like never before.



II A RENOVATED MARVIN GAYE PARK

NRPA's Vision: Parks Build Community

Beginning in 2008, at the impetus of new CEO Barbara Tulipane, NRPA began to explore the idea of working on an urban park project that would exemplify the theme of how “Parks Build Community.”

That “parks build community” is a concept intuitively understood by every professional in the field of parks and recreation. From the smallest urban pocket park up through the largest urban parks, having a park enriches the life of every community. However, there is often little empirical evidence to show just how a park tangibly contributes to the building of community. NRPA saw how valuable it would be to complete such a project in a community that had none, and to use the example to demonstrate why parks are so important to every community's sense of itself.

For a number of reasons, NRPA chose to look for a park-build project in or close to the District of Columbia. And it was not difficult to find any number of communities and neighborhoods in need—communities that had no parks or playgrounds, or if they had them, they were in dire need of repair and rehabilitation.

Partnering with the DC Department of Parks and Recreation and the non-profit group Washington Parks and People, an established park advocacy group that had completed a highly successful park renovation with the National Park



II VOLUNTEERS INVOLVED IN CLEAN UP EFFORT

Service at Meridian Hill Park in NW D.C., NRPA identified a park rehabilitation project in an underserved community that would be an ideal candidate for proving the hypothesis that parks do build community—Marvin Gaye Park in Northeast D.C.

The need for a park and playground in this underserved community could not have been more apparent. Ward 7 has the second highest concentration of children of any Ward in the city, and there had been no public playground here for the past 25 years. In fact, local civic leaders had asked the city to remove old and dilapidated playground equipment because they did not want children to be attracted to it since it was now a known open-air drug market.

Under the Administration of Mayor Adrian Fenty, the city had committed to an ambitious redevelopment of the former Watts Branch Stream Valley Park, but did not have the funds to complete the planned redevelopment of the entire park. Working with the office of the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and Washington Parks and People, NRPA proposed to take responsibility for securing the equipment and materials for a new playground, which would be the heart of the park redevelopment project.

Over the next two years, NRPA sought and received an outstanding level of donations—over a quarter million dollars in value—from suppliers, manufacturers, and businesses, to support this park rebuild. The project efforts and results was widely featured in local and national media, including documentation in **Parks and Recreation Magazine** in September, 2010.

In addition to the park-rebuilding project, NRPA also committed to a research project in cooperation with George Mason University to show how people's perceptions of their health and wellness were improved by using the park, and how park visitation increased once there was a safe place to play for children and youth.

However, the larger purpose of the Marvin Gaye Park project was more than play equipment, pavers, and landscaping. The Parks Build Community initiative demonstrates how parks connect to and enhance the life of a community. It is as much about what takes place in the community outside the park as it is about what takes place inside the park. Marvin Gaye Park resulted in a community that now had a safe place for children to play and residents to socialize. The spillover effect of Marvin Gaye Park has led to the closure of a drug rehabilitation clinic adjacent to the park formerly referred to as “needle park” and the infusion of community development investment from the City for the neighborhood.

Parks are such an essential component of livable, sustainable, communities that it is difficult to imagine a truly livable sustainable community without parks, trails, and other recreational resources and the positive changes such parks create for the entire neighborhood.

The Parks Build Community project at Marvin Gaye Park has begun to serve as a national model for any community to use in the restoration and rehabilitation of deteriorated urban parks. This toolkit, which was assembled with the intention of deconstructing the valuable lessons learned from the Marvin Gaye project, can serve as a guide for other agencies, non-profits, and communities. There are a number of essential steps that can point the way to successfully completing similar projects. Every component might not apply to every project, but the outreach and partnership building examples of this project and other similar projects around the country can help any agency to link results to outcomes in a way that brings credit to the partners and ensures a high probability of success.

NRPA is pleased to share not just the vision, but also the nuts-and-bolts of how Parks Build Community can work in your community.

Section 1: Recalling the Concept

The information and insights in this section are intended to:

- Remind citizens, advocates, and professionals of the role open spaces and parks play in creating, supporting, and sustaining the well-being of a neighborhood or community.
- Remind the reader that a park or section of open space holds potential beyond its obvious existence as a parcel of land.
- Provide an example of the “before” and “after” circumstances where a park renovation contributes to the revitalization of a neighborhood.
- Identify ways in which a renovated park serves as a community asset.
- Reference opportunities for parks that tie into collaborating with other emerging community efforts and initiatives.

Defining a Park

When people are asked to define a park, most of their answers are similar in focus but cite differing outcomes. For example, the bird-watcher may define a park as open space left in its natural state to support the habitat of local birds and provide him or her with untold hours of education and enjoyment. A child might refer to a neighborhood park as a place where to go climb on playground equipment. Still another individual may immediately define parks as athletic fields.

*Beyond what parks do to fulfill individuals,
they address important community and societal needs.*

Aside from what parks mean to individuals, parks can surpass an individual's preference to address important community and societal needs. The component parts of a park—grass, trees, open space, benches, and play equipment—can come together to result in more than just another public place.

When is a park more than a park? A park assumes more widespread and important roles for communities when it:

- Serves as an impetus to revitalize or rejuvenate the neighborhood or community in which it is located
- Plays an integral role in the life of a neighborhood and the lives of the people who reside there
- Serves as a touchstone for sense of community for those who live, work, and play there

*A park can be a vehicle for creating social organization
and community. If it doesn't catalyze something else, it's not going
to be a great contribution to the neighborhood.*

GREGORY D. SQUIRES, GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR OF
SOCIOLOGY AND PUBLIC POLICY AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Back to the Future

The concept of parks as an anchor for revitalizing neighborhoods and communities is not entirely new. The origins of park and recreation services grew out of the societal needs of the early 20th century, when cities in the United States were undergoing radical changes. People were relocating from the farms to the cities or emigrating from other countries, and both groups were attempting to acclimate to a new way of life. The early creation and use of parks and places during this time of change played a role in the successful transitions of individuals, families, neighborhoods, and entire communities into a new era in American life.

Imagine ...

- There would have been no need for Central Park in New York City if it were not for urban growth.
- There would have been little need for Chicago's Hull House if immigrant families were not experiencing difficulties assimilating.
- Joseph Lee would not have created sand gardens and play areas in Boston had there not been unsupervised children playing in the streets.

Today's changes in how we live, work, live, and play are once again creating a foundation for parks and recreation as a source of renewal and revitalization for neighborhoods, communities, and society. The situations that communities today face are remarkably similar to the challenges facing cities at the turn of the last century: overcrowding, unsupervised children, gangs, stress, crime, and other negative consequences of unprecedented change.

Today as we move further into the 21st century, equally important issues face our cities, seemingly regardless of location and population size. Some of these issues include:

- The flight of people and businesses from the cities to the suburbs or beyond
- Drug usage, including prescription drugs
- A rise in crime associated with gang activity
- Growth in the proportion of people living in poverty
- An increase in the number of people who do not speak English as a first language
- The growth in the number of young people considered "at risk"
- Challenges for adults seeking new employment pursuits
- The aging of the population and increased longevity
- Greater diversity in the population

The economic changes and challenges facing the United States only intensify these circumstances.



II WATTS STREAM PARK/MARVIN GAYE PARK – EARLY PICTURE

When Is a Park More than a Park? Marvin Gaye Park of Washington, D.C.



II MARVIN GAYE PARK REVITALIZATION PROJECT

for maintenance and improvements. It was Marvin Gaye Park where the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) launched its initial community revitalization initiative, Parks Build Community.

Following is an overview of how the many uses and evolutions of this parcel of land eventually led to a revitalized neighborhood in this urban enclave.

From Tobacco Fields to Development to Linear Park

Once the Federal City started to grow, the tobacco farmlands alongside the stream valleys of the Anacostia River gradually gave way to homes and businesses. However, the development in that area was subject to unpredictable flooding, such that the area was designated as a floodplain, thereby restricting development.

By 1938, the buildings were demolished and residents relocated so that a park could be developed in the floodplain. This linear park space, called Watts Branch Stream Valley Park, was completed and remained as park space until the urban renewal efforts of the 1950s and 1960s. Urban renewal resulted in large public housing projects—such as this one—to provide living space for those displaced people by such efforts.

Watts Branch Stream Valley Park went through several stages of usage and later neglect. It lay in disrepair until the first lady, Lady Bird Johnson, had eight acres of the park refurbished as part of her Capital Beautification Campaign, bringing about new flower beds, large grassy areas, and a cleanup of the Watts Branch tributary. Once again the community flocked to this beautifully renovated park.

From Disrepair to Revitalization

In 1970, the federal government turned the maintenance of the park over to the District of Columbia. The district's limited funds led to the gradual disrepair of the park once again: it fell victim to illegal dumping and criminal activity. It became known as "Needle Park," reflecting the drug sales and use within its boundaries. Renamed in honor of a famous local resident, musician Marvin Gaye, who frequented the banks of the stream while writing his music, the park remained in disrepair and misuse.

Enter Washington Parks & People, a nonprofit citizens' organization that spearheaded an effort to clean up the land and restore the park. Over a five-year period beginning in 2001, this volunteer effort resulted in a multimillion dollar rejuvenation of the park, during which 24,000 volunteers removed more than 3.5 million pounds of trash.

Beginning in 2007, as part of NRPA's first urban park project, it partnered with Washington Parks & People and the DC Department of Parks and Recreation. This initial undertaking by NRPA resulted in improvements to Marvin Gaye Park—providing further evidence that the health of a park is directly connected to the health and beauty of its surrounding neighborhoods.

How can parks play a role in addressing important community issues? While no one would be naïve enough to suggest that public parks are *the* saving grace for urban areas, we would be remiss not to cite some of the many park and development projects that have enhanced the livability of our cities and addressed some of those critical issues for overall health and well-being.

One such park renovation that clearly demonstrates how a park can benefit a neighborhood is Marvin Gaye Park in Washington, D.C. This park illustrates the life cycle associated with many urban parks, because the conditions and subsequent use of the park follows the variations in the economy and the available funds

Marvin Gaye Park, the former Watts Branch Stream Valley Park, was officially reopened in 2009 and featured state-of-the-art playground equipment, permanent mosaics honoring community heroes, and rebuilt hiking and biking trails.

Community Alive and Well

The story of a park renovation project intended to revitalize a neighborhood does not stop with a successful dedication. More changes and improvements were on the horizon, due to continued involvement by Washington Parks & People and the strong community leadership developed as part of this effort. The renovated and reopened park indeed had ties to positive changes in a newly revitalized neighborhood, such as:

- The closing of a nearby methadone clinic that attracted drug users to the area.
- More people, young and old, visiting the park
- Visitors staying longer in the park
- Youths being more active physically while visiting the park
- Adults recalling childhood memories they recaptured by spending time in the park
- People speaking about how the park has broken down barriers among residents

Community was once again alive and well in the former Watts Branch Stream Valley Park after it was renamed and revitalized.

To conclude, in combination with the adjacent Riverside Center (owned and operated by Washington Parks & People), Marvin Gaye Park has become a community asset.



II MARVIN GAYE PARK, BEFORE MOST RECENT RENOVATION



II MARVIN GAYE PARK, AFTER RENOVATION

Marvin Gaye Park—A Community Asset

The rejuvenation and revitalization of the Anacostia community is related to the restoration of Marvin Gaye Park, which has now assumed become a valuable asset to this community. The many community assets accrued to this project include:

- **A safe community gathering spot.** Prior to the renovation, local residents requested that D.C. government remove the unsafe play equipment, so that it would not attract children to the park, which not only was home to an open-air drug market with rampant drug usage but also was a frequent crime scene.
- **Health and social interaction.** In earlier times, most people avoided the park, and parents warned their children to stay far away from its boundaries. Today, however, young mothers push baby carriages through the park, and children of various ages attend programs and activities within the park. The programming by Washington Parks & People changed people's perception: the new perception is that Marvin Gaye Park is a safe place to go—one that offers activities and opportunities for improving one's health as well as social interaction.

- **Environmental improvement.** Environmental improvements benefiting the stream have occurred as a result of the restoration of the park and the removal of trash and hazardous materials.
- **Community involvement.** A farmers market was started by a group of neighborhood women committed to taking back the park from drug dealers. Working with Washington Parks & People, these women and local farmers host a weekly market. New ideas for community supported agriculture are emerging from this success.
- **Increased opportunities for physical activity.** The repaving of paths through the park, combined with on-street improvements, connects the surrounding neighborhoods to places for increased physical activity. Research conducted by George Mason University suggested there were increases in physical activity for children because of the playground and for adults because of the walking paths and connecting trails.
- **Rebirth.** Adjacent to the park, Woodson Senior High School is undergoing a total makeover, and new townhouses are under construction in the area.



II RENOVATED MARVIN GAYE PARK AND WATTS BRANCH

- **Impetus for further improvements.** The revitalization of Marvin Gaye Park is a tangible example of how a park project can serve as an impetus for further improvements. The District of Columbia has embarked on an ambitious community revitalization plan for this community that includes transportation improvements, streetscaping, business improvements, and neighborhood redevelopment.
- **Conservation efforts.** The Washington Smart Growth Alliance, a group that promotes conservation initiatives that create quality of life in communities, named Marvin Gaye Park a 2009 regional conservation priority.
- **Focal point for media.** The renovated park drew media attention both at the local and national level. Stories on the revitalization of the park and its effects have appeared in *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* and on National Public Radio.

Videos Bring the Park to Life

Two videos are available on the NRPA Web site that further understanding and appreciation for the Marvin Gaye Park initiative. One video relates to the park, while the second features the park dedication. These videos can be viewed at:

<http://www.youtube.com/v/Z1GFLf3inio&hl=en&fs=1&>

<http://www.nrpa.org/media/parkday/default.html>.

Revisiting the Question: When Is a Park More Than Just Land?

A series of five research papers commissioned by NRPA was released in 2010. They present evidence of the impact made by parks and recreation in local communities nationwide. Moreover, they provide insight into the benefits important to individuals, communities, our economy, and society. Lastly, these research papers help agencies adapt to increasing demands and quantify the benefits of their services to local and national decision-makers.

The five papers are:

- The Benefits of Physical Activity: The Scientific Evidence
- Measuring the Economic Impact of Park and Recreation Services
- Parks and Other Green Environments: Essential Components of a Healthy Human Habitat
- Air Quality Effects of Urban Parks and Trees
- The Rationale for Recreation Services for Youth: An Evidence Based Approach

Agencies are encouraged to make full use of these resources that enhance the credibility and effectiveness of our profession's efforts. This research series can be found at <http://www.nrpa.org/2010researchpapers/>.

Small Parcels of Open Space With a Big Impact

Parks and Other Green Environments: Essential Components of a Healthy Human Habitat details research examples in the NRPA Research Series that demonstrates the effects that even small amounts of green space can have on the lives of people and neighborhoods.

The Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago consist of two apartment buildings located in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the United States. When people signed up for housing in this complex, they were randomly assigned to either of the two buildings. The demographics of occupants in the two buildings were similar regarding age, education, employment, income, household size, marital status, number of children, health, and alcohol and drug usage.

However, there was one seemingly small but significant difference between the two identical buildings. One building faced only concrete and asphalt, while the other building had a view of green: trees and grass.

Could social dysfunction be found among residents of apartment buildings, the human experience of overcrowding? The answer is yes, but:

- The people living in the building with only the view of concrete and asphalt reported higher levels of aggression and violence than the residents of the other building, with its views of trees and grass.
- Similar differences were reported when residents of both buildings were asked about conflicts with their children. Parents living in the building with the concrete view reported using a greater range of psychologically aggressive behaviors.

How could these results be explained? Were these findings tied to this one particular instance? Similar results were found in a later study conducted in another poor neighborhood, the Ida B. Welles low-rise apartment developments. Researchers examined two years of police reports from more than 98 of these apartment buildings and found more violent crimes in the buildings with the least amount of vegetation—again the “gray” versus the “green.”

Source: Parks and Other Green Environments: Essential Components of a Healthy Human Habitat, by Ming F. Kuo, NRPA *Research Series*, 2010

Related Initiatives With Potential for Parks

The power that parks, open space, and public places have to affect the greater good of the community has been recognized by a number of other community activists as well. There are many instances in which local parks have played a role in one or more of these initiatives.

Some of these initiatives that make particularly viable partners for parks and recreation include:

- **Community building.** The intent and focus of community building are actions that increase the capacity of a neighborhood to identify needed changes, be involved in those changes, and sustain positive revitalization.
- **Placemaking.** Associated with the American Planning Association, this approach transforms public squares, parks, streets, and waterfronts as a means of attracting people and revitalizing a previously underutilized community asset.
- **Environmental justice.** Environmental justice refers to fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people—regardless of race, ethnicity, income, and national origin—in the development and implementation of environmental laws and policies. The first wave of environmental justice focused on locally unwanted, nondesirable, and in some cases harmful uses of land such as landfills—the hazardous waste sites that disproportionately affected minority populations. The second wave of environmental justice has shifted its attention to urban design, public health, and access to quality outdoor recreation spaces. Such park access in underserved neighborhoods is tied to the Healthy People 2010 goals to increase health over the life span and eliminate health disparities.

We should recognize both the potential to collaborate on other initiatives and the value these other groups place on the role of parks in vital community outcomes. These types of initiatives build on existing assets of park and recreation agencies. In the case of placemaking, parks and a number of other public spaces are often the responsibility of public parks. Community building relates to many strategies currently used in park and recreation programming opportunities. In many instances, public parks and spaces are the only options available to underserved neighborhoods, which makes environmental justice a natural fit with public parks.

Sources of Information for Related Approaches

Numerous sources examine these initiatives and suggest partnering potential for parks and recreation. Consult these Web sites.

