



NATIONAL RECREATION  
AND PARK ASSOCIATION



# **Representation Matters: Strategies to Diversify Instructor Recruitment**

## Background

At the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), we believe parks and recreation is vital to community health and well-being. Access to these spaces, programs and services remains essential to community vitality and is a key factor in advancing health equity, improving individual and community-level health outcomes, and enhancing quality of life for all people. Park and recreation professionals are uniquely positioned to advance public health approaches — including physical activity and chronic disease management interventions — that improve physical, social, emotional and cultural well-being.

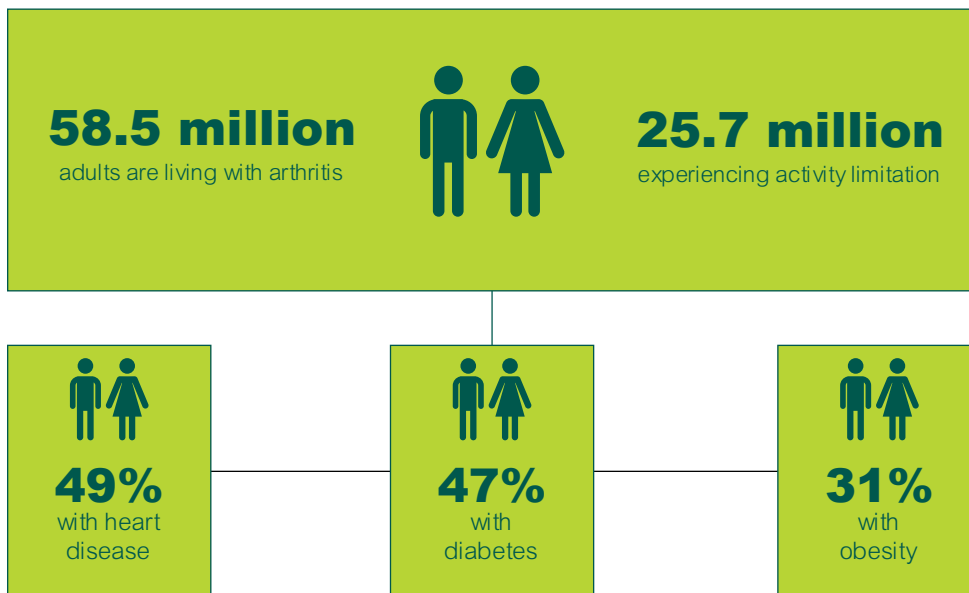
Arthritis-Appropriate, Evidence-Based Interventions (AAEBIs) play a vital role in managing the challenges posed by arthritis, a chronic and often debilitating condition affecting millions worldwide. AAEBIs are effective interventions that help people with arthritis and adults with other chronic conditions improve their health, wellness and overall quality of life. Beyond helping to manage symptoms of arthritis and overcome activity limitations, AAEBIs and physical activity interventions provide other health and wellness benefits for adults, including improved mental health and social connection.

*Cover photo: Commission For Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies. Courtesy of Adobe Stock*



*A group of older adults sit in an outdoor setting. Courtesy of Adobe Stock*

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that there are 58.5 million adults living with arthritis, with 25.7 million of them experiencing activity limitations because of their condition.<sup>1</sup> As the population of the United States ages and the co-occurrence of chronic conditions or diseases (comorbidities), such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease, continue to rise, the number of doctor-diagnosed arthritis cases in the United States are expected to increase by at least 25 million people over the next 20 years.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, adults with comorbidities — such as heart disease (49 percent), diabetes (47 percent) and/or obesity (31 percent) — are diagnosed with arthritis at a significantly higher rate, and comorbidities disproportionately impact people of color. To promote physical activity, address the burden of chronic disease and combat social isolation, it is critical to continue expanding on the accessibility of AAEBIs with health equity at the center.



Exercise class participants stretch during class. Photo credit: Department of Parks and Recreation, Prince George's County, Maryland.

