



The Health Benefits of Parks and Their Economic Benefit

Communication Guide

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Photo on the cover: Communities with access to parks reap many different benefits. Photo credit: Tinsley Creative



Photo credit: freepik.com

Park projects create job opportunities, both during park construction and in ongoing park management.

Overview

This communication guide is intended to assist park professionals and their advocates in effectively communicating the insights of [The Health Benefits of Parks and Their Economic Benefit](#). It equips users to communicate with three distinct audiences: policymakers and elected officials, funders, and community members invested in the welfare of parks in their community.

This guide includes suggestions on how park and recreation professionals can use the data generated by the annual health cost benefits of parks calculator tool to develop locally relevant campaign materials that highlight robust data. By utilizing the resources provided, including tailored messages, social media content, and blog and newsletter materials, park professionals and their advocates will be able to clearly communicate about the significant health and economic impact of parks as outlined in the report.

Background and Context

The overarching goal of the [The Health Benefits of Parks and Their Economic Benefit](#) is to articulate the economic benefits that communities receive from high-quality parks where everyone has opportunities to access a park by walking, rolling, riding or driving. By showcasing how parks enhance property values and contribute to residents' overall well-being, we intend to strengthen the case for continued investment in these invaluable spaces.

The selection of the target audiences — policymakers, funders and passionate community members — is rooted in their vital roles in shaping the future of our parks. Policymakers hold the ability to enact change through legislative decisions, while funders provide the necessary resources for park development and maintenance. Engaged community members play a crucial role in advocating for the continued well-being of our parks.

NRPA funded the Urban Institute to develop [The Health Benefits of Parks and Their Economic Benefit](#), drawing from diverse sources to back up its findings. The report was created with input and review of a panel of park and recreation professionals. The report's purpose is to provide a comprehensive view of the economic impacts of the health benefits parks offer to local communities. This report serves as a critical tool to communicate the tangible and intangible advantages of parks, aiming to foster a deeper understanding of their economic benefits as those relate to health and development in communities across the nation.

Park professionals are encouraged to utilize the annual health cost benefits of parks using the calculator tool, which provides rich data and a tailored view for their specific communities. They can then integrate this localized view into the messaging toolkit's content to create a more tailored and compelling narrative.

Messaging by Audience

Policymakers and Elected Officials

Individual policymakers care about different things, and within each region, you can tailor these messages to fit the community. For example, some officials care about healthy communities and others reelection, but we are leaning into leaders who look to showcase strong leadership in the communities they serve.

As you read the following messages, think of stories that provide specific examples from your community to better illustrate the key points identified.

Vision: When everyone has access to quality parks, residents will experience improved health outcomes that lend themselves overall to more resilient, thriving communities. Parks play an integral role in the health, social and economic outcomes of residents in communities.

Values to tap: Elected officials and policymakers have a duty to protect and provide for their constituents. With that in mind, they play an integral role in ensuring their communities are healthy and thriving. With the increased challenges like strained health systems, increased impacts to mental health and climate change, public health is a priority area for local leaders. Parks play a critical role in reducing health expenditures in communities in a strained economic system when people have access to them and use them often. An elected official's investment in quality parks underscores their commitment to the community they serve.

Barriers to overcome: Elected officials constantly face competing priorities that stretch their budgets. Unfortunately, investing in parks to ensure their constituents have access to quality green spaces is not always a primary priority on their agendas. It is critical that park and recreation professionals communicate to elected officials that access to quality parks in their communities improves overall public health and reduces strain on local health services. In some communities, particularly those that have experienced disinvestment, elected officials also may face challenges navigating historical distrust. Elected officials and park and recreation leaders must dedicate resources and time to ensure historically underrepresented communities have a voice at the decision-making table. It is critical that park and recreation professionals communicate to elected officials the importance of trust building, community-led decision making and community engagement.

