

Equity in Implementation

Putting Plans into Action to Improve Safe Access to Parks



Implementing Safe Routes to Parks: Communities Bringing Their Plans to Life

A collaborative approach goes a long way when implementing Safe Routes to Parks efforts. Working with partners, such as community residents, community-based organizations, government agencies, local businesses, and schools, is an effective way for each group to contribute its knowledge and resources to improve safe park access.

To equitably implement Safe Routes to Parks plans, community members should be included in carrying out the plans they co-developed. This can be accomplished by working with residents and community groups like faith-based organizations, neighborhood associations, and neighborhood block watches. Activities might include activating a park through programming, cultivating more trusting relationships with law enforcement, and making physical improvements to improve safety and access to and within the park. Like the other Safe Routes to Parks stages, community-driven implementation provides the opportunity for community members to take ownership and stewardship of their local parks. Equitable implementation means that policies, plans, and programs that support the creation of safe and equitable access to parks are focused in the neighborhoods that need them most.

Everyone deserves safe and easy access to parks, but not all people and neighborhoods have that opportunity. Safe Routes to Parks is especially important in communities lacking infrastructure, such as sidewalks, crosswalks, and speed humps, to support safe walking and bicycling; where violence and crime are prevalent; and where there are high rates of weight-related diseases or conditions. Improving safe park access requires thoughtful assessment and inclusion of strategies aimed at overcoming these injustices in each stage of a community's Safe Routes to Parks efforts. This provides an opportunity to achieve optimal health for every person regardless of the color of their skin, their level of education or the job they have, their gender or sexual identity, whether or not they have a disability, or the neighborhood they live in.¹ This fact sheet offers ideas and examples of strategies to advance equity that can be included in the **Implementation** stage of Safe Routes to Parks efforts.

Working Toward Equitable Implementation

The Implementation stage of the Safe Routes to Parks framework aims to put policies and plans into effect through improvements in street design, park programming, community safety improvements, and any other strategies identified by a community. As with other opportunities for authentic community engagement, make sure to schedule implementation activities during times that work for community residents. Potential strategies to conduct more equitable implementation of Safe Routes to Parks include:

❖ Residents should be involved in implementation activities.

Take Action: Identify opportunities for community residents, neighborhood schools, and youth organizations to be involved and champion this work moving forward. For example:

- Invite law enforcement members to attend a series of forums and/or community events to discuss conflicts and build more trusting relationships, and collaborate on ways to improve safety in and around the park.
- Design wayfinding and park signage (invite community residents to express their visions, design the art, or select the color schemes that best reflect the character of their neighborhood).
- Meet with the principal (if your park is near a school) to discuss how park access safety improvements align with and can support Safe Routes to School efforts.
- Make sure engineering plans are going according to the community's vision.

❖ Once improvements have been made to the route or within the park, it is essential to engage residents in the changed environment. It is an opportunity to show people how their hard work and involvement has made an impact in their neighborhood or community. It also begins to change perceptions of safety of the walk to and within the park.

Take Action: Host events that are culturally relevant, co-developed and designed by the community, and involve community groups in showcasing the improvements to park access.



❖ For most Safe Routes to Parks efforts, implementation is an ongoing process. Community residents should work with their local elected and appointed leaders to implement Safe Routes to Parks plans so that their vision becomes reality.

Take Action: Ask residents how comfortable they are meeting with local government leaders to advocate for desired changes. Build their capacity to reach out to their elected officials and government agencies via phone, in-person, or at council meetings to hold them accountable to move the work forward. Consider and address the obstacles that may prevent some residents from pursuing those opportunities; for example, transportation, immigration status, child care, or translation/signers.

❖ Evaluation is a critical component of equitable implementation. It provides an opportunity to measure the impact of implemented changes on marginalized populations, areas and population groups that have been historically disinvested in, as well as different demographic groups more generally.

Take Action: Collect quantitative and qualitative data to better understand the impact of the changed physical or social environment on people of color, low-income communities, and other marginalized populations. Conduct park observations to count how many people are walking to and within the park, compare to baseline. Hold conversations with community leaders, park neighbors, and businesses near the park. Ask about how the improvements affect perceptions of safety of the surrounding area. Use these data to inform next steps in implementation, including course correcting if the implemented change isn't benefiting the communities that need the most support.

Equitable Implementation in Action

In New Bedford, Massachusetts, the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Beaches conducted a variety of assessments to identify areas of improvement to access to one of their local parks. Their findings showed the need for minor sidewalk repairs, better pavement markings, and increased signage. In May, 2018, New Bedford Parks, Recreation, and Beaches partnered with WalkBoston, Mass in Motion New Bedford, their planning department, department of public infrastructure, and neighboring schools to temporarily install a parklet and brightly colored crosswalk to help slow traffic at an intersection during a heavy traffic time with school dismissal. Students from neighboring schools helped to color the sidewalks and parklet with chalk, which seemingly “popped up” overnight, in preparation for the [Ashley Park Pop-Up Day](#). The day also included games and activities for youth and an onsite survey for attendees to provide feedback about the temporary street installations. New Bedford Parks, Recreation, and Beaches noted that the efforts slowed traffic and caused no difficulties for school buses and delivery trucks maneuvering around the bump outs and took action. The agency created a permanent change, shortening the crosswalk distance for pedestrians crossing the street. The parks and recreation department will be sharing their Safe Routes to Parks template with the city to ensure infrastructure projects going forward take park access into consideration.

What is Safe Routes to Parks?

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



References

1. Braveman, Kumanyika, Fielding, et al. (2011). “Health Disparities and Health Equity: The Issue of Justice” American Journal of Public Health. Accessed October 15, 2018. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3222512/>.
2. Safe Routes to Parks." National Recreation and Parks Association. 2016. Accessed June 22, 2018. <https://www.nrpa.org/Safe-Routes-To-Parks/>.