<sup>1</sup>National statistics. (2023, October 4). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved December 20, 2023, from [https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/data\\_statistics/national-statistics.html#:~:text=Arthritis%20prevalence%20increased%20with%20age.&text=Arthritis%20can%20have%20substantial%20impacts,activities%20due%20to%20their%20arthritis.&text=Learn%20more%20about%20arthritis%20attributable%20limitations](https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/data_statistics/national-statistics.html#:~:text=Arthritis%20prevalence%20increased%20with%20age.&text=Arthritis%20can%20have%20substantial%20impacts,activities%20due%20to%20their%20arthritis.&text=Learn%20more%20about%20arthritis%20attributable%20limitations)

<sup>2</sup>Press room. (2023, July 20). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved December 20, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/communications/press.htm>

# Strategies to Diversify Instructor Recruitment

Many park and recreation professionals are making progress toward centering equity and inclusion within programming, operations, practices and environments, yet opportunities remain to take concrete action. NRPA's *Elevating Health Equity Through Parks and Recreation: A Framework for Action* resource outlines a set of guiding principles and actions that park and recreation agencies can use to advance health equity. We recognize that when park and recreation professionals bring their unique skills, assets and experiences to their work and when the concept of inclusion goes beyond ability and access and focuses on how, where and which people are included, health outcomes will improve. One way professionals can put these guiding principles into action is to focus on staff representation.

A largely overlooked aspect of effective and equitable AAEBI implementation is ensuring the diversity of instructors who deliver these interventions. The lack of diversity among AAEBI instructors may have significant implications for both instructor care and participant outcomes. Studies consistently show benefits of teacher-student race/ethnicity matching. A review from the Educator Trust shows that access to a racially and culturally diverse teacher workforce is beneficial for all students, particularly for students of color.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, within healthcare settings, the benefits of race concordance are seen between patients and providers, where positive outcomes — such as higher levels of perceived patient satisfaction of care, quality of healthcare and more trust in their provider — are reported.<sup>4</sup> Participants from various backgrounds may feel more comfortable and engaged when instructors share experiences that are similar to theirs. It is crucial to support the increase of diversity among AAEBI instructors. **Below are eight strategies agencies can use to diversify instructor recruitment:**

- 1. Agency Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:** Ensuring that your agency's commitment to advancing diversity, equity and inclusion is reflected in your agency's mission and values is integral to any effort to advance health equity.
- 2. Assess Current Instructor Diversity:** Assessing instructor demographics (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender identity) against the demographics of the community your agency is serving is a key step to setting outreach and recruitment goals.

**Tip:** Utilize [CDC's PLACES Data](#) to better understand the population being served and the health of community members.