- The Community Building Initiative at <http://www.communitybuildinginitiative.org>
- The Community Building Resource Exchange at <http://www.commbuild.org>
- American Planning Association (articles, examples, and an outline) at <http://www.pps.org/placemaking/articles/placemaker-profiles>
- The Townscape Institute at <http://www.townscape.org/publications.htm>
- Soul of the Community Research at <http://soulofthecommunity.org>

With respect to environmental justice, there is no specific organization for parks and recreation but some related projects are described at:

- http://www.pacinst.org/reports/measuring_what_matters/issues/shoreline.pdf
- http://www.ny4p.org/pdfs/planningforparks/Open_Space_Index_Report.pdf
- www.uchastings.edu/public-law/docs/ejreport-fourthedition.pdf

A Closing Thought

The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life.

— JANE ADDAMS

Section 3: Information as Foundation and Springboard

The information and insights in this section are intended to:

- Establish the significance for securing data and information.
- Provide examples of elements found within a community profile.
- Identify existing, widely available sources for such data and information.
- Provide an example of use of information as part of the planning process.

Data and Information Drive the Process and Project

Two of the more compelling reasons for focusing on information gathering are (1) to ensure that the existing data related to specifics of the neighborhood are assessed as part of the planning process and (2) to secure partnerships and resources to bring the project to fruition. Potential partners and funding agencies often requires data and statistics related to factors such as demographics, health behavior, and crime rates.

After an incident or request, it is easy enough to rush headlong into planning. However, with transformational park projects, it is critical to gather information about the issues, the people, and the context before moving forward.

While this section focuses on information gathering, that is of no greater importance than collecting ideas and input from residents, neighborhoods, and other stakeholders. Both of these actions are critical to designing and bringing to fruition a park project that rejuvenates an area.

Three major categories for gathering information associated with project development of this type are:

- **Community profile:** Neighborhood and community data and statistics describing the demographic makeup of a community or neighborhood and established patterns of activity and behavior within that physical location
- **Issues identification:** Analysis of the information and data to determine the issue, problem, or challenge intended to be addressed through this park project
- **Park assessment:** A concise description of the conditions within the park area itself, along with potential opportunities and constraints

Community Profile

A community profile serves as the framework for the project. It provides essential, valuable information for planning as well as securing resources and partners. The four most common elements of a community profile are:

History

- The neighborhood
- Parks or projects that already exist

Demographics

- Current neighborhood makeup
- Changes over time
- Trend projections

Key Issues Identification

- Health data and trends
- Crime data and patterns
- Environmental issues
- School attendance and success
- Economic and employment

Assessment of the Park and Neighborhood

- Size and condition of the park
- Issues or concerns of the neighborhood

Issues Identification

Analysis of the gathered data helps to determine the major issues within a community. This analysis is particularly critical when the park project or renovation has as its intended outcome the rejuvenation of a community. Often the data and statistics specific to the neighborhood under study can be compared with similar information and descriptors gathered from nearby neighborhoods or similar communities.

Data gathered nationwide suggests that neighborhoods and communities across the country are being challenged by a number of social issues, many of them with serious economic implications. Some issues have their roots in national statistics related to high school dropout rates, levels of obesity among youth and adults, and the increasing costs of medical care for chronic diseases associated with obesity. When national, state, and community data are reviewed in light of local issues around community safety and youth development, a picture of the issues within an area begins to take shape. In other words, the identified issues, along with their underlying causes, form the basis for the park project.

One Park's History—Discovery Green in Houston

Every neighborhood and its parks have a history. By paying attention to these histories, we gain greater understanding of their condition as well as clearer understanding of the opportunities, strengths, constraints, and issues for the neighborhood and its parks. As an example, here is the history and timeline of one urban area and its green space.

Discovery Green in Houston is a 12-acre urban park that functions similarly to a city green. The long history of this urban space is enlightening for envisioning its potential for that community.

19th Century

The area now known as Discovery Green was high-end residential housing in Houston.

20th Century

Residential housing gave way to the construction of a railroad station, which soon attracted industrial operations. The area remained industrial for many decades.

1970s

A gas pipeline company, Texas Eastern, acquired 32 downtown blocks in east Houston. It then developed Houston Center, a mixed-use commercial complex with office buildings, a shopping complex, a luxury hotel, and substantial surface parking. The intent was to encourage businesses to relocate to the edge of downtown, but Houston Center struggled in this effort.

1980s

The George Brown Convention Center opened in that area in 1987, again hoping to drive business and people to the area.

2000s

The city of Houston purchased undeveloped land and green space as part of a legal arrangement not related to the site or the project. A portion of the green space was the Houston Center Gardens, which was owned by the Houston Center. By 2004, Houston Center announced plans to sell the undeveloped property including Houston Center Gardens. Concerned that the green space could be lost to the city forever, some foundations contacted Mayor Bill White in hopes that the land could be preserved as a permanent park. Funding from the Brown Foundation and the Kinder Foundation, coupled with city funds, was used to purchase nearly 12 acres to create this park.

Today

Both the mayor and the Houston City Council insisted that the public play a large role in the development of this space. The end result was Discovery Green, which serves as a village green for the city of Houston. As a result of this public-private partnership between the city of Houston and the nonprofit Discovery Green Conservancy, Discovery Green welcomed more than 1.5 million visitors and hosted more than 800 public and private events in its first two years of operation.

Source: Discovery Green, www.discoverygreen.com

Community Profile and Issues Identification – Longview, Washington

Located on the Columbia River, rural Longview is the largest and most influential city in Washington's Cowlitz County and serves as a hub for as many as 40 smaller communities. In 2007, Longview had 37,584 residents, and the county had 104,400 residents. Almost 85 percent of residents are Caucasian, 10 percent are Hispanic/Latin, 2 percent are Asian, and 1 percent are of another race. Nearly 9 percent of the households speak a language other than English at home. With a struggling local economy long dependent on mills, two of which have closed in recent years, Longview has a high unemployment rate—nearly 15 percent in 2010.

Issue Identification

Risk factors for developing diabetes and cardiovascular disease are common among county adults. Primary risks are high rates for overweight and obesity (67 percent), insufficient physical activity (37 percent), high cholesterol (30 percent), hypertension (20 percent), and smoking (24 percent, including 28 percent of pregnant women). With an environment affected by air pollution and tobacco smoke, 22 percent of youth are being treated for asthma, one of the highest rates in the state. The overall impacts of chronic health problems on Longview and Cowlitz County are higher healthcare costs and an average life span that is three years less than the state average. Deaths due to chronic disease, as well as accidents and suicides, are also higher in Cowlitz County than state averages.

Source: NRPA ACHIEVE

Park Assessment

A thorough park assessment gives insights not revealed through a review of acreage and other statistics. A park assessment answers the question “What are the conditions within the park area itself, along with potential opportunities and constraints?”

There are some agencies that perform periodic park assessments as part of their ongoing operations, while other agencies use of assessments as the need arises. In either case, there are a number of areas that should be addressed through a park assessment including:

- Existing landscape
- Conditions of facilities
- Access for user groups
- Available working utilities
- Inventory of specific amenities and conditions of those amenities
- Maintenance reports
- Police complaints and records, if any

Data and statistics about your community are critical. They are likely to be requested for annual budget reviews, capital improvement requests, and foundation or grant proposals. The good news is not only that such data is available in greater depth than previously but also that most of it can easily be secured through public information sources or via online sites.

A Park Assessment Checklist

The following checklist may be useful for conducting a future park assessment.

Park Specifics

- Acreage (total)
- Acreage developed
- Acreage open
- Acreage paved

Existing Landscape

- Natural to area
- Planted/developed
- Condition of each type
- Features that contribute/detract to development
- Landscape and safety features: ways in which the current landscape restricts safety or contributes to perceptions of safety

Current Facilities

- List the existing facilities of this park.
- State the condition of each facility, such as “usable,” “not functioning,” and “could use repairs.”

Current Equipment

- List the existing equipment of this park (play equipment, picnic tables, and so on).
- State the condition of each equipment category, such as “usable,” “not functioning,” and “could use repairs.”

User Groups

- State the intended user groups of this park when it was developed.
- Describe the current user groups of this park.
- Describe accessibility for all potential users, such as sidewalks, safety, mass transportation, and proximity to schools or housing.

Available Working Utilities

- Extent of availability of water, gas, and electricity
- Description of current availability, usage, and costs

Maintenance Practices

- Current maintenance schedule (time and specific activities)
- Quarterly maintenance schedule
- Annual maintenance recommendations
- Maintenance requests from staff
- Maintenance requests from user groups
- Maintenance requests from neighbors

Complaints and Requests

- Neighbors
- Area businesses
- Law enforcement

Data Available Within Communities

Certain department and agencies within a community can be sources for information important to your project. These include:

- **Planning departments.** Local, regional, or state agencies can provide historical patterns as well as future projections.
- **School districts.** Tracking the demographics of specific neighborhoods and communities within districts is critical—for examples, for schools that need to plan ahead to purchase land for additional schools or to renovate buildings. In addition, school districts are required to maintain records of student attendance, standardized test results, and graduation rates. This information can create a picture of the well-being of young people in various neighborhoods or sections of your community.
- **Economic development agencies.** These agencies may be publicly operated or overseen by a private group, but either way, they already have community profile information.
- **Health departments.** City, county, and state health departments compile data on various chronic diseases, level of obesity, amount of physical activity, and health disparities.
- **Law enforcement agencies.** The overall safety of various sections of the community as well as issues related to juvenile behavior can be secured from local or county officials or both.

Census Data

The Census Bureau makes substantial demographic data available at no cost and online, including mapping capability using its TIGER data. A community planning department may already have such mapping available.

Two good starting places for information useful for park plans are available online at www.census.gov.

- **American Community Survey.** This ongoing survey provides updated data between the 10-year census cycles. It includes such factors as age, sex, race, family and relationships, benefit, health insurance, education, veteran status, income, disabilities, location of work and commute time, and amount of money directed toward essential expenditures.
- **The American FactFinder.** This interactive application supports the Economic Census, the American Community Survey, and the latest Population Estimates. Maps reflecting various demographic areas be refined down to ZIP code or street address.

Other Sources of Data

Other sources of data and information are available from government sources, nonprofit organizations, and even a few private endeavors. Most of this data is available to the general public—and most often online.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

It is difficult to summarize the vast amounts of information and data that are available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on the Web site www.cdc.gov. The data covers health disparities and various health conditions as well as risk behaviors. In addition, the site contains position papers that highlight the need for community action in a number of areas including healthy communities, walkability, and physical activity. In short, the CDC Web site has an outstanding compilation of information for park projects.

School Statistics

High school graduation rates reflect the overall well-being of a neighborhood, and this information can be secured at <http://www.edweek.org/apps/gmap>. Editorial Projects in Education is the independent, nonprofit publisher of *Education Week* and provides reliable data on graduation rates for every school district and high school in the country.

Crime Statistics

The Bureau of Justice Statistics is designated by the federal government to collect, analyze, publish, and disseminate information on crime, criminal offenders, victims of crime, and the operation of justice systems at all levels of government. The focus areas include corrections, violent crimes, gangs, drugs, and crimes. <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov>

The Kids Count Data Center

This national project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation is a prime source of information for specifics on children. The data is available on a state basis and the Web site helps an agency not only to obtain community-level data but also to use it to create maps and graphs of findings and then conduct comparisons to other states or communities. http://datacenter.kidscount.org/?gclid=CL0gxP_a66UCFQ915Qod6mSsqQ

Comparisons on Health Status

The **County Health Rankings** are a key component of the Mobilizing Action Toward Community Health project. MATCH is collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

For this report, researchers pulled together federal and state health-related data on 3,016 U.S. counties. The Web site posts the 50 state reports, ranking each county within each state according to its health outcomes. Each county receives a summary ranking for its health outcomes and health factors, as well as for the four different types of health factors included in the MATCH program: health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic factors, and the physical environment. A researcher can drill down to county-level data (as well as state benchmarks) for the measures on which the rankings are based. <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org>

Measure of America

The American Human Development Project, a program of the Social Science Research Council, created the American Human Development Index. This index serves as a tool to track progress in communities in important areas such as health, education, and income. The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and the Lincy Foundation support the project. <http://www.measureofamerica.org/maps>

Well-Being Index

The Gallup–Healthways Well-Being Index is the result of a 25-year partnership agreement between these two companies. It combines data related to health leadership and behavioral economics to create a monthly portrait of

the well-being of Americans as a whole and for specific states. It truly and broadly defines wellness by tracking such categories as life evaluation, emotional and physical health, healthy behaviors, the work environment, and basic access to healthcare. Please note that only overall data about the United States can be accessed by the general public. <http://www.well-beingindex.com>

PARKScore and the Trust for Public Land as Resources

PARKScore, an online resource funded by a grant from the California Endowment, displays park and other health-related information in the form of interactive maps. These maps can help the agency make the case for increasing park and open space within certain communities.

Another resource is the Park Equity and Health Toolkit of the Trust for Public Land. It offers techniques and tools for agencies wishing to address health-related problems by creating, improving, and funding public parks, playgrounds, community gardens, and other settings for physical activity.

These resources can be viewed at:

<http://www.parkscore.org>

http://www.tpl.org/tier2_kad.cfm?folder_id=3548

Analyzing Information for Planning

Information is of limited value without analysis of how it relates to the lives of people who live in a particular neighborhood or area. This same information and data has limited value to the planning process and the project, until it is incorporated into a concise set of statements identifying community issues and describing the roles that park development or renovation will play in the future of the neighborhood or community.

The Catalyst for Neighborhood Parks, which is a joint endeavor of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and the City Parks Foundation, creates a profile for each area or neighborhood before starting on a project. It gathers such information as

demographics (labeled “context”); assets of the area; challenges for the park revitalization project; and potential strategies for moving the project forward.

The Catalyst for Neighborhood Parks initiative uses the profile, demographics, and assets of the affected neighborhood to identify challenges and strategies—which is really the overall purpose of gathering data. It is interesting to note that within the following profile, the strategies for engaging the most essential partners refer to the people who live and work in the area.

The following profile was developed for the Astoria/Long Island City neighborhood as part of the Catalyst for Neighborhood Parks.

Context

Population of 147,000

- 48% of local population foreign born, compared to 36% of New York City’s population overall
- Several large public housing projects adjacent to waterfront parks

Assets

- Seven waterfront parks with great views of the East River and Manhattan
- 121 acres of lawn, esplanades, and sports amenities

- History of cultural activity in many of the parks
- Recently acquired beachfront property added to Socrates Sculpture Park

Challenges

- Minimal use of waterfront parks
- Extensive capital needs, ranging from new playgrounds to a collapsing seawall
- Little coordinated community leadership for the waterfront

Strategies

- Doubled cultural and sports programs in parks
- Extensive outreach for concert series, attracting 3,300 people
- \$5,000 in small grants to support local programming
- Earth Day and shoreline cleanup events that established a base for ongoing collaboration
- Participation by 300 volunteers in beautification projects

Source: *Catalyst for Neighborhood Parks – Step One: Build. Partnerships for Parks*

Information has value.

Once gathered, it can:

- More clearly and accurately define the needs and goals
- Contribute to better decisionmaking
- Garner support and resources from decision-makers and partners

The key is to make the best possible use of existing data as well as information available through technology *and apply it.*

Section 4: Neighborhood Insights and Ideas

The information and insights in this section are intended to:

- Remind the reader of the unique and powerful results that come from garnering ideas and input from stakeholders—especially those whose lives will be most improved by the park project.
- Identify traditional alternatives for garnering insight with suggestions for usage.
- Identify newer models for garnering insight with guidelines for usage.

Moving Beyond Information to Insight

Data and information can provide a useful framework for a park project, but the foundation of genuine rejuvenation is the ideas and insights secured from the people who live, work, learn, and play in the neighborhood of the proposed park or renovation. What links a park project to community revitalization and improvement is the involvement of people living in the area.

When an incident occurs in a neighborhood or a small group of residents requests a meeting with leaders of the park agency, an immediate response is expected. Naturally, an emergency situation or safety concern requires immediate action.

In undertaking a plan to build or renovate a park, stakeholders should understand that it will take time for the park to result in the revitalization of the neighborhood. The time requirement reflects the need to seek and receive input from community stakeholders: a process that both engages residents in this revitalization and supports access to resources.

This section includes techniques for meeting with the various publics and stakeholders to garner their perceptions and preferences. The process at one time relied primarily on the traditional methods involving public meetings and surveys, and these are included here, along with suggestions for increasing successful outcomes. However, we will present a new approach, participatory action research, for interacting with stakeholders and obtaining valuable information.

Traditional Approaches to Public Input

Meetings and surveys are two common approaches to soliciting public input. In both cases, the ideas, suggestions, comments, and insights generated are only as good as the questions asked, the people responding, and the genuineness of responses.

Meetings

While the types of information being sought may be somewhat similar, the number of people participating and the role or interest of people participating at meetings can vary.

Meeting types appropriate for generating community insight include public meetings, stakeholder meetings, and focus groups.

- **Public meetings.** Open to the general public, these widely publicized forums disseminate information and capture feedback from attendees. These meetings are usually held at the beginning of the process and again when the process has reached a series of potential recommendations.

- **Stakeholder meetings.** These meetings are appropriate for the purpose of securing input from many community interests in an efficient manner. Representatives attend from various community groups with a stake in the issue or project. Representative stakeholder groups may be formed at the beginning of the process and meet regularly as the project progresses to contribute ongoing feedback.
- **Focus groups.** A much smaller group of individuals—between six and 10—are invited to participate because of their interest or knowledge of a particular topic. These meetings lead to greater and more specific understanding of an issue or topic, but they are not intended to represent the views of an entire community.

Surveys

There are several different types of surveys. Their variations can include many of the following.

- **Targeted group of respondents.** These are individuals who have the specific types of insight you are seeking.
- **Method of delivery.** Forms of delivery can be mail, phone interviews, online, or face to face.
- **Need for decisionmaking.** Statistically valid surveys give decision-makers information representative of the entire targeted group of respondents. On the other hand, participant surveys or face-to-face surveys (often referred to as “intercept” surveys) represent only the views of those being interviewed.
- **Resources.** Different types of survey approaches come with very different price tags and time considerations.