Ask: Prioritize and increase investments in park and recreation systems in our community. As residents continue to face challenges — including public health risks, climate change and other stressors — people want to feel connected and part of a community. Parks and green spaces and their programming can provide that. An investment in parks is an investment community long-term health, economic outcomes and environmental resiliency.



Photo credit: freepik.com

Public parks and green spaces are a means of preventative care for residents.

Values to tap (leadership): As an elected official, your goal is to lead with your constituents' health and happiness top of mind.

- As a community leader, you see the common good that parks have on our community and residents. Parks offer a multitude of benefits, from promoting physical activity and mental well-being to fostering social connections, environmental resilience and vibrant green economies.
.....
- Public parks and green spaces are a means of preventative care for your residents. Research has already demonstrated parks' insurmountable impacts on communities.
 - Parks and green spaces contribute physical health benefits equivalent to about \$2 billion in reduced health costs related to lack of physical activity in Massachusetts.
 - If all residents of [INSERT COMMUNITY] had access to a park within 10 minutes of their home, we could see \$[INSERT DOLLAR AMOUNT FROM CALCULATOR] worth of health benefits saved for our community. [INSERT COMMUNITY] needs great parks for everyone to enjoy and reap their incredible benefits.
.....
- An investment in parks will bring about significant economic returns for your community. In 2019, park and recreation operating expenses and capital produced \$218 billion in economic activity and supported nearly 1.3 million jobs.
.....
- Your investment also could yield significant returns in your community's environment, business development, tourism and property values.
.....
- Your investment could provide significant long-term impacts toward improved air quality, resiliency to increasing adverse weather events, and disaster planning and recovery, which affect the physical, mental and economic health of your community.
.....
- You have the power to ensure your local parks are well-resourced, offering residents the benefits that parks provide so your communities can thrive.

Barrier breaker (budget priority): By prioritizing quality public parks that are accessible and well-maintained, you are offering health benefits to residents and investing in a thriving community.

- Your community deserves to thrive. When your constituents have access to quality parks and recreation, they are more likely to experience improved mental and physical health and reduced emergency room visits and reliance on medication, ultimately leading to lower healthcare costs.
.....
- Holistically, parks are a smart investment. Investing in parks not only enriches the community's recreational and environmental resources, but also serves as an engine for economic growth. By providing access to new job opportunities, parks contribute to increased economic mobility, fostering a thriving and prosperous community.
.....
- A stronger investment in the development, redevelopment and maintenance of local parks and their programs is key not only to ensuring a thriving community but also showcasing your strong leadership and care for the communities you serve.

Ask (invest in parks): Prioritize investing in the development, redevelopment and maintenance of your local parks.

- Parks provide the public with low-cost or no-cost physical activities, like walking, hiking and biking. These activities help prevent increasingly common health conditions, such as obesity, anxiety, cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Invest in parks and recreation to show your constituents of all ages that their health and well-being are your top priorities.
.....
- You have the power to attract more businesses and jobs to your area when you invest in public parks. A commitment to improving your public parks is a commitment to improving your community's quality of life and attracting new residents to our community.
.....
- Parks provide long-term, sustainable solutions to climate change that support improved community health. Investing in green spaces is a multi-beneficial solution to improving the health of your community and their economic recovery.
.....
- Investing in parks and recreation helps communities thrive. Increased funding supports more jobs, creating more opportunities for residents to live and work in their own community.
.....
- Demonstrate strong leadership and care for the communities you serve. Your residents will thank you for it.
.....

Vision (healthy communities): With your leadership and investment, quality parks and green spaces will promote physical activity and mental well-being in your communities.

- The positive impact of parks leaves residents healthier, happier and less reliant on local medical and mental health services.
.....
- With your support, [INSERT COMMUNITY'S NAME] park and recreation professionals can continue nurturing and improving green spaces for all to enjoy and benefit from.



Photo credit: City of Palm Coast Recreation

Parks are spaces that promote a sense of well-being for everyone in the community.

