

Keep the Good Work Going

How to Sustain Your Equitable Safe Routes to Parks Efforts



Safe Routes to Parks: Interwoven into the Fabric of the Community

Funding comes and goes, but community residents' need for safe, secure park access continues beyond grant periods and deadlines. To work toward long-lasting impact, sustaining Safe Routes to Parks efforts begins when you first reach out to community residents and organizations. By cultivating authentic relationships and involving neighbors and organizations in a meaningful way, you sow the seeds of community-led stewardship.

From the beginning, nurture your relationships with community residents and organizations by offering reciprocal support for their other efforts and activities, building their capacity to plan for and implement Safe Routes to Parks, and monitoring the impact of Safe Routes to Parks improvements. When possible, community residents and organizations should lead these efforts and non-profits and local governments should support by providing the resources to actualize community visions. Often, as gatekeepers of grants and other funding to do this work, non-profits and local governments have power to determine the direction of projects and decide what changes get made on the ground. It is important to determine the level of power that needs to be shared with residents to bring their vision to life. This is key to ensure that efforts positively affect the communities they are intended to benefit, especially in marginalized and historically disinvested communities. Equitable sustainability means that ongoing efforts are carried out in a way that centers residents as champions and beneficiaries and equips communities with the resources needed to keep the work going.

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 **Sustain** stage of Safe Routes to Parks efforts.

Sustaining Safe and Equitable Access to Parks

To sustain your Safe Routes to Parks efforts and achieve your goal of increasing park access for neighborhood residents, determine what processes and resources (people, funds, time, etc.) need to be in place for the work to continue in a way that positively impacts the community. There are a number of strategies that can be implemented to promote equity in sustaining Safe Routes to Parks efforts, including:

- ❖ **Relationships between community based organizations and neighborhood residents should outlast single projects and efforts.** If you developed relationships with a particular community specifically for this Safe Routes to Parks effort, recall the effort that went into meeting neighbors and organizations and the bonds that were created. Working with a community on a project should be the beginning of a long-standing relationship with residents and community-based organizations. This is especially important in marginalized and historically disinvested communities where organizations come and get what they need from a community without reciprocating the action.

Take Action: Continue to stay abreast of, participate in, or assist with activities and initiatives of your partner coalition members. This helps to nurture relationships, shows support, and makes it easier to identify ways to align for future opportunities.

- ❖ **Proactively planning for continued work can increase the likeliness that your Safe Routes to Parks efforts have a longer-lasting positive impact on the community.** One way to do that is by formalizing partnerships with diverse organizations that center community residents as the leaders and intended beneficiaries of this work.

Take Action: Determine gaps in your staff or on your coalition regarding content expertise, experience, and relevance to the intended beneficiaries and neighborhoods you serve and identify organizations that can fill that gap and amplify your Safe Routes to Parks efforts. Develop formal or informal agreements with these organizations to identify roles and responsibilities in order to continue the work. Choose organizations or individuals that:

- Have an equity focus
- Demographically reflect the population
- Grew up or live in the community
- Worked in the community and are trusted by residents



- ❖ **Residents should be the stewards of their community's Safe Routes to Parks efforts.** Providing opportunities for community members to be champions and contribute their energy and ideas will create more buy-in and support.

Take Action: Create a “Friends of” group for the park or Adopt-a-Park maintenance group for residents to assist with building political and financial support for enhancements and promotion and maintenance of parks. Find or develop opportunities for community members to serve as advisory committee members or governing board members for the project or to the local government responsible for implementing the Safe Routes to Parks plan. Compensate residents for their time contributing to these efforts.

- ❖ **Building the capacity of residents to be champions of change in their community through leadership, advocacy, and organizing trainings and related opportunities can help to support continued Safe Routes to Parks improvements in their communities and beyond.**

Take Action: Identify training and skill-building needs of residents and pair them with opportunities to learn and grow in those areas. Examples include an equity or leadership development training, or advocacy and organizing workshop. Remember to account for obstacles that may prevent some from pursuing these opportunities, such as meeting times and locations, transportation, child care, food, and translation/signing services.

❖ **Evaluation of the implemented changes helps to determine what is or isn't working and next steps.**

Consider how the changes affect marginalized populations and those that have been historically disinvested in, as well as different demographic groups more generally.

Take Action: Identify a list of metrics and the data collection process. Begin to collect this data before the change is implemented and continue to collect data after. Course correct if the implemented changes are not positively impacting the community. Be sure to ask residents about their perception of the changes in their community. These data can be useful for future projects, to increase investment into your Safe Routes to Parks efforts, and other learning opportunities.

❖ **While some Safe Routes to Parks strategies can be implemented at no- or low-cost, often improvements to safe and secure park access require future funding.** When funding is or can be made available, it should be directed to support communities most in need of it.

Take Action: Evaluate your community's parks and recreation and transportation budgets. Seek opportunities to influence the budget process to include your community's Safe Routes to Parks priorities. If this involves redirecting funds, consider the unintentional impact on other aspects of the community's health and well-being. Identify other sources of funding, and consider how these new revenue sources could adversely impact individuals and communities.

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/>

Sustainability in Action

Inspired by early Safe Routes to Parks successes at Monte Sano Park, the Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge in Louisiana is making the case that Safe Routes to Parks benefits various agencies in meeting their own goals. Therefore, a couple of agencies are now working together to create safe and equitable access to and within Monte Sano Park. For example, BREC's Planning and Engineering Department is working with a consultant on the design of a bike/pedestrian trail that will connect to the park, and the Conservation Department is working on hosting cleanup days in the areas surrounding the park. In support of Safe Routes to Parks, the Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge added \$8,000 to its regular operating budget in 2018, which is dedicated to projects related to improving safe and equitable access to parks in low-income communities of color.

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](#).