Survey Choices – Representative or Local

If a park project requires voter approval to secure funding, often the representative statistically valid survey method is used. But when the focus of the project is the revitalization of a specific local neighborhood, extensive sampling is not needed and likely will not be particularly useful.

Survey Choices – Representative or Local

The targeted group of individuals invited to respond to a survey could range from a large number, such as the general public, to a much smaller group of people who live in close proximity to the park project. The method of survey delivery is most often determined by resources available and the type of engagement desired.

- Mail and phone surveys with representative sampling can be expensive.
- Online surveys generally eliminate respondents who do not have access or the ability to navigate the technology.
- Face-to-face surveys using volunteers to conduct intercept surveys take more time but heighten neighborhood engagement in the process.

Another important survey factor is the need for statistically valid information. Often this consideration is dictated by funding, since representative sampling of a community can be costly. Nevertheless, each situation and desired outcome related to the specific situation should be considered. For example, if a park project requires voter approval to secure funding, then the statistically valid method is often used. But when the focus of the project is the revitalization of a specific neighborhood, such extensive sampling is not needed and is not likely to be particularly useful.

The Marvin Gaye Park project—the partnership initiative among the DC Department of Parks and Recreation, Washington Parks & People, and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)—made extensive use of on-site participant surveys of children, parents, and other adults.



Marvin Gaye Playground Parent/Adult Survey Washington Parks & People

Please answer the following questions about your visit to the park today.

1. Is this your first visit to Marvin Gaye Park playground?

- Yes (go to 2) No (go to 1a)

1a. If NO: How often do you visit this playground...

...during the cold seasons (November-March)?

- Daily Monthly
 2-3 times a week Less than once a Month

...during the warm seasons (April – October)?

- Daily Monthly
 2-3 times a week Less than once a Month

2. Do you always accompany your child to the playground?

- Yes No

3. When you visit the playground, with whom do you usually come? (Please check all that apply)

- Children 0-5 years Children 6-12years Children 13-16years Friends
 Other (Please Specify): _____

4. What is your child’s favorite part of the playground? (Please check all that apply)

- Swings Spinners High Climb (Yellow) Tunnel/Tube (Green)
 Other (Please Specify): _____

5. How much time will you spend (or did you spend) at the playground today?

- Less than 30 minutes 30 minutes up to 1 hour 1 hour to 2 hours 2 hours or more

6. How did you get to the playground today?

- Walked Jogged Rode a Bike Drove Subway/Metro/Bus

7. How long did it take you to get to the playground?

- Less than 10 minutes 10 to 20 minutes 20 to 30 minutes Over 30 minutes

8. What do you like most about the playground?

9. What do you like least about the playground?

10. What would you change about the playground? _____

10a. Children

- Yes (go to 10b)
 No (continue below)

10b. Seniors

- Yes (go to 10c)
 No (continue below)

10c. People with disabilities

- Yes (go to 11)
 No (continue below)

11. Do you feel that facilities in this playground are adequately provided for people of the follow age and abilities?

- Yes No

Greater Insight

How can we reach people that may not respond to traditional surveys or attending meetings?

Intercept surveys are short lists of written questions distributed to people who either are visiting the park in question or are present in nearby public spaces. These questions can also be asked orally by a parks representative stationed at the entrance of the park.

How can we generate more specific ideas and suggestions?

A walking tour is an easy, effective, and inexpensive technique. Stakeholders are invited to visit the site or the neighborhood, and the tour leader emphasizes generating ideas and solutions in a relevant time and space.

Knowing the Critical Considerations

The park agency will either serve as the catalyst for the revitalization project or act in concert with other individuals or groups undertaking it. Whether holding meetings or using surveys, the agency should address a number of elements.

- Identify and invite a variety of people to provide the needed insight.
- Determine desired outcomes. This can start with information dissemination and conclude with consensus building.
- Generate questions.
- Determine the best method to use.
- For meetings, consider logistics such as the location and time of day that would work best for the invitees. In the case of surveys, consider the time of year that would work best for the respondents.

Train the staff or volunteers (who will be running the meeting and recording the information) in the specifics of effective interaction and recording techniques. Such training is required for survey design and phone interviews as well.

Extensive community participation is essential to providing a good understanding of the existing site and the sacred places, as well as in formulating the needs and hopes of the residents.

– MARILYN BOYD DREW, URBAN PARK AND RECREATION EXPERT

The following addresses important elements for successful public meetings.

Identifying People to Be Included

A good starting point is to develop a list of stakeholders (both individuals and groups) who are likely to have the insight you seek, such as:

- Neighbors who immediately surround the park or project as well as any neighborhood associations
- Community leaders, both official and informal
- Schools, both staff and students
- Churches, both staff and members
- Nearby social service agencies
- Local area businesses

- Other public agencies with an involvement in the area
- Advocacy groups, such as friends of parks and conservation groups
- Community foundations

Determining the Desired Outcomes

While it may seem obvious, the desired information and outcomes for meetings and surveys should be determined before deciding on formats or questions. The overarching goal is to design a park that best addresses the needs and issues of the neighborhood. So it is useful to review the purpose and flow of outcomes.

- **Purpose.** Is the purpose of the meeting to disseminate information, solicit input, or arrive at a consensus? Questions and group facilitation techniques will vary accordingly.
- **Flow of outcomes.** At the beginning, the focus is on information exchange: What are the needs? Who wants to help? How are we defining the issues?
 - ▷ During the process, the insights of individual and stakeholder participants help transform a physical project into a revitalization initiative.
 - ▷ Near the end of planning, information dissemination will lead to reactions and suggestions.
 - ▷ The end of the planning process focuses on information dissemination relating to the various elements of the project. The end of the process could include a celebration in appreciation of the participants.

Generating Questions

The survey questions are generally written, rewritten, piloted, and rewritten prior to mailing the survey or conducting the phone interview, This is considered a best practice for such endeavors. The questions being asked at meetings should receive the same time and attention.

- Often, open-ended questions are best used at the beginning of the process, when you are looking to gather insight into people’s perception related to an issue or project.
- Multiple choice questions (or a multifocused response) require respondents to select the best or most preferred response. These questions would be asked further along in the process, when respondents have both the information they need and time to reflect on these choices.

Selecting the Most Appropriate Method

The essential questions rely on two factors: the people whose input you are seeking and the level and type of insight you need. This list shows some of the techniques and methods that are appropriate for these various groups.

Public Meetings	Stakeholder Meetings	Focus Groups
Open to everyone Can accommodate large numbers of people	Individuals or groups with specific interest in the project	Small group of 6 to 10 people who receive information about a specific focus/topic
Focus is information sharing and group opinions	Secure greater depth of understanding of needs, ideas, and preferences of stakeholders	Detailed insight

New York City’s Guiding Principles for Generating Insight

Partnerships for Parks, a partnership between the City Parks Foundation and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, uses these guiding principles for building rapport and generating insight from neighborhoods.

- Understand the community history and context.
- Connect parks to community priorities.
- Recognize that change can be perceived differently by different people.
- Assist neighbors in becoming allies.
- Use incentives to encourage collaboration.

Source: Catalyst: Step One. Partnerships for Parks

The Role and Importance of Logistics

Logistical decisions on meetings—their location as well as the time of day and day of the week—should be made purposefully. Sometimes even the slightest change in logistics can have far-reaching effects on the number of attendees, their comfort level, and the overall quality of the responses. Examples of logistical factors to consider include:

- **Location Choice**
 - ▷ It is usually most convenient and comfortable for people to attend a meeting in their own neighborhood.
 - ▷ Some locations, such as a place of worship or a civic building, might keep certain potential attendees away.
 - ▷ Consider accessibility of the location to potential attendees (within walking distance, safety of the location, on bus line, and so on).
- **Time Parameters**
 - ▷ Take into consideration local customs and patterns (often related to religious practices) when scheduling the day and time of day.
 - ▷ Bracket the most convenient times to reach the intended attendees.
 - ▷ Consider work and commuting patterns in your area.
- **Meeting Arrangements**
 - ▷ In setting up the room, avoid the “leader at the front of the room” placement if possible. A circular arrangement of chairs or the ability to move chairs to form small groups is optimal.
 - ▷ Plan a way to welcome people to the meeting and ease people’s way into the room. For example, designate volunteers to serve as greeters; provide name tags featuring first names only; and suggest a starting point to attendees to move them into the room.

Train Staff or Volunteers

The individuals facilitating the meeting or conducting the on-site surveys are obviously critical to the success of this process. Both training and orientation are essential for these individuals who represent your agency.

- **Training.** Training should focus on group facilitation skills. Access to it may be found either in house in larger agencies, or by contacting other local organizations such as university extension services, United Way, social service agencies, and local colleges.

- **Orientation.** The facilitators should be informed as to:
 - ▷ How many people are expected to attend and who they are, at least categorically
 - ▷ The desired outcomes of the meeting (information exchange, consensus, and so on)
 - ▷ The logistics, time, and setup
 - ▷ The anticipated nature of questions and time of information questions are intended to generate

Special attention should be paid to ensuring that the information generated by a meeting or survey is recorded and shared widely.

Two other techniques for generating insight and capturing perceptions and suggestions are on-site surveys and walking tours.

- **On-site surveys**—sometimes referred to as “intercept” surveys—consist of written questions distributed to people while they are visiting the park under study or who are in nearby public spaces. These questions are usually shorter and may be open ended rather than “check the box.” A park representative may be stationed at the entrance of the park to ask this short list of questions to visitors.
- **A walking tour** is one of the easiest, most effective, and least expensive ways to learn more about perceptions of the park. Park staff, stakeholders, decision-makers, and others take part in the tour, asking and answering questions, making suggestions, and sharing comments.

We have learned to say that the good must be extended to all of society before it can be held secure by any one person or class; but we have not yet learned to add to that statement, that unless all [people] and all classes contribute to a good, we cannot even be sure that it is worth having.

— JANE ADDAMS

Pursuing Success in Generating Information

Generating information can consume a great deal of time, effort, and other resources on behalf of planning. The following suggestions may contribute to more successful meetings and focus groups.

Public Meetings

- Go beyond standard announcements for public meetings. Consider inviting as many different groups and individuals as possible and encourage them to invite others they know who might be interested.
- Capture RSVPs by phone or e-mail. Follow up a day or two before the actual meeting to make sure you will have a suitable number of people in attendance
- Provide sign-up sheets for attendees so people know one another and you are able to follow up with outcomes of the meetings and other forthcoming meetings via e-mail. Name tags are also useful on site.
- Ask questions of participants in the first part of the meeting. By asking first and talking later, you can incorporate the interests and questions of the attendees into your comments.

Results of Surveys Conducted at Marvin Gaye Park

Autumn Saxton-Ross, Ph.D., of Washington Parks & People conducted three surveys of park participants: park users, playground users, and parents, with the following findings.

Park User Survey (total of 74 surveyed)

- 74% of those surveyed had visited the park before.
- 56% were female.
- Half were between 45 and 59 years old.
- 83% were District of Columbia residents.
- 88% were black or African-American.
- 58% had the same ZIP code as the park.
- 75% rated the park as either good or excellent.
- 82% spent 30 minutes or more at the park.
- 69% spent 15 minutes or less to get to the park.
- 75% walked, jogged, or rode a bike to the park.

Observation: Physical activity recommendations hold that for cardiovascular benefits, activity can be done in 10-minute increments. The fact that most respondents used active transport to get to the park demonstrates that having safe, attractive neighborhood parks within a half mile of the user can increase activity.

- When asked what improvements should be made, more than 50% wanted improved seating; 46% wanted something to be done about loitering; and 55% wanted improvements to the stream.
- 80% of those surveyed said the best way to notify them about happenings in the park is through newspapers and flyers in and around the park

Observation: Clearly those who use Marvin Gaye Park rely on the written word and word-of-mouth. This was echoed in the go-along interviews, where most respondents said they found out about recreational opportunities by flyers, newspapers, and word-of-mouth. In an increasing number of places, more attention is paid to electronic and social media.

- When asked, “On a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being always, how often do you feel safe while visiting the park?” more than 70% responded they felt safe most of the time or always.
- 82% noticed the changes occurring in the park.
- When asked, “Was there ever a time you didn’t feel safe coming to MGP?” more than 70% did not feel safe one year to 10 years ago.

Observation: This speaks to a combination of capital improvements and an effective program. Within the past year, lights had been installed throughout the park, the playground was in place, and there were concerts and weekly programs.

Childrens Playground Survey (total of 37 youth surveyed)

- 91.4% were black or African-American.
- 89.2% were district residents.
- 89% had visited the playground before.
- 69% rated the playground good or excellent.
- 56% were girls.
- 83% of respondents were between 5 and 11 years old.
- Only 3% visited the playground alone. Most visited with other children or family members.
- The favorite part of the playground was the swings.
- 37% felt safe sometimes; 25.7% felt safe most of the time; and 34% felt safe always.

Observation: Links to ParkUser survey responses indicated that improvements could be made by discouraging loitering.

Observation: Links to ParkUser survey responses indicated that improvements could be made by discouraging loitering.

- 52% of youth felt the playground was not clean.

Observation: This can become a teachable moment, connected with environmental stewardship.

- More than 50% of youths surveyed spent 30 minutes or more at the playground.
- More than 80% of youths walked, jogged, or rode a bike to the playground.
- 83% took less than 10 minutes to get to the playground.

Observation: Looking at these last three points, it appears that if there is a neighborhood playground, walking to and from it totals almost an hour of activity for the user on each visit.

Parent Playground Survey (total of 27 adults surveyed)

- 44% were female.
- More than 90% were district residents.
- 85.2% were black or African-American.
- The majority of parents (70%) spent one hour or less at the playground with their children.
- 92% walked, jogged, or rode a bike to playground.

Observation: Once again, this result speaks to how using active transport can make individuals more active.

- 90% took less than 10 minutes to get to the playground,
- More than half (53%) felt safe either most of the time or always when visiting the playground.
- Two-thirds rated the playground as good or excellent.

Focus Groups

- Decide on the specific focus of the information gathering, such as issues about athletic fields or the needs of neighborhood children.
- Invite individuals who are known to have knowledge and interest about the focus or topic.
- Follow up and confirm attendance by participants, since the group is much smaller than a public meeting.
- Focus groups should last no longer than one hour.
- Prepare four to five appropriate questions and determine their order, such as simplest to most complex, or noncontroversial followed by controversial.
- Be careful not to allow one or two people to dominate the discussion.

Stakeholder Meetings

- List all the organizations with an interest or stake in this area or neighborhood.
- Invite those groups to send a representative to this meeting—preferably a member of their leadership.
- Welcome each one and explain clearly that they have been invited to share the ideas and perceptions of the groups they represent.
- Once again, focus on general values or outcomes—for example, encouraging healthy young people rather than creating more regulation baseball fields.

Community Input Is Ongoing – Brook Run Park in DeKalb County, Georgia

In 1998, DeKalb County purchased the former 102-acre state hospital and nursing home for the mentally challenged with the intention of developing a major park in the northern area of the county. The state of Georgia agreed to sell the property with a number of deed restrictions. The restriction with the greatest impact on the site design limited to 30% the amount of land that could be developed. Thus, adoption of the master plan relied heavily on the identification of facilities and the prioritization of facilities to be developed.

The site, inclusive of the hospital, dormitories, and maintenance and office buildings, sat vacant for use by vandals, drug users, and graffiti artists, while the buildings continued deteriorate in the middle of the Dunwoody neighborhood.

Establishing trust with the community was an essential component of the planning process, and it was enhanced with the creation of a public-private partnership with the Dunwoody Preservation Trust, a community-based nonprofit organization. DeKalb County gave \$150,000 to the trust to hire a consultant to develop a park master plan that would meet the design restrictions and be supported by the community. The public input during the planning process resulted in the following design goals.

- Create a signature community park with passive recreational and educational opportunities.
- Develop places for community interaction.
- Protect, enhance, and restore environmental resources.

Throughout the discussions, the goal was to build consensus: a common vision for the park master plan. During the public work sessions, participants were asked to respond to two questions: What do you want to be able to do at Brook Run Park? and What is a favorite place of yours that you would like Brook Run to resemble?

During the planning period another community action group, Mothers for Playgrounds, formed. It advocated for including a playground in the first phase of development because there were no well-designed, well-maintained playgrounds in this community. Instead, many of the mothers were driving their children to playgrounds in neighboring counties.

In partnership with the parks and recreation department, the Dunwoody Preservation Trust presented the Brook Run Master Plan to Dekalb County government and gained full support for implementation. The plan divided the park into three themed areas: Nature's Way, The Arts, and Play. Large copies of the plans were mounted and placed throughout the park.

The planners and the community jointly decided that a traditional playground would not be built, but rather that the play area include elements recommended for The Arts and Nature's Way, such as a space for an outdoor theater, a running brook, and an accessible tree house. The neighborhood input resulted in a \$2 million award-winning children's adventure garden, which was filled with families all day long—in a once-dormant space that was an eyesore in the community.

Community input and involvement did not end there. Phase two accommodated the request for a skateboard park. The design firm held a charette in Brook Run Park to discuss the plans and desired features. This public forum attracted members of Dunwoody Preservation Trust, teenagers and young adults, and parents of children interested in skating in the park.

The charette also attracted bicycle motocross (BMX) riders. They shared ideas on how to design the skateboard facility so they, too, could use it without damaging it. The design firm embraced the importance of public participation and carried it to a new level by posting the draft designs of each feature of the facility online for comments of the skaters and bikers.

Between phase one and phase two, another action group formed in the community and approached county leaders to build a dog park. Although that suggestion was less popular, county leaders approved the construction of an off-leash area in Nature's Way, and the Friends of the Dog Park is responsible for its maintenance.

Consultants are now required to post the proceedings of the public meetings and copies of the draft designs online for citizen review and comment. The successes of Brook Run Park started with the involvement of the public in the development of the 2000 Strategic Park Master Plan. Many of the stakeholders worked to secure support for passage of a \$125 million park bond for land acquisition and development. In 2005, the citizens of DeKalb County passed a similar park bond in 2005 of \$97 million to continue to renovate and modernize the park.