Donors, Funders Focused on Investments in Social and Racial Equity Issues

Many philanthropic funders and donors care about the vast disparities in health, economic and social opportunities most prevalently seen in underserved communities. This messaging leans into their desire to close those gaps through their investment in the communities that need it most.

Vision: A future where everyone can benefit from great parks is within reach. Parks create healthier lives, stronger neighborhoods and places where everyone can thrive.

Values to tap

Charitable funders and donors care about social and racial justice issues that disproportionately impact underserved communities and/or communities of color. That includes mental and physical health and access to infrastructure and resources. When they look across communities from the wealthiest to the disinvested, it's not hard to see that not all parks are created the same or equal. Parks in underserved communities tend to lack the same structural soundness and community programs that parks in wealthier communities have, creating underutilized parks and ultimately poor resident health, environmental resiliency and economic outcomes in those communities.

Barriers to overcome

Funders' resources are split among numerous other philanthropic investments. Additionally, funders lack information about the impact of parks across communities. Park professionals need to clearly convey the impact that a funder's investment can have on the positive health outcomes of residents who reside near the parks and improve the community's overall economic health.

Ask

Make a financial commitment to invest in public parks, especially in the areas that need it most. Funders' support of parks will contribute to ensuring the preventative healthcare or mitigated health impacts that parks provide residents, as well as increase residents' economic mobility with access to green jobs right there in their community. Making parks a priority signals that funders are invested in creating health, environmental and economic equity in the areas that need it the most.



Photo credit: freepik.com

Parks create stronger neighborhoods and places where everyone can thrive.

Values to tap (challenge racism by increasing access to parks and resources): All communities should have access to sound infrastructure and resources to help their residents thrive. But not all communities have equal access to resources, including parks.

- Due to systemic racism and historical disinvestment, residents in underserved communities have limited access to parks and recreation and their physical, social and environmental benefits compared to residents in wealthier neighborhoods.
.....
- Research shows that when residents are active in their parks, the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and other debilitating health issues are reduced, leaving residents healthier.
.....
- Research shows that more affluent communities benefit from better air quality, reduced risk of flooding and other environmental benefits due to their quality of green space and tree cover over disinvested communities.
.....
- Exposure to air pollution is linked to many health problems, including cancer, respiratory diseases and heart disease. Outdoor air pollution is also linked to early death and those living in disinvested communities are at the highest risk. Investing in parks like green spaces and trees can help mitigate the issues caused by air pollution.
.....
- Your investment in park equity can go a long way to ensure all residents, no matter their neighborhood, have access to structurally sound and well-maintained parks. An investment in park equity will guarantee more positive health and economic outcomes. It's the right thing to do.

Barrier breaker (offer information on parks' impact): Quality parks serve as catalysts for increased physical activity, reduced stress levels and enhanced social cohesion within neighborhoods.

- These benefits translate into improved overall health outcomes, leading to stronger, happier and more resilient communities for all.
.....
- Proximity to green spaces has been associated with lower levels of stress and reduced symptoms for depression and anxiety, while interacting with nature can improve cognition for children with attention deficits and individuals with depression.
.....
- Supporting parks in under-resourced communities yields substantial benefits for the local community. By supporting projects that fund park development and maintenance, you are helping to stimulate economic growth. Investments improve quality of life for all, support the local business community and help attract more visitors to create thriving communities.
.....
- Park projects also create job opportunities, both during park construction and in ongoing park management, providing employment and income stability for residents. By investing in parks, you are directly contributing to a vibrant local economy with increased business activity, job creation and a higher standard of living for the entire community.

Ask (invest): Invest in creating and improving public parks in communities that need them the most.

- Your investment in parks and green spaces will enable under-resourced communities to take charge of their health. Local public parks are free for people to use and the environmental health impacts benefit broadly, which levels the playing field for everyone to achieve improved mental and physical health.
.....
- You can ensure every community has access to the transformative power and health benefits of parks and recreation while helping to break the cycle of health inequity.
.....
- Your contribution will directly impact the lives of countless individuals, improving their overall health and quality of life.