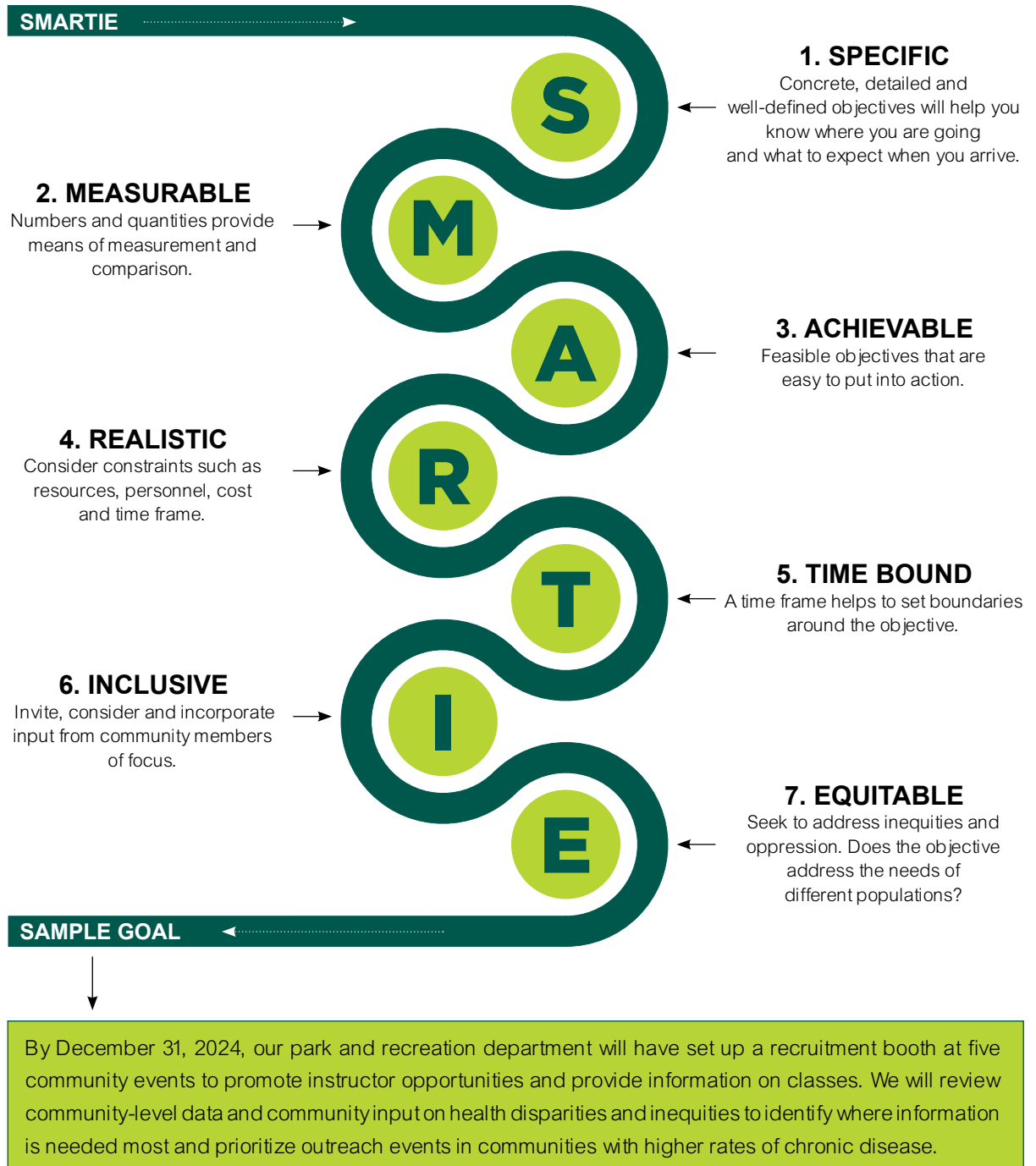
*A group of older adults participate in an exercise class offered by the City of Shawnee, Oklahoma. Photo credit: Keaton Nye*

<sup>3</sup> The Education Trust. (2023, June 23). Teacher Diversity & Equity Policy Scan - The Education Trust. <https://edtrust.org/Educator-diversity/#CA>

<sup>4</sup> Gray, B., & Stoddard, J. J. (1997). Patient-physician pairing: Does racial and ethnic congruity influence selection of a regular physician? *Journal of Community Health*, 22(4), 247–259. <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1025148302636>

- Recruitment Plan:** Engage champions and ambassadors, identify key messages and talking points, create recruitment materials and set goals for outreach.

**\*Tip:** Use the common acronym **SMARTIE** to describe your objectives. The CDC describes **SMARTIE** objective characteristics as:



- Collaborate With Partners:** Building trusting relationships with historically underrepresented community members and organizations that represent them can help build awareness of programming, increase participation and identify future instructors.

5. **Allocate Funding:** Allotting budget funds that support translation of materials, marketing and recruitment strategies.
6. **Translate Materials:** Ensuring that all materials the instructor will need are available in the language the instructor is most proficient in. This includes identifying what languages are most spoken in the local community and having materials available in those languages.
7. **Focus on Retention of Staff:** Use a variety of strategies to acknowledge staff for their contributions and maintain motivation. Strategies may include:
  - Identifying what feedback current participants and instructors have regarding retention and regularly providing feedback opportunities
  - Offering professional development opportunities for instructors (including mentorship)
  - Celebrating and recognizing accomplishments
8. **Provide Training to Staff:** Ensuring current staff receive training on honoring community diversity and supporting programming that is culturally sustaining.

Having a diverse instructor workforce not only allows instructors to connect with each other, but also allows teachers to collaborate and learn from one another to benefit the students they serve. Participants are inspired by people they can relate to and therefore can create positive perceptions of all individuals.



*The EnhanceFitness program helps older adults become more active. Photo credit: Town of Mooresville Parks and Recreation, North Carolina*

*This publication was supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (CDC/HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$460,007 with 100 percent funded by CDC/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CDC/HHS or the U.S. Government. Please contact Colleen Pittard, NRPA's partnership manager, at [cpittard@nrpa.org](mailto:cpittard@nrpa.org) with any questions or comments.*