Participatory Action Research

In addition to the tried-and-true approaches for gathering community input for park planning, there are newer methods for generating information, such as participatory action research (PAR). The insights generated through this emerging approach are quite useful for neighborhood projects. A number of PAR techniques were used in the Marvin Gaye Park project. This form of qualitative research focuses on receiving input and ideas from those people closest to the project but also from individuals who often are not part of this process.

More Information About PAR

Incite is a national organization that widely shares information about participatory action research (PAR) in a toolkit featured on its Web site. It explains that the PAR approach:

- Does not feature one specific method for generating insight but more closely resembles a philosophy for securing such information and insight
- Has its roots in empowering marginalized communities, such as abused women, disabled persons, and other groups, where true insight is difficult to garner using traditional methods
- Enables the people whose lives are intimately involved with the issue and project to become more actively involved and influential in the process of resolution
- Gathers insight that holds great value for planning of a project

http://www.incite-national.org/media/docs/5614_toolkitrev-par.pdf

Notice that PAR is a philosophical approach to gathering information rather than one specific method. Four techniques that are often used in this form of action research are featured in this section: asset mapping, photovoice, open space technology, and go-along interviews.

Asset Mapping

Asset mapping is the intentional mapping of available resources within a community for building community. Such an approach engages members of the community in which the project is located and creates a context for the process or project. While it has gained renewed popularity in recent years, asset mapping was actually used by settlement houses in the late 19th century. This approach focuses on the strengths of an area rather than deficiencies and problems.

While asset mapping may initially appear to be time-consuming, it is gaining in popularity in parks and recreation due to:

- Contributions made to a neighborhood by identification and organization of data not previously available
- The engagement of young people in the community, such that a subset of this technique is known as “youth asset mapping”
- The unique way in which community members can evaluate the design of a project and its impact on the community

Guidelines for Implementation

The Center for Youth Development and Engagement within the Academy for Educational Development (formerly known as the Center for Youth Development & Policy Research) identified the following steps as suitable for youth asset mapping. However, the same steps apply to the process when used with adults.

Step 1. Identify the convening organization. An organization within the community must take the lead to bring community groups together to consider the process.

Step 2. Form a public/private/nonprofit community advisory board. A community advisory board is formed to support, plan, and implement the community mapping process.

Step 3. Designate a lead agency. A lead agency—not necessarily the same agency as the original convener—is identified. Ideally, this agency is known to work well with youth and the community.

Step 4: Define the community. A clear definition of community is required to establish the boundaries of the project, such as specific neighborhood blocks, city limits, and the school catchment area.

Step 5. Recruit the mapping team. The lead agency recruits individuals to work on the mapping team. Stipends, particularly for youth, are an incentive.

Step 6. Develop the mapping protocol. The mapping team, with the assistance of the lead agency, develops guidelines for the project, such as sample questions, timetables, and data collection methods.

Step 7. Train the mapping team. Mapping team members need training that encompasses resource identification, interview techniques, and risk management.

Step 8. Conduct the mapping. The mapping team goes into the community and collects the necessary information.

Step 9. Analyze results. Analysis should include the types of resources found, access to those resources, and types of resources that are missing or inadequate in various parts of the community.

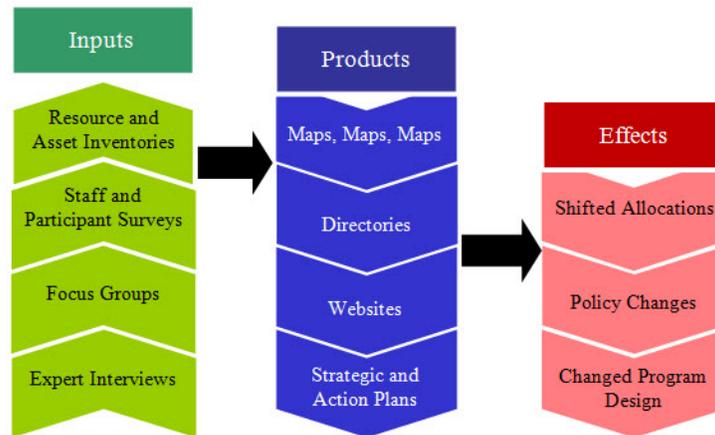
Step 10. Report and use the findings. A concise summary of the findings will be developed, published, and shared widely with the community. The complete results of the mapping process and its analysis, along with recommendations, will be shared with the convening organization.

Source: <http://cyd.aed.org/cym/tensteps.html>

Asset Mapping – From Inputs to Effects

A parks and recreation expert in asset mapping—more specifically youth asset mapping—is Corliss Outley, Ph.D., from Texas A&M University. Dr. Outley’s graphic representation of the process, shown at an NRPA Congress presentation, includes inputs, products, and effects. Policy changes and allocation shifts are highly desirable outcomes of the asset mapping process.

Mapping: From Inputs to Effects



Photovoice

Another participatory action research approach is photovoice. This technique enables people of all ages and languages to share information about their communities through pictures.

This grassroots approach for social change was devised by Dr. Caroline Wang in the early 1990s for use in China. It helped women living in a remote province to take photos and write stories about the photos to influence policy changes—changes usually made by public officials who had never been to their province.

Photovoice provides an entirely different dimension to the process than one involving “the experts.” Using it, residents can easily explain both what they perceive as valuable or important and what aspects of their community need changing. Photovoice:

- Enables the people who actually live in the community to record and reflect the community’s strength and challenges
- Promotes greater awareness of community needs on the part of policymakers
- Increases the possibility that changes can occur that address the needs of the community

At its core, participatory action research such as photovoice aims to increase the involvement of marginalized groups in decisionmaking that affects their lives and the lives of others in the community.

– AUTUMN SAXTON-ROSS, PH.D., WASHINGTON PARKS & PEOPLE

Guidelines for Implementation

On the surface, photovoice would seem as simple a method as giving people cameras and sending them out to take pictures. Of course that is not the case. To succeed, it is vitally important that the broader goals of the project are clearly defined and the segment of the community is identified whose voices need to be heard.

Photovoice: Two Critical Considerations

Before participants receive cameras, the project leaders should address the following matters to ensure the success of photovoice: a clear definition of the broad goals of the project and involvement by community members.

The steps for executing a photovoice project are quite similar to the steps used for asset mapping, certainly with respect to organizing and recruitment. Here are some guidelines for implementing photovoice.

- **Find a champion.** An individual or group within the community or associated with the project must champion the process and secure the initial resources.
- **Identify community members.** The people who can best tell the story of the needs and issues of the neighborhood should be identified and engaged.
- **Define the parameters.** Photovoice participants must be aware of the expectations for the project.
- **Train and identify.** Participants should be oriented to the best and safest ways to approach situations common to photographing in public places. They should each be given an official identification (indicating they are part of the photovoice project) that they can display if questioned.
- **Allow time for reflection.** Capturing the images is only one element of this process. Participants need to be given time and encouraged to reflect and share those reflections—most often in a written or videotaped format.
- **Share and celebrate the findings.** One of the more challenging aspects of this powerful method is the organization and interpretation of the photos and the discussion. That way, the photos can translate into a specific list of findings or recommendations. The pictures and the words of reflection should be exhibited within the community. Others, including decision-makers, should call attention to them.

The Five W's of Photovoice Plus the How

The standard *Who? What? When? Where? and Why?* questions can be useful for orienting photovoice participants. You could suggest that photos include:

- *Who* lives, works, and plays in the neighborhood or park?
- *What* types of activities or inactivity do these people pursue in the neighborhood or park?
- *When* are most people present and using neighborhood places and spaces?
- *Where* in the park area—or *Where* in the community—do many people go frequently?
- *Why* do people go certain places and undertake certain activities?

However, a major challenge for photovoice participants and most certainly for the organizers or champions of this effort is the *How?*—to interpret the findings of these photos and reflections in such a way that the findings:

- Identify some key themes or issues arising from the neighborhood
- Present a concise but compelling set of findings—most particularly for decision-makers and potential partners
- Develop a list of recommendations on the basis of the findings

Photovoice Project From Marvin Gaye Park

Among the components of the research into the impact of the revitalization of the Marvin Gaye Park was a program to provide neighborhood youth a creative voice in the documenting of the changes the park underwent. Washington Parks and People intern Marie Dennan taught the course.

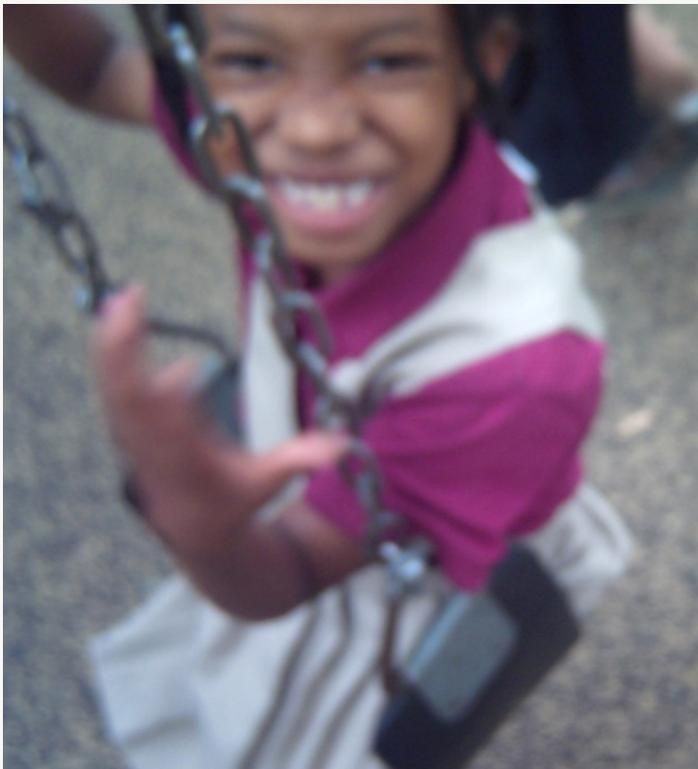
“We held photography classes every Wednesday for about an hour and a half for a month working with the children and teaching them how to use digital cameras, and how to connect their experience in the community with images,” Dennan says. “After three weeks of training, we sent the kids home with digital cameras for a week to take pictures of things in their community and homes that represent healthy eating, and active living ad also what prevents them from experiencing these things. Afterward, I analyzed and chose the most compelling photos, and another intern, William Voegelin, and I interviewed the kids about their photos.” The results comprised the exhibit of Our Eyes East, Sponsored by NRPA and held July 23rd at Marvin Gaye Park. Here’s a sampling of the entries.



II THE PLAYGROUND



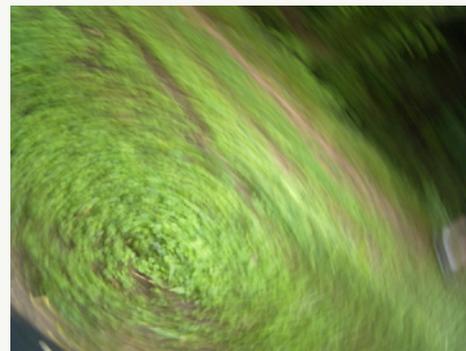
II PICNIC OF HOPE



II FUN TIMES



II THE TREE



II RISE AND SHINE

See “Our Eyes East” Park and Recreation Magazine, September 10, 2010.
<http://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/nrpa/201009/index.php#/46>

Open Space Technology

Open space technology (OST) is another method that could be considered part of the PAR approach. While OST uses technology to efficiently process the findings that were generated, it actually enters the process early on, by aiding the session organizers in establishing a place, time, and structure, so that stakeholders and other interested parties can come together and have a meaningful, orderly discussion.

Using OST, the organizers can extend an open invitation to any number of people. In fact, the organizational structure and strategy of OST favors the needs and preferences of attendees over the goals of the organizing group. While it may appear to be loosely structured, OST in reality is a very orderly approach.

OST benefits both the organizers of information gathering and the outcomes.

- It accommodates for any number of people, from smaller groups (say, a dozen people) to hundreds of people.
- It is participant centered. This method directs participants (those attending the OST) to identify the issues and agenda items for the gathering. In other words, the issues important to the organizers are not part of the process.
- It is facilitation friendly. OST can easily accommodate people with diverse backgrounds or conflicting opinions and can address complex issues as well, which is not always the case with revitalization projects.
- It delivers organized results. This process lends itself to producing a set of findings that can be assigned varying levels of priority.

With open space technology, no agenda is created for the meeting. Actually, a predetermined set of questions or agendas would be counter to the philosophy and purpose of OST. This does not imply, however, that OST meetings are called or organized in a haphazard manner. The following implementation guidelines explain.

Prior to the OST Meeting

These considerations should be addressed before invitations go out.

- **The focus.** The focus or theme of the gathering must be clearly stated so that it will attract people with an interest or concern for the issue. But at the same time, the organizers should not suggest specific ideas or directions for the gathering's outcome.
- **The group.** Individuals who are interested, involved, or committed to the topic are the people best prepared to participate. The invitation to the event should be open to all, but organizers often make a concerted effort to invite specific individuals or groups of individuals. Recall that the size of the group is not especially important in this approach.
- **The space.** The space is important: it needs to be large enough to hold the group, with ample room to move around. A room with a long, blank wall suitable for having big sheets of paper taped to it is a real help. Movable chairs are preferable to fixed furniture.
- **The time.** The time requirements naturally vary based on the depth of the ideas and information desired. For an initial public event, a few hours are adequate, but some OST events go a full day or up to two to three days. Choose a time that will be available for the people you would most like to attend.
- **Supplies and equipment.** Supplies should include large sheets of paper (at least one per participant; flipchart paper works well), markers, masking tape, and movable chairs.
- **Room setup.** Whether participants sit in a circle of chairs or stand, each one should be able to easily see the information posted on the long wall.

During the OST Meeting

As mentioned previously, organizers of the OST session provide a place, time, and structure so the people interested in a particular issue can come together. Ideally, those participants will have a meaningful discussion in an orderly and timely fashion and leave the meeting with some sense of accomplishment, no matter how difficult the issues.

This means that the essential role of the OST facilitator is to explain the process to the group, then stand back and let the participants organize themselves into groups to discuss the topics of greatest importance to them.

While it is difficult to assign a specific time frame to OST meetings, the following is a sample for a meeting of two to three hours. Depending on the size of the group and range of interest within that group, there can be concurrent discussion sessions. Organizers and facilitators can serve as timekeepers.

15 minutes	Welcoming remarks; explanation of the OST process
15 minutes	Attendees put ideas for the OST event up on the wall
15 minutes	Attendees review posted ideas and establish the agenda
45 to 60 minutes	Discussion sessions
30 minutes	Review of discussion sessions
10 minutes	Closing remarks; statement of next steps

Go-Along Interviews

Go-along interviews are a method of qualitative research that can be used to gain information from grassroots participants and members of the neighborhood or community. The emphasis is truly on “go along”: the researcher accompanies an individual or small group of people while they examine specific aspects the neighborhood or area firsthand.

R.M. Carpiano, a sociologist at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, B.C., is a leader in this methodology, which largely has focused on projects related to health and community building. By extension, this technique can be beneficial in public park and recreation settings as well. Dr. Carpiano indicates that go-along interviews are valuable for generating insight, to:

- Explore and improve and understanding of people’s experiences with their immediate physical surroundings
- Enhance an understanding of the social, cultural, and historic context that residents assign to the geographic area

Source: R.M. Carpiano, 2009. Come take a walk with me: The “go-along” interview as a novel method for studying the implications of place for health and well-being. *Health & Place*, 15:263–272.

The Marvin Gaye Park and Go-Along Interviews

Autumn Saxton-Ross, Ph.D., a staff member of Washington Parks & People, used go-along interviews to gather information for Marvin Gaye Park. Saxton-Ross’s work and results can serve as a model for others who desire to implement this participatory action research approach. (See *Parks & Recreation*, September 2010)

Ross-Saxon used a snowball sampling technique to select interview participants. She conducted the interviews over a three-month period within the designated boundaries in the Marvin Gaye Park area. The 24 questions she developed were aimed at determining participants’ definitions of neighborhood and community, their experiences with Marvin Gaye Park, their personal involvement and perceptions related to outdoor recreation, and their feelings of personal safety in light of recent changes in the park.

Following are the questions that Saxton-Ross developed (aside from questions on the respondents' name and age, and cross streets of their residence).

Experience and Definitions of Neighborhood/Community

- When did you first move into this neighborhood?
- When I ask you about your “neighborhood,” what area or blocks does that encompass? (Interviewer will have a map.)
- What do you call your neighborhood? (Watts Branch, Far Northeast, or other)
- When I ask you about your “community,” what area or blocks does that encompass?
- What things (physical structures) make a community?

Focus on Physical Activity and Recreation

- Can you share one of your fondest memories of outdoors or parks you had as a child?
- Thinking about your more recent outdoor recreation experiences and interests, tell us about the types of outdoor activities you've been involved in.
- How do you learn about recreation opportunities?
- What benefits do you think (or hope) you get from outdoor recreation activity?
- What are some of the features of your community that support health (or healthy behaviors)?

Marvin Gaye Park Specifics

- What is your first memory of Marvin Gaye Park?
- What do you think are the key factors that limit, reduce, or prevent your visiting Marvin Gaye Park?
- Have you noticed any changes in service/park in this area? How do you feel about those changes?
- Do you visit Marvin Gaye Park? (If not, why not?) What do you do when you come?
- When you come to the park, what are you using it for? (For example, transportation or walking to bus stop or home)
- Where do you usually enter the park? (cross streets)
- What changes could be made that would encourage you to use the park more often?
- Do you feel safe coming to Marvin Gaye Park?
- If yes, was there ever a time you didn't feel safe coming to Marvin Gaye Park?
- What can be done to make you feel more safe?
- Are there areas of the park you don't go to? What are they and why?
- What are some of the features of your community that prevent health (or healthy behaviors)?
- What do you think are the assets or strengths of this community?