Vision (inclusive access to parks): A future where everyone has the chance to thrive and enjoy the benefits of a quality park is well within our reach.

- Together, we can improve park access and health outcomes in every community.
.....
- When people can access and use high-quality parks in their communities, their well-being is improved overall. Your support helps improve that access, thereby creating more just and inclusive communities.

People Who Care About Parks

Most people want to have a local park in close proximity to their residence to enjoy time spent in green spaces with family and friends. In fact, research indicates that proximity to and use of parks are associated with increased levels of physical activity and improved physical health outcomes.

Values to tap

People love parks because they are beautiful and restful, and they offer outdoor space for people to enjoy their surroundings with family and friends. Parks are places to relax, exercise and establish a healthy lifestyle; enjoy family and friends; and even socialize at community gatherings.

Barriers to overcome

Not all parks are created equal. The good news is residents can get involved to raise awareness about park inequities to ensure programming and opportunities are available to all. Residents can reach out to their elected officials to ask for increased investment in improved green spaces and programming. Engaged community members are often instrumental in securing grants, corporate partnerships and nonprofit support that move toward a more equitable park system.

Ask

For residents in the community, it is important that they speak up and show their local park professionals and elected officials how much their local park means to them, their family and the community. Residents play a role in helping create and maintain great parks and thriving communities.

Vision

Every person in every community deserves to enjoy the transformative power of parks and recreation, and we have the power to make our parks great. When we do, our neighbors and friends are more likely to join us in experiencing the parks that make a community great. They then can experience the positive impact parks have on their mental and physical well-being from spending time in green spaces.

Values to tap (access to parks to enjoy time with family and friends): Everyone should be able to enjoy their local parks regardless of where they live.

- We love our parks because we use them to exercise, unwind, rejuvenate and connect with our family, friends and community.
.....
- Our parks are an easy and accessible means to experience the transformative benefits of nature. All communities should be able to experience the serenity that we do in our parks.
.....
- As our community navigates health and social challenges, parks are paramount in supporting mental health and fostering happiness.
.....
- Whether through walking, organized sports or some other physical activity, parks provide a comfortable and reliable space to connect with others for little to no cost. As a result, our communities are healthier and spend less money on health services.
.....
- These outdoor spaces that we enjoy alongside our neighbors provide us with a much-needed respite from the pressures of daily life, enabling us to find solace, reflect and reconnect with ourselves, our family and friends, and our community.

Barrier breaker (empower people to support an investment in well-maintained parks): We all have a role to play in ensuring the parks in our areas are safe and well-maintained for us to enjoy with family and friends.

- By ensuring the parks in our areas are safe and well-maintained, we can create a more inclusive and healthier community where all of our neighbors can reap the positive outcomes that stem from spending time in a park or green space.
.....
- Our parks are vital to providing environmental benefits that provide protection from heat, air quality, flooding and other issues that will continue to impact our communities' health and economy.

Ask (use your voice to show support for your parks): Use your voice to share with your elected official how much your local park means to you, your family and your community. Your voice matters.

- It is crucial to let your local park professionals, community leaders and elected officials know how parks contribute to your health, happiness and community connections. Share how they can support your continued enjoyment of your community green spaces.
.....
- We all have a part to play to keep our parks in great condition. We can work together to ensure our parks remain inviting, safe and healthy spaces for everyone.

Vision (community effort to keep parks maintained): When we make it our business to keep our parks beautiful, they can continue to serve as a vital oasis of tranquility and joy for generations to come.

- Our parks are spaces that nurture mental health and promote a sense of belonging and well-being for everyone in the community.
- A future where everyone in every community has access to a quality park is possible. We all deserve to reap the incredible health benefits of enjoying our local parks.

Sample Content

The following pages provide examples of content you can use to communicate with the three identified audiences via both short- and long-form written copy and digital media. While we recommend using certain messages with specific audiences, you are the expert on your community. You know which messages will resonate best, so you should feel empowered to use your discretion to determine where or how you use these templated messages.