Snowball Sampling Technique

In the snowball sampling technique, individuals involved in the research identify other prospective research subjects. The term describes the way that the sample grows—like a rolling snowball. This sampling technique is used when it is difficult for the researcher to access additional people to be interviewed.

The lack of accessibility could have a number of reasons. Regardless, it is important to recognize the limitation of this sampling approach: the built-in biases of the initial group of people recommending people they know.

On the other hand, the snowball sampling research method has two benefits. Not only does it reveal how the interview participants perceive their neighborhood but it also enables the researcher to observe their experiences in the neighborhood firsthand.

Here are a few observations and insights that Dr. Saxton-Ross gained by using this method for the Marvin Gaye Park project.

- When asked to describe a “perfect community,” half the respondents referenced recreation spaces—places for people to interact and congregate.
- All but one respondent felt that one of the benefits of outdoor recreation activity was for exercise or physical activity. Four indicated that fresh air was a benefit of outdoor recreation, and three cited the calming aspects of nature.
- Consistently the respondents indicated that an aspect related to safety (such as crime, drug use, or violence) was the key factor limiting their use of Marvin Gaye Park.

Closing Comments About Participatory Action Research

As a method of generating information, participatory action research certainly reflects a belief in the value of what people have to say. That makes it a natural approach for parks and recreation because of the field’s strong connection with people. PAR approaches make sense for any process or project that truly has as its underlying outcome the revitalization or rejuvenation of a neighborhood or community.

Two reminders about using PAR:

- It can be used at the start of a process to identify topics that need to be examined further.
- After more traditional methods have identified recurring issues, PAR can narrow down the specifics of the issues.

It is, of course, always important to remember that the responses are personal in nature and should not be used to make generalizations about all the people living in the neighborhood or community.

Well Worth the Effort

The approach and array of activities cited in this section vary according to the investment of time and resources. However, we can cite three reasons that investing in grassroots insight methods makes sense.

- It saves time over the course of the project.
- It results in a park renovation or development that best matches the needs of a neighborhood or community.
- It engages residents in a meaningful way that will have carry-over value for sustainability.

If a park project requires voter approval to secure funding, often the statistically valid survey method is used. But when the focus of the project is the revitalization of a specific neighborhood, extensive sampling is not needed and likely will not be particularly useful.

Section 5: Input to Implementation

The information and insights in this section are intended to:

- Remind the reader that integrating information and insight requires ongoing diligence.
- Identify important elements of a successful model by learning more about the New York City Partnerships for Parks approach and its lessons.
- Review park examples nationwide of the integration of information into implementation.
- Examine the Partnerships for Parks model and identify elements and lessons that can apply to other settings.
- Consider essential elements for creating a model that works for your community, situation, and agency.

Input and Ideas Transformed Into Implementation

The saying “Rome wasn’t built in a day” certainly applies to park projects—especially the ones that result in community change and revitalization. Just a few of the challenges:

- How do you manage to sustain the interest, trust, and input of the neighbors and other important community groups over an extended period of time?
- How do you actually complete a project that reflects the specific preferences and addresses the important needs of the neighborhood or community?
- How can the engagement of the community and its partners support the ongoing sustainability of the project?

In spite of the challenges, some park agencies and park partnerships have been successful in progressing from ideas to implementation to sustainability. The lessons they have learned and shared are valuable to all who pursue this worthwhile rejuvenation, as examples in this section will show.

Having successfully addressed the above challenges, the New York City Partnerships for Parks has charted the steps it took and then replicated throughout various projects, along with lessons learned, for the benefit of others considering the rejuvenation of parks.

Partnerships for Parks: Lessons and Successes

When Partnerships for Parks, a joint program of the Parks Foundation and the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation, began in 1996, it called its undertaking the Catalyst for Neighborhood Parks. While an enticing title or graphic does not guarantee success, the term “catalyst” created a tone that strongly suggested action and results.

Granted, not all communities are as large as New York City or have its potential resources, but then not all communities experience the depths of issues and challenges of its size either. Review the framework of this approach and be ready to adapt and adopt these tools and techniques for your part of the world.

The Catalyst Project – Build, Connect, and Sustain

While recognizing that neighborhood improvements are often complex and far-reaching goal, Partnerships for Parks broke it down into three steps.

- **Build** by working with partners to increase participation, local pride, and leadership within the neighborhood parks.
- **Connect** by linking people, ideas, and efforts to develop common goals and move toward reaching those goals.
- **Sustain** by creating a framework for continued park stewardship as well as identifying successful approaches to sustainability.

The Build Phase

Although Partnerships for Parks identifies “build” as its initial phase of neighborhood rejuvenation through parks, this step has little to do with building anything physical. Rather, it refers is the building of partnerships that increase leadership and pride within neighborhoods.

The goals of this stage included:

- Attracting people to parks through recreational programs
- Making strategic improvements to facilities and programs
- Providing training and resources supporting park leadership

Source: *Catalyst: Step One*. Partnerships for Parks

The Partnerships for Parks concept of “build” as its initial phase of neighborhood revitalization has little to do with building anything physical.

Specific techniques of the build phase included these:

- **The 3Rs approach.** One of Partnerships for Parks’ initial projects addressed the challenge to re-establish a connection with the neighbors living in proximity to High Bridge, the oldest bridge in New York City. The partnership embarked on a 3Rs approach: *reintroduction*, *reinvention*, and *rediscovery*. The initial meetings with 20 community organizations resulted in 36 park hikes for 200 children from six local schools and new events co-sponsored by park neighbors with the support of the partnership.
- **People to people.** In developing community relationships with neighborhoods surrounding the four historic Harlem parks, the partnership learned these lessons:
 - ▷ **Meet people where they are.** Some of the park groups in this area were long established, while others were just getting started. The partnership tailored its support to each situation.
 - ▷ **Make new friends.** The partnership made a new friend and partner, St. James Presbyterian Church, which resulted in a successful teen basketball tournament. This led to other co-sponsored events.
 - ▷ **Find shared interests.** Park volunteers organized a meeting among four different areas of the community, which resulted in a decision to work together on a concert series.

(Source: *Catalyst: Step One*. Partnerships for Parks)

Social advance depends as much upon the process through which it is secured as upon the result itself.

– JANE ADDAMS

The Connect Phase

The connect phase advanced the process of park restoration and community revitalization by focusing on connecting the concerns, goals, and resources of the people living in these neighborhoods to the development of park sites.

Partnerships for Parks brought together various community stakeholders: residents, community leaders, other public and nonprofit representatives, and business owners. The staff of the partnership was able to mobilize people around their shared interests and potential group power. (The partnership describes “power” as access to decisionmaking and fund-raising.)

The techniques for building connections among people, interests, and power included:

- **Communication.** There was support for creating posters, brochures, and event calendars as a means for uniting groups by highlighting their shared interests. Building mailing lists and creating databases were also part of this support.
- **Resource development.** Workshops were held on a variety of useful topics including group formation and dynamics, organizational development, partnerships, and advocacy. From within the groups of advocates, Partnerships grew group organization and facilitation.
- **Coalition building.** By engaging people in collaborative undertakings, the partnership’s staff facilitated identifying shared issues and connecting them to overall community goals.
- **Vision planning.** Few activities bring people and resources together like a shared and powerful vision. This vision planning was the foundation for engaging partners—leading to long-term investments in the park project.

The Sustain Phase

A third and final phase in the process was sustainability. However, it could be argued that sustainability is less a phase in the process than a requirement for ensuring future support for the long-term the success of individual projects. When referring to the Catalyst project, Partnerships for Parks defines “sustainability” as “the ability of a group to have a continued positive impact on their community.”

When referring to the Catalyst project, Partnerships for Parks defines “sustainability” as “the ability of a group to have a continued positive impact on their community.”

How, then, did the partnership support sustainability? Three principles apply:

- **The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.** Although a group effort takes more time and effort to bring together the eventual collaborators on the renovation, it has a far greater impact than individuals working independently of one another.
- **Give credit where credit is due.** While staff are essential to the success of any undertaking, long-term success hinges on providing ample opportunity for individuals and groups working on the project to be recognized for their contributions and successes.

- **The end justifies the means.** In theory, project plans and renovations go more quickly without the extensive involvement and input of stakeholders. However, a solo or small staff effort within an organization seldom results in the vital collaboration to sustain a future for the project and, by extension, its ongoing contributions for the community.

Moving Forward

Here are a few more insights garnered from the Partnerships for Parks' activities.

Building Bridges – the People Kind

The particular challenge of the High Bridge project was this: If restoration was to occur, it would require the involvement of communities in two different boroughs—the Bronx and Manhattan—which are separated by the Harlem River.

Initial meetings brought together representatives from such diverse groups as Inwood Community Services, Samaritan Village, Alanza Dominicana, the New York Restoration Project, and the newly formed High Bridge Coalition. Language and cultural differences were gradually bridged, one step at a time.

People Building Stakeholders

The untold potential of a small group interested and committed to a project lies in its ability to attract other stakeholders. A prime example is the entry of the Gotham Center for City History to the High Bridge stakeholder group. The center produced a document on the historical role High Bridge played in the city's water supply system.

The newspaper articles in the *New York Times* and *New York Post*, along with presentations and tours, eventually resulted in a 300% increase in the membership of the High Bridge Coalition, comprising 50 groups.

Finding Partners for Larger Projects

Undertakings of this magnitude cannot move forward without funding. Therefore, this phase of the project leveraged the expanded coalition to identify sources of financial support. The need for horticulture in this area resulted in a city council member's securing \$2 million for the Jackie Robinson Park Conservancy. (This park is one of the four historic Harlem parks.)

(Source: *Catalyst: Step Two*. Partnerships for Parks)

You can get so much more done working with other groups than doing it on your own. Working together will not only help our group grow, but also to be part of a community working together to reach common goals.

– CLARE DOYLE, PRESIDENT, ASTORIA RESIDENTS RECLAIMING OUR WORLD;
STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBER, GREEN SHORE

The Washington Parks & People Model: Magic or Miracle?

Washington Parks & People (WPP) is a nonprofit organization that leads green initiatives across Washington, DC revitalizing forgotten neighborhoods. WQPP is an organization that has accrued a number of successes in seemingly impossible situations across the years including Malcolm X Park in the Meridian Hills, Josephine Butler Parks Center more recently Marvin Gaye Park. Steve Coleman serves as the Executive Director of this innovative and effective organization.



II PARK CLEANUP DAY – VOLUNTEERS AND COLLECTED TRASH FROM PARK

The approach to community revitalization used by WPP is likely shaped by Coleman’s earlier experiences as neighborhood association president of Meridian Hills, a neighborhood within DC. Two decades ago, when Coleman was the neighborhood association president, a child was murdered in this neighborhood. Coleman called a neighborhood meeting in response to this tragedy and it was that meeting that served as a collaborative springboard that resulted in a revitalized Meridian Hills neighborhood with the park as its centerpiece. It is likely that few people realized that this tragedy and type of response would become a model for revitalizing a neighborhood through its park and shape the modus operandi for Washington Parks and People (WPP)

To many people, park and recreation professionals and citizen advocates alike, the results achieved by Coleman and WPP seem to appear as if by magic or can be considered a near miracle, but the reality lies within the model of practice used by WPP. The magic behind these successful park and neighborhood revitalizations include key approaches that WPP implements on a regular basis.

Cited below are a few of those techniques and strategies that form the framework of WPP’s magic and its miracles.

People and Neighborhood Power

Strategy #1: Start with the People

This cardinal principle of WPP appears simple enough, but it is the genuine insight and involvement of people living within the neighborhoods that empowers the WPP model. This does not mean that individuals and agencies holding official places in the community are not included in this process, but it reinforces Coleman’s belief that there is a special character to each and every neighborhood that needs to be the basis for moving forward.



II WASHINGTON PARKS AND PEOPLE – PARTICIPANTS IN THE MARVIN GAYE RENOVATIONS

Strategy #2 The Memories of the Elderly and the Dreams of the Children

WPP makes a point of spending time with two particular groups in a neighborhood—the elderly and the children. Using the WPP model, these two groups are critical for the start of any successful project. The elderly are likely to recall the times when the park was well-maintained, heavily used by residents, and a real mainstay of the neighborhood. This information provides a basis for “what was”. The children and youth of the neighborhood are consulted and asked to describe what a “park” should look like through their eyes, which forms the “what can be”.

Strategy #3 Focus on Assets Not Liabilities

Every neighborhood has its positive and negative aspects. The strategy employed consistently by WPP is a focus upon the assets within a community rather than the list of liabilities that have likely long been associated with an area. WPP takes the Assets Mapping approach cited previously in this tool kit and raises it to an entirely enhanced level of effectiveness.

Strategy #4: Use of Existing Resources

A unique aspect of the approach utilized by WPP is to make use of the existing resources within the community at the very start of a project. This does not mean that WPP and the neighbors don’t eventually look for partnership and seek funding for their project, but it essentially means that lack of funding does not serve as a barrier for moving a community revitalization project/process forward.

Strategy #5: Capture the Attention and the Imagination

Coleman in his role at WPP is well-known for being bold and capturing the attention, imagination, and subsequent interest and involvement of people living in the neighborhood as well as media outlets. These bold, attention-gathering actions are usually very simple and low cost, but highly effective.

Strategy #6: Engage Others

Very often WPP does not start with the more “formal officials” or decision-makers in this process, a practice that seems somewhat out of the ordinary. Rather, WPP pulls together the preferences and involvement of the community members. It is these efforts on the part of the local residents first that empowers the residents to take the results of their efforts and plans for the future to local decision-makers and other potential partners.

Examples of the WPP Model: The Marvin Gaye Park Story

Similar to many successful leaders of our time, Steve Coleman believes in the power of stories that resonate with people serving as a basis for their interest and involvement. Keeping that in mind, the Marvin Gaye Park story incorporates the WPP strategies and most often shares those strategies and successes through the power of stories.

Some of the short stories about the actions and activities associated with the restoration of Marvin Gaye Park and the revitalization of this neighborhood are revealed in the following:

Memories and Dreams

The staff of WPP responded to a request for help with this neighborhood park that was at that time referred to as ‘needle park’ reflecting its heavy usage by drug dealers. WPP initiated the model by interviewing the elderly and the children of the neighborhood. The older residents recalled with fondness a time when the park was the gathering and social center of their neighborhood. Some of these long-time residents had recollections of a then much younger Marvin Gaye writing his songs along the stream bank and trying out his music in an after-hours club that has now been converted to a community center. The children were buoyed by the visions of music and a place where usable play equipment similar to what they had seen at other parks could become their dream park.

It was the integration of these memories and dreams that served as the foundation for the renovation of the park and the revitalization of the community.

Marvin Gaye Park Amphitheater

Try to imagine ‘Needle Park’ filled with syringes, overgrown with weeds and scrub trees, and filled with old tires and plenty of other trash. It was within this situation that Marvin Gaye Park Amphitheater had its start. The creation of the Marvin Gaye Amphitheater is one that reflects the ways in which WPP builds upon a neighborhood’s assets and captures the attention, imagination, and the involvement of the community simultaneously. WPP placed a sign in the ground at the park that read “Marvin Gaye Park Amphitheater”. This action certainly captured the attention of people who when looking at this grossly overgrown and heavily littered hillside where the sign had been placed were likely intrigued, but most certainly puzzled.

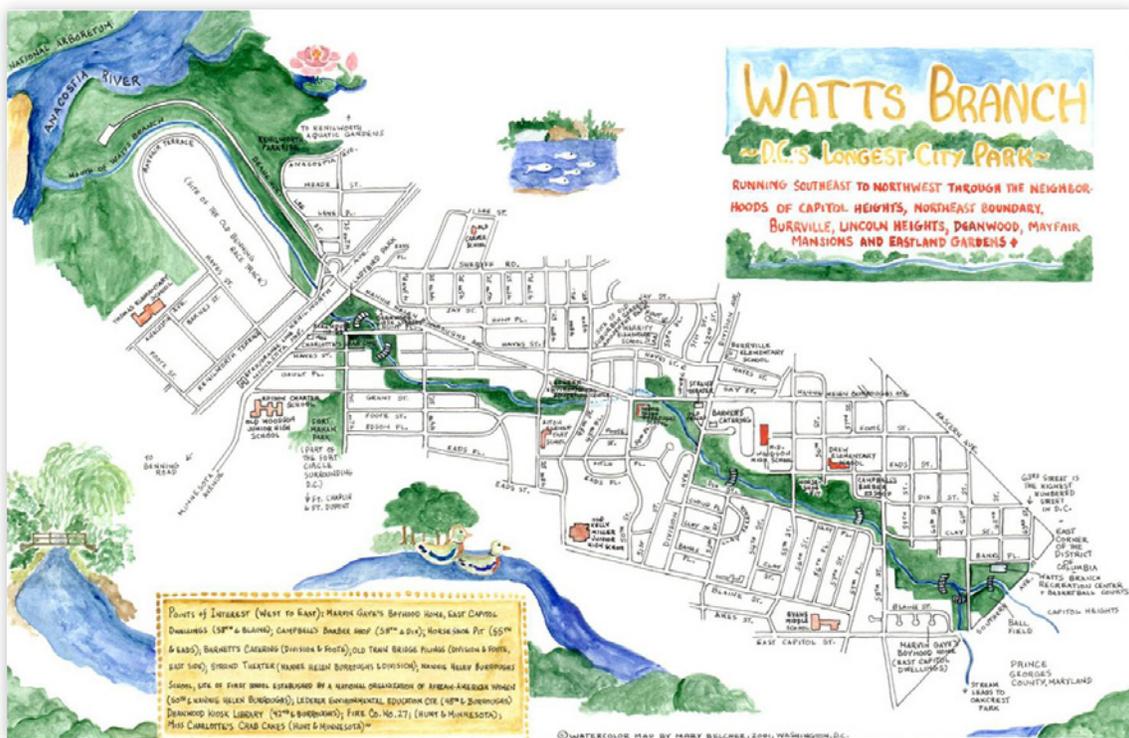
The sign aroused both attention and interest of the neighborhood leading to a significant volunteer involvement to clean-up of the hillside. The rejuvenated open space formed the basis for the amphitheater.

The Saturday Night Talent Show

How can a community go about making use of such an area? At this point, the amphitheater was a cleaned-up hillside with no budget for concerts. Recall two of the WPP strategies – building upon assets and using existing resources – and both of these strategies were used to launch the amphitheater. As Steve Coleman likes to say “wherever you have an open mike and plenty of children living nearby,” it’s a talent show just waiting to happen. The magic and miraculous talent show also captured the attention of the media as well, via a news article that followed in the *Washington Post*.

Taking the Dream to Others

Armed with a 10 Point Action Plan, a map of the neighborhood’s assets done in watercolors, and a petition with 2,000 signatures, the neighbors of Marvin Gaye Park took their memories, dreams, and plans to the local decision-makers ensuring the fate of a renovated Marvin Gaye Park and the beginnings of a revitalized community. The support of these decision-makers led to the outreach to other potential partners including the National Recreation and Park Association that played a key role in securing play equipment from national vendors.



The Story of Stone Soup

One of the stories that Steve Coleman and WPP use to describe the basis for their model of community revitalization through parks is the old folk story best known as “Stone Soup”. The story of Stone Soup involves three wanderers without resources coming into a town going door to door trying to persuade local people to give them some food. The requests for food were not successful so the men decided to return to the houses inviting the town residents to a celebration at the town center where the three wanderers would be serving stone soup. When people asked about the ingredients for stone soup, the men told them water and stones, but then added a request from the residents for other small ingredient such as garlic, a carrot, and even a cooking pot.

Each invitee from the community came to the town center to place their small contribution to the stone soup into the cooking pot and miraculously there actually was a soup to be consumed; a soup that came to fruition from the small contributions of ingredients from various townspeople.

While the variations of the circumstances and situation of this story vary from telling to telling, the message that comes through clearly and consistently is that especially in situations of scarcity, the contributions and the cooperation of many individuals can result in something greater than the individuals or the circumstances.

The story of stone soup reflects the philosophy and methodology of Washington Parks & People—the individual contributions of people when brought together form the basis for community-wide success.

To listen to Steve Coleman tell the story of the Marvin Gaye Park progression and the techniques used by Washington Parks & People link onto http://ipv.nrpa.org/nrpa_docs/viewdocuments/viewer.aspx?icode=CONG10_129.flv

Lessons From Other Places, Projects, and Parks

When park agencies share the challenges and opportunities of their projects, a wealth of insights and lessons results. To illustrate this, here are profiles of five projects: Petersburg Park (Louisville, Kentucky), the New York City Parks and Playground Program, Lou Walker Park (DeKalb County, Georgia), Windsor Village Park (Indianapolis, Indiana), and Jaycee Park (Boynton Beach, Florida).



II **PETERSBURG PARK BEFORE**

Eight Years, One Step at a Time – Louisville, Kentucky

The 27-acre Petersburg Park was in an excellent location: close to the Newburg Community Center, an elementary school, a library, and a number of neighborhoods. However, T-ball and softball were the only available activities for residents at the local park. In 2002, Dr. Barbara Shanklin was elected to serve on the Louisville Metro Council. Her election and her ensuing outreach to neighbors and community groups launched an effort that has resulted in a truly renovated park and revitalized neighborhood.

The significant additions and renovations to the park did not occur overnight, but today, these Petersburg Park amenities attract more participants from throughout the community. The eight-year process for the park unfolded as follows.

- The first addition to the park was a performance stage. The concerts and events that followed were the basis for renewed involvement and participation in that park.
- Other amenities and opportunities followed, including soccer fields, playground equipment, picnic tables and a picnic shelter, basketball courts, and a walking path.
- City-owned property adjacent to the park had been allowed to deteriorate. High grass disguised garbage and discarded tires. The transfer of this property for use as parkland renewed community pride and expanded the perception of safety.
- Twelve tennis courts at this new location replaced four overused courts, with two bonuses.
 - ▷ The changes in the configuration of the tennis courts freed up the space previously taken by the original tennis courts so that multipurpose athletic and physical activity spaces could be created.
 - ▷ The increased usage of the tennis courts in the park by residents living throughout the community fostered greater contact between various social and ethnic groups in the city.



II PETERSBURG PARK AFTER

A recently improved master plan went through four concept models before being accepted by all stakeholders. The summer of 2010 witnessed the opening of a spray park, which further increased the popularity of the park.

The Trust for Public Land and New York City Parks and Playgrounds Program

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) has cooperated with New York City to revitalize places for children to play and be more physically active and healthier. This partnership will eventually result in 151 playgrounds and community parks, 380,000 smiling faces of children and family members, and 200 acres of new city parkland.

In partnership with Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC 2030 program, TPL has been working to create safe, accessible play areas where children in New York City can exercise their mind and muscle. The focus is on existing space at schools in underserved neighborhoods. A key objective of the approach is the involvement of stakeholders in the design process: students, school staff, and community members. This video link features one such design process in a Bronx neighborhood. http://www.tpl.org/tier3_cd.cfm?content_item_id=22208&folder_id=631

Lou Walker Park – Community Involvement and Sustainability

Listening to the community is essential, and transforming that input into ideas that result in the best uses for a park is an accomplishment. Lou Walker Park in DeKalb County, Georgia, is one of those success stories.

Listening to the Community

Lou Walker Park was a three-acre park next to a major stormwater drainage ditch. The open park provided adequate space for flooding without damage to the homes near the park. Residents told the elected officials that the renovation of the park was one of its top priorities for enhancing the livability of their community. This resulted in funds to create a master plan that included public participation.

The Community Responds

Three public meetings were held to solicit comments and recommendations. Emerging as the top priorities were play opportunities for children, the needs of teenagers, and community events. The consensus was that the final renovation plan met the goals of the community.

After approximately one year, however, prostitution and drug sales took over the park, and vandalism to the park increased as well. So the community leadership convened a meeting in the park with the police, parks, and other county departments. The purpose was to develop an action plan to save the park and their community from the rise of criminal behavior and the destruction of the park. As a result, each government agency, the school system, and the Greater Towers Neighborhood Association committed to a comprehensive action plan that addressed the concerns expressed at the meeting in the park.

Community and Department Partnership

The parks department provided a supervised summer playground program for the children and youth. The program consisted of the summer food program, arts and crafts, swimming, and trips.

The community committed to providing community festivals and to participate in the National Night Out, with the park becoming the host site for neighborhood events. The school system opened the doors of the local high school to house the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) program during the summer months.

Important Outcomes

- The summer playground program is in its third year and continues to average 60 campers per day.
- Children from the playground program have graduated into the STEM program at the high school.
- The park has become a place where families can get breakfast, lunch, and a snack during the summer months, thereby ensuring that children who might well go unfed during the day are not hungry.

- Volunteer leadership at the playground discovered children who were truly “home alone” due to parents who were absent or unavailable for a variety of reasons. This led to volunteers providing social support through personal outreach. (Yes, neighborhood parks are critical in urban areas for many reasons!)
- The community conducts major events in the park annually.
- This community trusts the county to be responsive to concerns that affect the overall quality of life in their neighborhood.
- The lines of communication remain open to the department and to the district commissioner.

The former name of this stormwater drainage ditch was Meadowdale, but it was renamed for Commissioner Lou Walker, who made sure funding was appropriated for the redevelopment.



II NEW PLAYGROUND REPLACES STORMWATER DRAINAGE DITCH AT LOU WALKER PARK IN DEKALB, GA

Windsor Village Park Neighborhood and Revitalization Program

The Windsor Village neighborhood in Indianapolis, Indiana, is located in what has been historically called the Consolidated Eastside Neighborhood—home to more than 2,700 people. There are more than 1,300 houses in this small geographic area; 49% are occupied by renters, and 21% are vacant or unoccupied. The renovation of the 53-year-old Windsor Village Park changed the culture for area residents.

Changing Demographics

This particular neighborhood grew during the early years of the 1940s, as houses were built for people employed in war-related industries. The neighborhood continued to develop through the 1950s with duplexes and ranch-style houses. In 1956 the neighborhood acquired another major employer, Community Hospital, leading to more residential and commercial development.

The 1960s then saw an infrastructure change with long-term ramifications, when the area was physically divided due to the construction of Interstate I-70. This highway created a permanent northern boundary for what is now known as Windsor Village. The time period between the 1960s and the '80s witnessed the graying of the neighborhood: there was an 85% increase in the number of adults over the age of 60 living in the neighborhood and a 250% increase in the number of adults over age 65.

As of 2000, more than 40% of the people living in the neighborhood were under the age of 20, with only 14% of the residents over age 60. Census information reported in 2002 indicated that 65% of the residents were black and 33% white.

The young families then living in the neighborhood recognized the need to build social capital and commit the community to services and approaches that would help them overcome the challenges of violence (due partly to abandoned and vacant houses) while recognizing their social, health, educational, and recreational needs.

In 1990, the city of Indianapolis and the residents of Windsor Village conducted a neighborhood plan for the area that addressed three major goals:

- Elimination of substandard housing
- Support for community beautification and preservation
- Renewal of areas where revitalization would have the greatest impact

Renovation and Revitalization

Windsor Village Park had worn-out playground equipment, a basketball court, and a picnic shelter. The anchor of this well-used park was a 2,000 square foot concrete community center. Even in disrepair, however, it remained a cornerstone of the neighborhood.

The parks renovation was one of those projects identified as “revitalization with the greatest impact.” The scoping document took shape in 2005, followed by fund-raising and design. Construction got under way in 2008, and the new family center was opened the next year.

A renovation project like this one moves the neighborhood forward in many ways—some small, some large. As a result of this project:

- The residents of this neighborhood acquired a renewed sense of hope, recognizing that the larger community was willing and committed to investing resources there.
- The residents managed to attract and retain the attention of the city’s decision-makers.
- The Marion County Library—a particular resource for youth—is part of the newly renovated community center.
- A newly organized neighborhood association deals with litter control, crime-watch programs, and neighborhood cleanups.

Lastly, the success of this model project has resulted in similar undertakings and construction projects in five other parks and neighborhoods in Indianapolis.



|| COMMUNITY CENTER IN WINDSOR PARK BEFORE



|| COMMUNITY CENTER IN WINDSOR PARK AFTER

The Many Lives of Jaycee Park

Jaycee Park in Boynton Beach, Florida, was once owned by the Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND) to hold material from the dredging of the Intracoastal Waterway. Since no dredging had occurred since the early 1980s, the city began leasing the property in 1965 from FIND for \$1 per year, and the recreation and parks department began maintaining the 5.6 acres.



II JAYCEE PARK, BOYNTON BEACH, FL – RENOVATIONS TO FORMER DREDGING SITE

After that, many partnerships formed and began to improve the land.

- During the 1960s and 1970s, the property was filled with mango, lime, tangelo, avocado, loquat, banana, and ficus trees. Some of those trees have been removed over time.
- In the mid-1970s, the parkland was cleared and some irrigation installed through a joint effort of the local Jaycees and city staff.
- In 1998, a vehicle path was developed along the northern portion of the property, extending to the Intracoastal Waterway.
- The property came on the market under the List of Lands Available for Taxes in 2003. Both the county and the city were interested in the property, so the next year they partnered to purchase the land. The city received \$1 million from the county's 2002 recreation and cultural facilities bond and another \$1.7 million through a grant award from the Florida Communities Trust. The total purchase price for Jaycee Park was \$3.4 million.

Phase one of the Jaycee Park renovation project began in October 2007 and was completed in March 2008 at a cost of approximately \$900,000. Improvements included a paved access road, an 18-space parking lot, three picnic shelters, a playground, paved sidewalks, an open play field, restrooms, and lush landscaping. The city received a grant from the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program for \$200,000 for some of the improvements as well as a Land and Water Conservation Fund grant in the amount of \$200,000 for fishing pier improvements.

Jaycee Park was renovated and rededicated in April 2008. Phase two began the following year and had many unique features that were important to residents including:

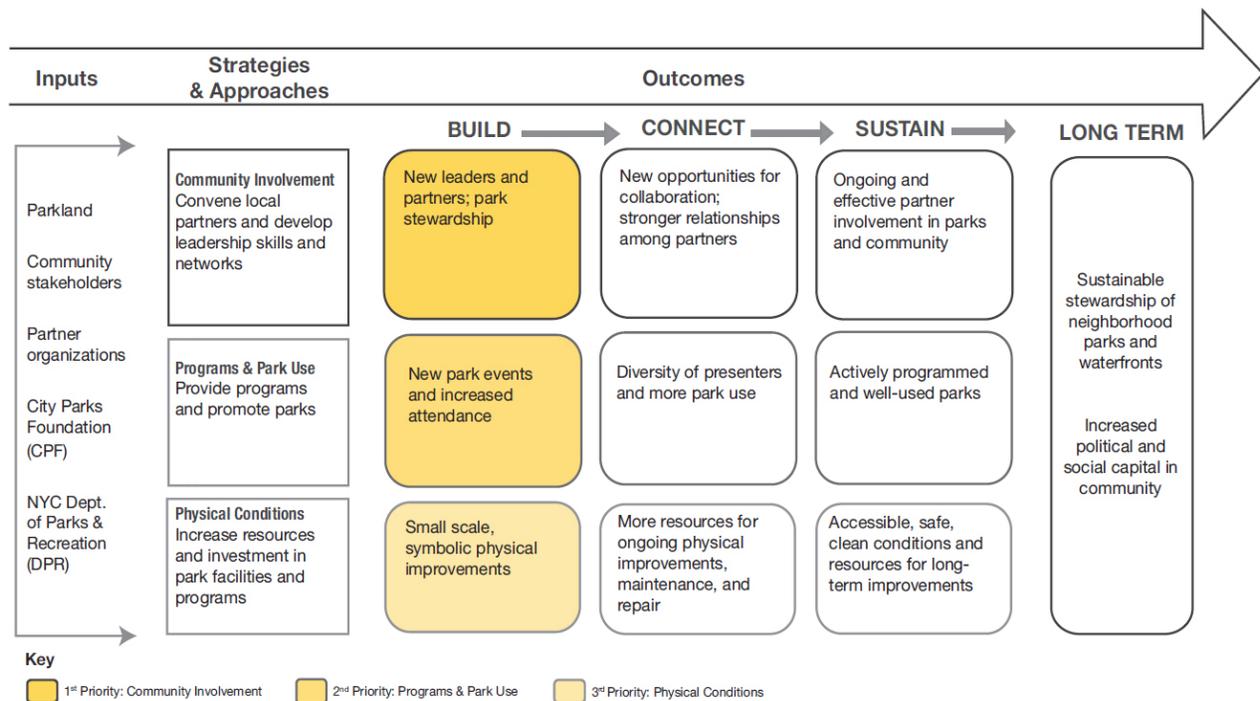
- cultural education markers
- art installations
- a canoe and kayak launch
- an observation deck and boardwalk that allow park visitors access to the beautiful Intracoastal Waterway

Prior to the 2008 renovation, meetings were held with the neighboring condominium associations and residents, who requested park amenities including picnic areas, bocce ball courts, a walking trail, and a play area. They also expressed concerns over active amenities such as ball fields. Today,

- Jaycee Park has a walking trail that is easily accessible from the neighboring communities.
- The playground is heavily used by groups of mothers who make regularly scheduled play dates at the park.
- The fifth, sixth, and seventh graders from a nearby private school visited the park for Environmental Day to learn about manatees, Lake Worth Lagoon, and the park habitat.
- The park has a fishing pier and observation deck running between the Intracoastal Waterway and a restored mangrove area. People can fish, watch the boats and wildlife, and better appreciate the importance of conservation of our natural resources.

Access to the water for all citizens is an important factor in quality of life for South Florida residents, and this 30-year project is a prime example of progress and persistence in the name of better park and recreation facilities.

THE NEW YORK CITY CATALYST MODEL FOR PARTNERSHIPS



Source: *Catalyst: Step One. Partnerships for Parks*, page 13
http://www.partnershipsforparks.org/library_links/pdf/catalyst/build.pdf

Two Thoughts From One Solid Partnership

This model acts as a sparkplug—spurring neighborhood involvement, attracting private donations, leveraging public funds, and empowering communities to take ownership of neighborhood parks.

– COMMISSIONER ADRIAN BENEPE, NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & RECREATION

This is a truly innovative idea—partnering government with the people it serves to develop a vision for a park and then working hand-in-hand with community members to make that vision a reality.

– DAVID RIVEL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CITY PARKS FOUNDATION, NEW YORK CITY

Adapting and Adopting a Model for Your Community

The Catalyst for Neighborhood Parks program in New York City was cited in the beginning of this section. Not only was the program effective for renovating parks and revitalizing neighborhoods throughout the city but it also resulted in a change model for the entire process.

The theory and accompanying model for Catalyst can be applied by any parks and recreation agency and its partners if they want to achieve similar results in a particular situation, neighborhood, or community. The following factors can serve as a starting framework for the model your agency will develop, adapt, or adopt.

- **People and partners.** All people should ultimately be considered as partners—either by virtue of their physical location or mind-set.
- **Perceptions and possibilities.** A person's perceptions are his reality. The opinions, needs, and perceptions of all people need to be addressed and linked to the vision for a revitalization project.
- **Projects and processes.** It is virtually impossible and not at all desirable to separate the physical project from the critical nature of the process. The project itself may equate to the tangible outcome desired, but the process will affect the immediate viability and the long-term sustainability of a park.
- **Progress and productivity.** One key element to be incorporated into a plan is a measure of progress. Identifying milestones that can be measured and observed is essential to being able to track and celebrate productivity.

Closing Thoughts – Moving From Input to Implementation

Clearly this entire process of park renovation and community revitalization, from conception to community involvement, is not without its challenges. Nevertheless, a critical aspect of the project and process calls for integrating the ideas and insights of the people most affected.