You will see short-form content intended for you to use on your agency's social media platforms, including Facebook and X, formerly known as Twitter. However, perhaps your agency has printed materials that these messages may be better suited for. Feel free to use them there!

Similarly, you will see templated blog and email content. While those are our recommended formats for those messages, you may use them in varied formats if your audiences communicate better that way.



Photo credit: City of Goose Creek

Parks create a healthier, happier community for all.

Social Media Content

Economic and Health Benefits of Parks and Recreation

These messages will be of interest to elected officials, policymakers and donors in your community.

Facebook Post

- Did you know that parks provide increased health benefits, like improved mental and physical health among locals and reduced emergency room visits AND help create job opportunities by attracting businesses to our area?
.....
- Did you know that parks provide benefits to our community, like reduced heat, clean air and reduced flooding, that improve our health and economy?
.....
- It's true! In 2019, park and recreation operating expenses and capital produced \$218 billion in economic activity and supported nearly 1.3 million jobs. Source: National Recreation and Park Association.
.....
- As for the health side of things, we could see \$[INSERT DOLLAR AMOUNT FROM CALCULATOR] worth of health benefits saved in [INSERT COMMUNITY] if all residents had access to a park within 10 minutes of their home. [INSERT COMMUNITY] needs great parks for everyone to enjoy and reap their incredible benefits.
.....
- Parks attract visitors, boost tourism and generate revenue for local businesses and hotels. Plus, when people can access and use high-quality parks in their communities, their well-being is improved overall.
.....
- An investment in parks is a direct contribution to creating a vibrant local economy with increased business activity, job creation and a higher standard of living for the entire community.
.....
- Holistically, parks are a smart investment. Investing in parks not only enriches the community's recreational and environmental resources, but also serves as an engine for economic growth.



Photo credit: City of Mesa Parks Recreation and Commercial Facilities

Parks promote physical activity, mental well-being and foster social connections.

LinkedIn Post

- When our local officials invest in public parks and green spaces, they are investing in a healthier and resilient [INSERT COMMUNITY].
- If all residents had access to a park within 10 minutes of their home, our community would save \$[INSERT DOLLAR AMOUNT FROM CALCULATOR] on health expenses. In other words, taking advantage of the incredible benefits that parks afford will improve our overall health.
- We need more funding to support our parklands and recreation programs. This way, we can create a healthier, happier and more prosperous community for all.
- Parks promote physical activity, improve mental well-being, social connections, environmental resilience and vibrant green economies. When we have access to quality parks and recreation, we have fewer visits to the emergency room and reduced healthcare costs. If all residents had access to a park within 10 minutes of their home, our community would save \$[INSERT DOLLAR AMOUNT FROM CALCULATOR] on health expenses.
- Additionally, quality parks and green spaces are a magnet for new residents and businesses, contributing to a thriving and prosperous community. By prioritizing the development, redevelopment and maintenance of quality public parks, our leaders will not only offer health benefits to our residents, but also ensure the prosperity of our [INSERT COMMUNITY NAME].

X Post

- In 2019, park and recreation operating expenses and capital produced \$218 billion in economic activity and supported nearly 1.3 million jobs. Investing in parks and recreation will help [INSERT COMMUNITY NAME] thrive and make residents healthier and happier.
- Right now, only [INSERT PERCENTAGE FROM CALCULATOR] percent of [INSERT COMMUNITY NAME] residents have access to a park within 10 minutes of their home. If that were true for 100 percent of our community, we would collectively save \$[INSERT DOLLAR AMOUNT FROM CALCULATOR] in health expenses.



Photo credit: City of Palm Coast Recreation

By ensuring our parks are well-maintained, we create a healthier community for all our neighbors to enjoy.

Addressing Racial and Social Equity Issues Through Parks and Recreation

These messages will be of interest to donors and funders focused on addressing equity issues in your community.