It is worth remembering that:

- From contact and communication comes commitment.
- From commitment creates the sustainability.

What people don't understand, they won't value.

What people don't value, they won't protect. What they don't protect, they will lose.

– CHARLES JORDAN

Section 6: Outcomes to Impact

In recent years funding entities including many governments have sought assurances that their dollar investment is actually meeting the qualitative outcomes of the target client. This is an essential shift away from sole reliance on quantitative performance measures.

The information and insights in this section are intended to:

- Establish a role for outcomes of the revitalization process.
- Define outcomes assessment and provide an overview of implementation.
- Provide a framework for outcomes assessment using park and recreation examples.
- Identify outcomes assessment models used by related organizations.

The Role of Outcomes Assessment

“Assessment” can be defined as evidence of the outcomes or results of a particular intervention, such as a park visit, program participation, or policy change in relationship to the desired result. A long-standing debate among decision-makers and critics of public parks and recreation is the extent of the impact of park projects and activities on the greater community good.

Outcomes assessment and the discussion of impact have assumed greater importance as many partners, foundations, and donors are requiring agencies to demonstrate results—more specifically, to supply indicators supporting those results. Despite the general perception that public parks and recreation are personally beneficial to individuals living in communities, less well understood or articulated is their impact on the greater social or community good.

A recent study by the California Park & Recreation Society found that nearly all Californians responding to the survey, both the general public and decision-makers alike, could readily cite the positive impact that parks and recreation had on them personally or on their family members.

A Critical Insight

A critical insight from the extensive survey conducted by the California Park & Recreation Society was that the general public and even decision-makers had difficulty identifying the broader social or communitywide impact of publicly funded park and recreation projects and services. Addressing this difficulty should become a priority for this profession and its advocates.

When an organization receives public funding—as is the case with park and recreation departments—or accepts funding or resources from nonpublic partners, that organization is expected to address and support the resolution of an important community need or issue. Therefore, efforts related to observable and measurable outcomes remain a critical component of both this process and the future sustainability of revitalization projects.

The most widely used approach for demonstrating how short-term outcomes relate to longer term impact is outcomes assessment.

Implementing Outcomes Assessment

This recent emphasis on outcomes assessment is appropriate for Parks Build Community, an initiative of the National Park and Recreation Association (NRPA). In the past, the success of a park or event might be determined in either of two ways: by tallying the number of people who attended or participated or by measuring the cost effectiveness and cost recovery.

The organizations that have led the way in this approach tend to be those that receive funding through the 21st Century Community Learning Center grants, from United Way, and from other grant-giving organizations. United Way agencies began asking their beneficiary organizations they supported to provide outcome indicators, for greater assurance that the activities or interventions they were funding were delivering the intended results. Colleges and universities have been under similar scrutiny by state departments of education.

Outcomes Assessment

Outcomes assessment essentially asks two questions:

- What are the outcomes or results achieved by an agency's actions and activities?
- How does that agency assess or demonstrate these outcomes or results?

This approach has gained popularity in the last decade because it takes the focus away from the organization's activities (what it did) and instead attempts to assess the results and outcomes of those activities (what it made happen).

Here are terms that are common to most outcomes assessments.

- Goal – the important or overall purpose of the park, program, service, or policy
- Inputs – the resources that have gone into the project, such as money, staff, equipment, or volunteers
- Activity – what your agency actually does related to this purpose or goal
- Outputs – tangible evidence based on the inputs, such as two new picnic gazebos or one multipurpose field
- Process – the actions and activities undertaken by the agency
- Outcome – the desired results of the agency's actions or the benefit to the participant or the community
 - ▷ Short-term outcome – a result that can be observed in a relatively short period of time, such as one session, one month, or one summer season
 - ▷ Long-term outcome – an overall desired outcome that addresses an important community issue or need, but one that will not likely occur or be observable until some point in the future
- Outcome indicators – observable, measurable characteristics of changes that represent the agency's progress toward reaching the desired outcome
- Data sources – methods and techniques used to assess changes, such as observation, interviews, and surveys
- Performance measure – a quantifiable measure to assess the outcome; an outcome indicator

Two Important Reminders

An agency undertaking outcomes assessment should be aware of two of its particular characteristics. First, outcomes assessment emphasizes an outcome “indicator.” While your program or intervention may not have achieved a particular outcome, it does provide an indicator that the intervention is leading to that outcome.

Outcome assessment while following guidelines practiced in some research projects does not purport to ‘prove or disprove’ any intervention or factor. So caution should be issued related to the way in which your results are reported.

Positive Outcomes for Marvin Gaye Park

As part of NRPA’s Parks Build Community initiative, which focused on community revitalization and the relationship between viable parks and the health of residents, an outcomes assessment was conducted. The Center for Health & Risk Communication at George Mason University, working in partnership with NRPA and the staff of Washington Parks & People, performed this assessment.

The outcomes of the interviews and observations revealed that:

- The number of visitors to the play area increased as a result of the revitalized park.
- The proportion of playground equipment use in relationship to participation in non-equipment areas of the park was 78% versus 22%.
- The proportion of those visiting the park that were physically active was 76% versus 23% were sedentary.

(Source: *Parks & Recreation*, September 2010)

Steps in Outcomes Assessment

The steps in outcomes assessment are quite similar to those for program planning or project development. The major difference lies in the deliberate nature of the planning, particularly in the following areas:

- Identification of a specific, desirable result
- Pre-planning around measurement
- Matching activities of the program or service with desired outcomes
- Training staff to conduct pre- and post-assessment, if applicable

Steps in the process might include these.

1. Determine the important community need or issue being assessed.
2. Decide which program, service, or park outcome will be assessed.
3. Select specific locations and times to assess the identified program, service, or park.
4. Identify the specific, measurable outcome to be targeted.
5. Decide on the measurement plan.
6. Train staff to execute the assessment plan and implement activities.
7. Plan and implement activities that support the targeted outcome.
8. Conduct the actual assessment.
9. Analyze the results.
10. Share the results.

Sample Outcomes Assessment for a Summer Park Program

Sunny Side Parks and Recreation

Program/service/policy being assessed: Summer Park Usage

Location: Will assess two of the six locations: Hayward and Central Parks

Dates of operation: June 22 – August 14

Population served: Youth ages 6 to 10

Assessment time period: June 22 – July 30

Pre-assessment date: June 24

Post-assessment Date: July 28

Important issue being addressed: Increases in childhood obesity and adult onset diabetes among this age group. The percentage of youth obesity in the community is 34%.

Research-related assumption: The increase in childhood obesity is related to unhealthy eating patterns and physical inactivity. Childhood obesity is a predictor of adult-onset diabetes.

Long-term outcome: Reduced incidence of adult onset diabetes in the community

Short-term outcome: Increase skill development among youth in lifetime physical activity and increase levels of daily physical activity

Agency inputs: Six roving leaders; one supervisor to oversee training and testing; normal expenditures associated with equipment and park maintenance

Program/service activities:

1. Weekly exposure to a different lifetime physical activity such as tennis, archery, or hiking
2. Daily participation in physical activity of a moderate to high level

Program/service outputs: Over the course of the five-week period of assessment, participants were taught four lifetime physical activity skills. They participated for a period of 30 minutes, five days a week, in moderate to high levels of physical activity.

Short-term outcome indicators:

- Practiced at least two new lifetime physical activities
- Participated in 90 minutes of vigorous physical activity each week

Sources of data:

1. Pre- and post-survey of participants, noting exposure to and expertise in various lifetime activities
2. Staff-led monitoring of daily physical activity time

Short-term performance measurements:

1. Perception of participants who learned a new skill or perceived themselves as improving in the lifetime physical activity
2. The actual number of children, with specific observations of number of days that each one participated in vigorous physical activity

Suggestions for Making the Shift to Assessment

If the organization makes a concerted effort to embrace the change to assessment, it can accelerate the learning curve. The incentive for making the shift should increase once staff members recognize that the new approach can lead to greater credibility for public parks and recreation. Greater credibility, in turn, is a steppingstone to future viability and sustainability.

Some suggestions and strategies that can be helpful to an agency undertaking this assessment change include shifting the organizational mind-set, obtaining training support, taking small steps, making sure the change is meaningful, and making use of the outcome and findings.

Shift the Mind-set

Parks and recreation focuses on facilities and activities, but that focus must now shift from thinking in terms of activities to addressing the *outcomes* of those activities. In other words, the new focus is *not on what we do, but what a park or program helps to make happen*.

Park and recreation agencies mow green space, line ball fields, teach dance, and hold community events. However, in assessment, the larger question is the impact or influence of these actions on the community and their overall contributions to society in general.

The shift to outcomes assessment is intended to align the organizational perspective of public parks and recreation with the perspectives and perceptions of stakeholders. Individuals, parents, decision-makers, and the general public are greatly concerned about how an organization or particular program or service affects the well-being of all concerned. For instance,

- Individuals may be concerned about personal health or property values.
- Parents are likely concerned about the safety of their children and the relationship of play experiences to their future.
- Decision-makers, especially now, are focused on the bottom line, asking what programs and services can most effectively and efficiently address the important issues of their jurisdictions.
- The general public wants to be assured that tax dollars are being expended prudently—in useful and meaningful ways.

In actuality, all stakeholders are focused on outcomes: the results that any public entity helps to realize for people, community, and society.

Obtaining Training Support for the Agency

For a staff member or a volunteer to acquire this new skill, rather than to immediately begin to implement outcomes assessment, will require training. It is particularly helpful if staff and volunteers can observe the agency's leadership wholeheartedly adopting this approach. Training for outcomes assessment may be available through United Way, 21st Century Learning Center grant participants, or university extension programs. After training, the implementation of this approach will require ongoing support from the agency overall.

Make It Easy and Take It Small

Succeeding in outcomes assessment relies on selecting outcomes that lend themselves to ease of demonstration or measurement, restricting the number of outcomes measured, and limiting the number of services and locations to be assessed.

For instance, you would not ask a volunteer group to conduct an outcomes assessment for all the events it sponsors any more than you would request the agency's own staff to undertake this process for all its services, programs, and activities. A trial assessment using one event or several smaller programs and services—or even just one or two sites of operation—would fare better.

Also, individual outcomes can have varying degrees of difficulty in terms of observation or demonstration. Focus on the more tangible outcomes of your parks or the activities and services associated with these parks. For example, it is easier to determine whether a child on the playground has learned new lifetime skills over the summer months than whether he appears to be healthier. It is also easier and more realistic to determine people's perceptions of personal safety in a park after a renovation than it is to monitor the occasions in which they have avoided potentially dangerous situations.

Be Sure the Change Is Meaningful

In every case, public park developments, activities, and services are intended to be beneficial to children, residents, and the community. Therefore, when conducting an outcomes assessment, your best approach is to demonstrate a change or improvement that the community, decision-makers, and parents find important and meaningful. For example, while a community may approve of the idea that children are having fun during the nonschool hours by playing in the park, it may place more importance on the children's remaining safe during these times.

Similarly, the regular mowing of grass in a park and ongoing removal of graffiti naturally relates to aesthetics, but far more significant priorities for the community are likely to be the improvements to property values and reduction in vandalism.

Making Use of the Outcomes and Findings

Lastly, the assessment outcomes need to be shared with many constituents: staff, volunteers, parents, decision-makers, other partners such as schools and health departments, and, of course, the general public and the media as appropriate.

Initial assessment efforts often lack a certain level of import due to the agency's learning curve. For example, since physical activity affects the containment of chronic illnesses, premature death, and the escalating costs of healthcare, the fact that the agency's accomplishments have contributed to an increased level of physical activity raises credibility with a variety of stakeholders in the community.

Sharing the Outcomes – Lee's Summit (Missouri) Parks and Recreation Department

Lee's Summit (Missouri) Parks and Recreation Department chose to share the following messages with the general public following two major park development and renovation projects.

Summit Waves: Outdoor Aquatic Center

The construction of this aquatic center resulted in the following:

- More than \$7 million in materials purchases and wages for numerous skilled workers and design professionals
- Meaningful employment for approximately 120 local youth and adults
- Annual operational expenses of the facility exceeding \$600,000 for salary, benefits, and supplies
- Aquatic activities that have proven health benefits to the 50,000 participants a season and provide millions of hours of active recreation for many years
- A safety benefit—teaching youth how to swim

Did You Know? Legacy Park

Here are some interesting facts about Legacy Park.

- Legacy Park was designed to use bioswales and native grasses to channel water into its lake, which doubles as a stormwater and erosion basin.
- The water from the lake is then used to irrigate the athletic fields at the park, rather than purchasing public water, so Lee's Summit saves more than 20 million gallons of potable water annually.
- The water is also used for the fire suppression system for the entire park—again saving dollars for the citizens of Lee's Summit.

Outcomes Assessment Models

Existing models for outcomes assessment are in use in social services, health, and community change efforts. They can also be useful for park and recreation applications.

United Way’s Logic Model

Many United Way groups across the country have been involved in outcomes assessment for some time now. They regard it as an important tool for their mission to provide funding to other community agencies—funding that those agencies expect to use to address important community issues. With respect to any one issue, they can use outcomes assessment to predict the effectiveness and efficiency of various proposals.

Many United Way affiliates conduct a survey every few years to identify the critical needs and issues of a specific community. The results from these surveys then serve as the basis for the short- and long-term outcomes examined in the outcomes assessment. Commonly identified community needs and issues include drug abuse and prevention; the lack of positive, healthy activities for at-risk youth; high school dropout rates; and increases in chronic disease and mortality.

United Way’s logic model approach for assessment assumes that a particular intervention—which could be a program, policy, or particular project—produces a specific, desired outcome or result. The strength of the actual assessment is closely tied to the accuracy of the assumption. The example of a summer day camp illustrates a logic model approach and shows two outcomes.

- Each youth participated in a minimum of 45 minutes of moderate physical activity at least three days per week for a minimum of a five-week period.
- Each attendee learned the rules and basic skills of a lifetime physical activity: tennis.

The assessment in this summer camp example is based on two premises: that physical activity addresses issues of potential overweight and obesity, and that acquiring lifetime skills as a child has a carry-over effect in adulthood.

Logic Model Sample for Summer Camp Program

Inputs	➡ Activities	➡ Outputs	➡ Outcomes
6 staff Healthy meals Healthy snacks Physical activity equipment	➡ Summer camp Daily team sports Daily tennis lessons	➡ 100 youth attending 5 days for 6 hours a day for 6 weeks	➡ Each youth participated in a minimum of 45 min. of moderate physical activity at least 3 days a week for a minimum of 5 weeks. Each attendee learned the rules and basic skills of a lifetime physical activity: tennis

The underlying premise of the logic model of outcomes assessment is that a particular intervention, program, policy, or project produces a specific, desired outcome or result. Therefore, the availability of credible research to support the value and relationship of the intervention is critical. For example, the 2010 NRPA Research Papers offer an example of using research to support the logic model addressing the goal of “healthy and successful youth” through after-school programming.

NRPA Research Papers

In 2010, NRPA published five cutting-edge industry monographs. They describe the broad and fundamental benefits of parks and recreation on local communities. Their titles are:

The Benefits of Physical Activity: The Scientific Evidence

Dr. Geoffrey Godbey and Dr. Andrew Mowen

Measuring the Economic Impact of Park and Recreation Services

Dr. John Crompton

Parks and Other Green Environments: Essential Comp. of a Healthy Human Habitat

Dr. Frances E. (Ming) Kuo

Air Quality Effects of Urban Parks and Trees

Dr. David J. Nowak and Dr. Gordon M. Heisler

The Rationale for Recreation Services for Youth: An Evidence Based Approach

Dr. Peter A. Witt and Dr. Linda Caldwell

These papers help park and recreation agencies develop and make a case for a particular local program, service, or policy. Anyone may access these research papers at <http://www.nrpa.org/2010researchpapers>

Using the Research to Describe Your Agency’s Impact

Overall Goal Healthy and successful youth

Premise After-school programs can contribute to reducing juvenile delinquency.

Context When the school bell rings, crimes by and against children soar. Millions of children and teens are turned out on the streets without constructive activities or adult supervision. On school days, the period from 3 to 6 p.m. is the peak time for teens to:

- commit crimes
- be victims of crime
- be in or cause a car crash
- smoke, drink, or use drugs
- commit a sexual assault

Source: Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2009. www.fightcrime.org

Recreation Research Example

A 2006 survey of more than 600 California 12- to 17-year-olds found that those left unsupervised three or more days per week were twice as likely to hang out with gang members, three times as likely to be engaged in criminal behavior, and more than three times as likely to use illegal drugs (Fight Crime, 2009).

Other Related Findings

In addition, youth who are unengaged, bored, or uninvolved can be at higher risk of undertaking negative behaviors such as delinquency. A study of California Proposition 49 funding for after-school programs indicated that for every dollar invested in after-school programs, taxpayers saved approximately \$6 in crime costs.

Source: Peter A. Witt and Linda Caldwell, “The Rationale for Recreation Services for Youth: An Evidence Based Approach.” NRPA Research Papers, 2010.

Your Department

The XXX City Department of Parks and Recreation provides 3 ½ hours of supervised playtime and open gymnasium opportunities five days a week during the district’s school year. The number of individual youth served in this effort exceeds 1,200.

The Whole Measures Process

“Whole measures,” a process developed by the Center for Whole Communities, is an approach that can be used either early on in a park revitalization project or toward the conclusion, as a form of outcomes assessment. Its value to a park revitalization project relates to the underlying philosophy—one of genuine involvement of the community’s stakeholders from the outset.

The whole measures process has the following features.

- It serves as a strategic planning tool that brings together staff, partners, potential partners, and community members to take a big-picture approach to any project before starting it.
- It offers an easily usable set of criteria for the project that greatly facilitates choices made along the way.
- It enables a broader set of community and societal goals to be identified.
- It builds in a useful evaluation tool for outcome measures.

The process brings to the forefront some questions that should be a part of any project addressing a communitywide need or issue:

- Are the issues and needs being addressed by the proposed project ones that are important and critical to the overall well-being of the community?
- Are the specific elements or aspects of the project identified before we launch the effort, and do they support reaching the overall project goal?

The whole measures process is well suited for a community revitalization process because of its focus on bringing people together prior to the start of a project, as members of an evaluation team. This team, after being oriented to the whole measures principles and measurement rubric, identifies the desired and intended outcomes of the project.

Whole measures is a relatively new outcomes assessment process. One of the more expansive efforts that incorporates this approach is reported in the publication “Whole Measures for Community Food Systems,” which was a project of the Community Food Security Whole Measures Working Group. The subtitle of the document, “Values-Based Planning and Evaluation,” succinctly describes the whole measures intent of the project. The document is available online at <http://www.foodsecurity.org/pub/WholeMeasuresCFS-web.pdf>.

Outcomes Assessment Resources

The following are links to online resources with information on outcomes assessment and measurement.

- **United Way: Outcome Measurement Resource Network**
national.unitedway.org
- **Association for Community Health Improvement**
<http://www.communityhth.org/communityhth/resources/planning.html#>
- **Outcome Tool Kit for Library Assessment**
<http://ibec.ischool.washington.edu/toolkit>
- **Whole Measures. The Whole Communities**
http://www.wholecommunities.org/measures_of_health

Closing Thoughts

The use and adoption of outcomes assessment throughout an organization can lead to significant and sustainable changes. The components of this process are powerful for any organization but most especially for public agencies, which must be sure they are addressing issues and alleviating needs that are critical for the future of a community.

However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results.

– WINSTON CHURCHILL

Section 7: Cycle of Success

The information and insights in this section are intended to:

- Remind the reader that projects are subject to a natural cycle that can result in continued growth or eventual decline.
- Identify the defining role of ceremony and celebration.
- Identify critical elements aligned with long-term success.
- Outline other forms of assessment that can contribute to the long-term sustainability of a project.

Every human being, project, or organization has an inherent life cycle. The beginning of that life cycle is characterized by relatively slow growth followed by increased interest and resources, which ultimately culminates in reaching a defined pinnacle. For park projects similar to the ones cited in this toolkit, the pinnacle is likely to be the completion of the park project.

The same cycle applies to a park renovation and the revitalized neighborhood around it. The overarching challenge is how to counter the natural life cycle. While the previous sections of this toolkit have explained how to grow an initiative, this section shifts its focus to the completion of the project and the actions required to maintain the park’s sustainability and the community’s viability.

Celebration and Ceremony

Whether the agency is involved in a relatively small park project, such as the three-acre Lou Walker Park in DeKalb, Georgia, or a large undertaking such as Marvin Gaye Park in Washington, D.C., there is one common thread: the need for celebration and ceremony.



|| PARKS BUILD COMMUNITY BANNER AT DEDICATION



|| GIRLS PLAYING



|| MOSAIC SIGN



|| ADULT MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY AT DEDICATION

There are several reasons that park dedications are popular and valuable culminations of park projects. Dedication ceremonies:

1. For the many individuals and stakeholders who worked to make the park project a reality, allow an opportunity to celebrate and be recognized for their efforts
2. Provide local officials with an opportunity to be associated with a positive aspect of community life while being reminded of the impact of public parks
3. Serve as an opportunity for additional public visibility and media coverage
4. Mark the beginning of a new phase in the life cycle of the project

The pictures accompanying this section illustrate the success of the rededication of Marvin Gaye Park, whose key partners were the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and Washington Parks & People. The two keynote speakers were Dr. Howard K. Koh, Assistant Secretary for Health, and U.S. Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton of Washington, D.C.

Citizens who provided input and sought resources for Marvin Gaye Park were also on site, and several of them approached the podium to speak. Also participating in the rededication were the Washington National Dream Foundation, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, and student volunteers from American University. The contributions of Playworld Systems, PlayCore, Landscape Structures, and Kompan to the park rejuvenation project were recognized as well.

The Marvin Gaye Park Dedication Ceremony

The Marvin Gaye Park dedication ceremony included the presence and recognition of a variety of individuals and groups, including:

- The local community activist Rebecca Stamps, a key player in bringing this project to fruition
- CEOs and executive directors of the two major partners
- Local council members
- National officials
- Numerous partners in the project
- Neighborhood residents
- Volunteers
- Park and playground users

Critical Action for Long-Term Success

To ensure the long-term success and ongoing life cycle of a park and neighborhood revitalization project, planning is essential. This planning to create a cycle of success should include the following elements.

- **Continued involvement and support of the community.** In the neighborhood, there must be a leader or citizen advocate to serve as a catalyst, both for generating community involvement and support and for promoting ongoing viability.
- **Ongoing resource support.** Support for maintenance and improvements for existing parks is often difficult to obtain. However, the development of a master plan with strategic initiatives can garner the ongoing interest of citizen advocates, resource partners, and donors.

- **Public visibility.** There are likely to be other community issues and projects that attract the attention of citizens and local media. Therefore, one essential element of sustainability is a year-round plan for events and accomplishments that can attract local media attention and reinforce community involvement.
- **Continued assessment of accomplishments.** The role and need for outcomes assessment featured in the previous section is central to demonstrating the impact of your project and associated activities related to the project with ongoing support. There are other types of assessment that can be implemented that will strengthen the longer term sustainability of the project by providing indicators of progress and success.

Two videos featuring the rededication of Marvin Gaye Park can be accessed at http://www.nrpa.org/media/parkday/pg_video.html.

Continuing With Assessment Options

Other types of outcomes of a park project can be assessed, as the examples and suggestions below will illustrate. Three different but closely related areas for assessment will be featured in this section.

- **Process assessment** identifies and tracks activities and results of people involved with the park, such as memberships, levels of attendance, and involvement at meetings and other events.
- **Outputs assessment** tracks and monitors more tangible aspects of the project, such as funds acquired or upgrades made.
- **Sustainability assessment** refers to the most difficult task: identifying key indicators of behavior and actions that should support for the long-term viability of the park and the neighborhood.

As shown in the outcomes assessment process, indicators are easier to envision if you start with the end in mind.

Process Assessment

Everyone involved in the project—volunteers, advocates, staff, and partners—will be looking for signs of progress or interim success markers. Process assessment is especially useful for a park project that will extend over a substantial period of time.

Most project planning software includes a flowchart with established dates to reach certain tasks or targeted projections. These targeted dates can serve as a form of process assessment, particularly if the results and milestones are widely publicized and then recognized or celebrated in some manner.

Process indicators naturally focus on the activities and actions of people. The strength of revitalization projects depends on the involvement and support of people, so it is appropriate that this assessment technique is people-centered. When tracked over time, the involvement and commitment of people can provide valuable insights into the extent of support from a neighborhood or community.

Citizens Play a Key Role in Process Assessment

In process assessment, the involvement and ongoing participation of neighborhood groups and citizen advocates (such as friends groups) and foundations play a major role. Indicators of this continuing support can be identified by tracking:

- New citizens or members joining the effort
- Renewals of membership or annual pledges, if applicable
- The proportion of the membership attending meetings
- The proportion of the membership helping with work projects (such as cleanup days)

An Example of Progress Based on Process Outcomes

Sunny Side Parks and Recreation Department

Project name: Partnering for Paradise Park

Overall project goal: To renovate Paradise Park so that the renovation brings positive and meaningful changes to the community that are sustained over time

Process goals: To empower a core group of interested people to expand the number of people involved with this park renovation project

Inputs (What people did)	Activities (The results)	Outputs (May include dates or numbers)
Three interest leaders from the community held 3 joint meetings with others from the 3 neighborhoods.	Three meetings were held in the 3 different areas on (insert dates and times)	People attending – 62 People volunteering – 28
Staff and 3 original community leaders organized and facilitated an expanded meeting of the interested parties.	Open space technology was used to identify issues and then other people or community groups who would be interested in this effort.	Three of the more important issues were identified by those in attendance. A mailing list was developed that included 12 other community groups and 32 additional people to be invited to a visioning session 3 weeks from now.

Process Follow-up

The 31 participants, including the three original community leaders, were recognized in a newspaper article and flyer distributed through local newspapers and in local public areas. The open invitation to the visioning session was included in the article and on the flyer.

A suggestion: “Process follow-up” should be noted throughout the process goal planning form as a reminder about communication, milestones, recognition, and celebrations.

Outputs Assessment

At one time, public parks and recreation relied a great deal on outputs as a way of evaluating their programs and services, emphasizing “what we did” rather than “what we helped to make happen.” Today there is more focus on the review and assessment of actual outcomes or results, especially when the goal is to ensure the long-term sustainability of a park project.

Some of the desired outputs or indicators that reflect the progress of a park project as it seeks continued viability might include:

- Number of new partnerships
- Number of new funding sources identified
- Funding from grant or foundation sources
- Number of contacts with the public and potential partners
- Support provided for stakeholder groups
- Funding for maintenance and operation rather than further development or expansion

This list of potential indicators can be expanded or replaced with actions and results that better reflect the needs of your project or situation.

Outputs Feedback from the Partnerships for Parks

New York City's Partnerships for Parks incorporates outputs assessment throughout its projects. You may recall that the first step of the Partnerships for Parks' Catalyst project was "to build." Even in this initial step the group tracked, highlighted, and shared activities and results as shown here.

During Step One: Build, Catalyst

- Presented programs that drew more than 30,000 people to Catalyst parks
- Met with representatives from more than 75 different community-based organizations
- Offered 20 workshops on topics ranging from event production to working with elected officials
- Secured \$11.5 million for physical improvements
- Distributed \$38,900 in small grants to 15 community partners
- Helped community groups to produce brochures, signs, and other materials
- Supported 175 volunteer projects with staff, tools, and supplies, resulting in more than 41,460 in volunteer hours

Source: Catalyst: Step One. Partnerships for Parks

Sustainability Assessment

An even greater assessment challenge is sustainability assessment—not because of the assessment process but due to the significant challenge of managing for sustainability. An important action in this type of assessment is determining which indicators might be relevant to long-term sustainability.

While the intense relationships between the stakeholders involved in the park project—the public agency, citizens, and partners—may wane after the development of the project, sustainability has clear links to the continued relationships among these stakeholders.

Since the park renovation project is intended to result in community revitalization, the longer term sustainability of the joint endeavor between the park and the neighborhood can serve as a basis for creating the assessment. The assessment may decide to identify both internal and external indicators of ongoing support and progress.

- **Internal Possibilities**
 - ▷ Presence or absence of trash
 - ▷ Presence or absence of graffiti
 - ▷ Number and type of activities held in the park
 - ▷ Number, age, and gender data for park visitors
- **External Possibilities**
 - ▷ The local jurisdiction will fund redevelopment projects in the neighborhood.
 - ▷ New businesses are open in the area.
 - ▷ Dwellings are improved by owners and landlords.

Recalling a suggestion in the previous section—that an agency create its own model of change—quite likely the agency also should create its own list of sustainability outcomes. Consider some of the following outcomes as possibilities.

- Three times a year a park cleanup is sponsored by the neighborhood association. Basic support (trash cans, garbage bags, rakes, and so on) comes from the public park agency, and at least three community groups participate.
- Two local community groups (such as a parent-teacher organization, scout group, or church) conduct a fund-raising project, with proceeds going to a small park improvement or program.
- Once a year, five community groups, using \$200 in seed money from the public park department, sponsor and deliver a special event designed to bring members of the community into the park.

Internal Indicators of Sustainability

The following local park and recreation examples involved citizen input in the park project, and they are already demonstrating indicators of future sustainability.

McKoy Pool

Starting in 2005, there were several discussions and public meetings in the southern area of Decatur, Georgia, concerning the future of McKoy Pool. For many years this pool was in disrepair and disuse. The pool barely brought in \$1,000 over the summer months from May to August.

The Decatur Active Living Department sponsored several community meetings in the Oakhurst Community and got the very clear message that the pool should be a facility that families could enjoy. Several meetings with designers and the community resulted in the city's building a brand new pool in 2007 with zero-depth entry and water features.

Since that time, the pool use has increased tremendously, with parents and children lining up at 9:30 a.m. to enter the pool—a half hour before it opens. The pool grossed more than \$30,000 this past season.

McKoy Pool is an asset to the community because this is where people connect and families get the opportunity to bond. It is within walking distance for many residents and has been featured in workshops across the country. The ongoing public support for this asset to the neighborhood speaks to its potential for sustainability.

Petersburg Park

Petersburg Park in Louisville, Kentucky, is filled with individuals, families, and groups that use its picnic facilities. One sign of ongoing sustainability that surfaces is that all groups clean up after their outing and place their tied trash bags next to the trash receptacles, facilitating the paid park cleanup.

Aera Park

Aera Park, the 11-field baseball complex that was jointly designed and paid for by the local nonprofit youth baseball group and the city of Bakersfield, California, fully operates without the city's assistance. This is sustainability at its finest.



II AERA PARK – BASEBALL COMPLEX – CITY OF BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA

Clearly, the goal of sustainability is challenging and universal. Jason Schwartz, director of New York City's Partnerships for Parks, believes that helping neighborhoods sustain their efforts is part of his organization's ongoing work.

Catalyst empowers New Yorkers by building the lasting networks and structure they need to be effective leaders, as they work to revitalize their communities and reclaim their local parks. As a public-private partnership that maintains relationships with a broad array of community groups, we are perfectly situated to serve as a link between public agencies, non-profits, and community members.

– JASON SCHWARTZ, DIRECTOR, PARTNERSHIPS FOR PARKS

Source: *Catalyst: Step Three. Partnerships for Parks*

Future Viability

Sustainability of a park project that ultimately leads to the revitalization of a neighborhood creates additional opportunities.

- Individuals and groups that have committed extensive time, effort, and resources are justified in celebrating the important changes their involvement has brought.
- Foundations and other funding organizations that supported the project report the success of these investments to their boards and donors.
- Residents and members of the community become empowered and inspired to sustain not just the park but the improved way of life within the community.
- Public parks and recreation can re-establish its role as a facilitator of positive results for individuals, neighborhoods, and communities, thus contributing to its future viability as a public servant.

Such revitalization does not occur in a short period of time—nor does it end with the completion of the park project and the dedication ceremony. The challenge of ensuring future viability has no end date.

Unlike ecological capital which humans do not create, social capital is created by people and can be grown virtually at will; we can always adjust its supply in order to meet our needs. Thus, the gaps that must be closed in the case of social capital are not gaps between what we are stuck with and what we use; they are gaps between what we need and what we have decided to produce or make available.

– MARK MCELROY, AUTHOR AND CONSULTANT ON
INNOVATIONS THROUGH KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Credits

A special thanks to the people and organizations that made this Tool Kit a reality

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Non-Profits Assisting with the Tool Kit

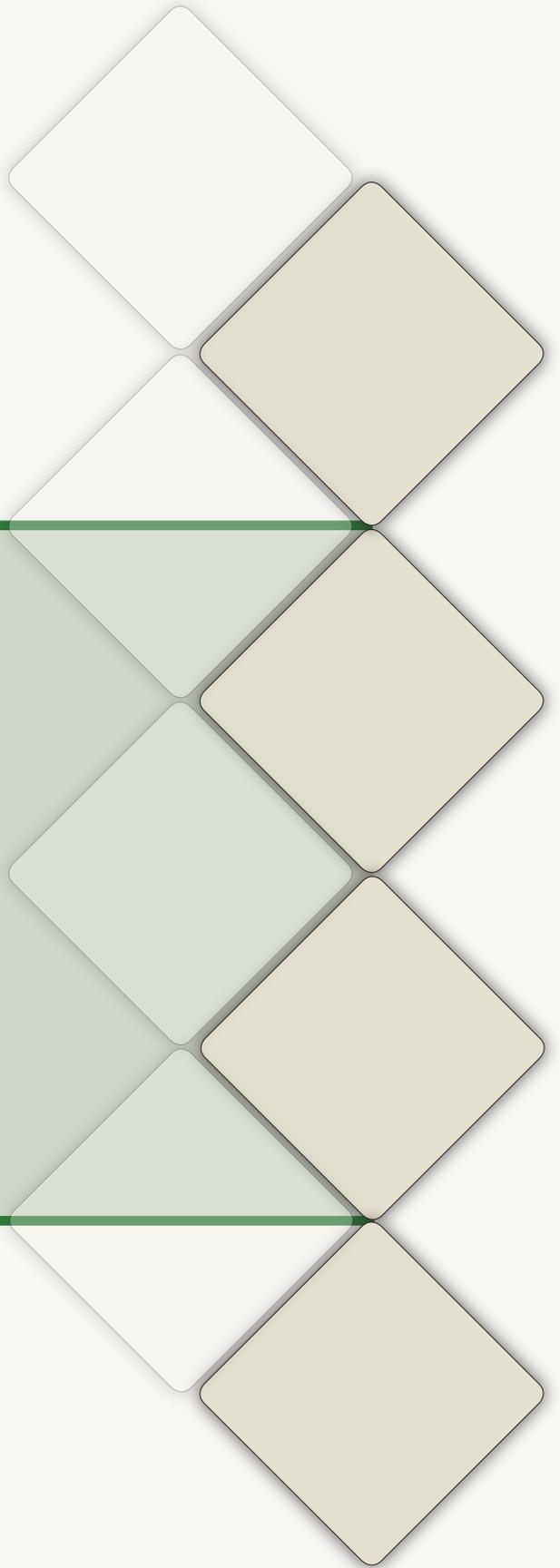
Steve Coleman, Executive Director of Washington Parks and People
Autumn Saxton-Ross, Ph.D., Former staff member of Washington Parks and People

A special thanks to Partnership for Parks for sharing its information, insights, and model for park and community revitalization.

Partnerships for Parks is an innovative joint program of City Parks Foundation and the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation that was founded in 1995. Its mission is to help residents of New York City work together to make neighborhood parks thrive.



The park and recreation agencies across the country that shared examples and insight.



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