Facebook Post

- Great parks make our communities better. In [COMMUNITY NAME], [PERCENTAGE FROM CALCULATOR]% of residents live within a 10-minute walk to their local park.
.....
- If more people had easier access to parks, the entire community would benefit. Think of it this way: Playing, walking and exercising in our local parks can prevent chronic health conditions, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Additionally, living close to a park can provide health benefits from cool and cleaner air, reduced flooding and other environmental benefits that impact health.

LinkedIn Post

- Everyone deserves to have a great park in their neighborhood.
.....
- An investment in park equity can go a long way to ensure all residents, no matter their neighborhood, have access to structurally sound and well-maintained parks. Increased park equity will guarantee more positive health and economic outcomes.
.....
- It's the right thing to do.

X Post

- Public parks are free for everyone to experience their incredible benefits. However, systemic racism and disinvestment have limited access to parks and recreation in underserved neighborhoods. An investment in parks will enable under-resourced communities to thrive.



Photo credit: Grand Prairie Parks Arts and Recreation

Parks improve the quality of life for residents of all ages.

How Parks Create Healthy, Vibrant, Resilient Communities

These messages are important to people in your community who care about your parks.

Facebook Post

- We love our parks and all they do for us. They provide spaces and programs for us to connect and exercise and to help us become a healthier community. We all have a role to play in ensuring everyone in our community has access to these benefits.
- When we make it our business to keep our parks beautiful and resilient, they will continue to serve as a vital oasis of tranquility and joy for generations to come.
- Did you know walking in your park is a great way for you to improve your health while also saving money?
- There's no need for costly fitness memberships, and as a bonus, parks offer a beautiful place to address leading health concerns. If you spend time in our parks doing physical activities, you too can reap the positive outcomes that stem from spending time in a park or green space.
- Did you know just having a park in your community improves your health? Cleaner and cooler air are just two ways they improve your health through environmental benefits.

LinkedIn Post

- All communities should be able to experience the serenity that we do in our parks. We walk, play, gather and connect with our neighbors in our parks.
- And if we want to continue reaping the benefits of these spaces, we have to use our voice to let our leaders know how much they mean to us.
- Speak up! Share how our local leaders can support our continued enjoyment of our community green spaces.

X Post

- As our community navigates health and social challenges, parks are paramount in fostering happiness. They enable us to put our mental and physical health first. Let's work together to ensure our parks remain inviting, safe and enjoyable spaces for everyone.



Photo credit: NYC Parks and Recreation

Parks provide fun ways to connect with friends in the community.

Blog Content

Policymakers and Elected Officials

Headline: City Leaders Who Invest in Parks Invest in Community Health

Byline: Park Professionals

Park professionals across the country often face challenges — managing limited community resources and investments to develop sound structural green space and programming for the families in the communities they serve. As park professionals, our goals are many — such as regular park maintenance, robust activity programming, and safe spaces to ensure healthy, thriving communities — but our resources are slim. The plight is no different here in **[INSERT COUNTY/COMMUNITY]**.

When you look across communities from the wealthiest to the disinvested, it's not hard to see that not all parks are created the same or equal. In fact, many parks across the country in marginalized communities require additional investment and resources to catch up to the beautiful and beneficial green sanctuaries in wealthier communities. This leaves park leaders at a severe economic disadvantage when faced with the catastrophic costs that come along with fixing structural issues, renovating recreation space and ensuring well-managed and resourced recreational facilities.

As a community leader, you see the common good that parks have on the community and its residents. Research demonstrates parks' insurmountable impact on communities. Public parks and green spaces are a means of preventative care for your residents, because they provide low-cost or no-cost physical activities, like walking, hiking and biking. These activities help prevent chronic health conditions, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes, and reduce emergency room visits. Parks also provide clean and cooler air, reduce the impacts of flooding and other environmental beneficial factors that impact health. Additionally, parks attract visitors, boost tourism and create green jobs, generating revenue for local businesses.

Public health has been an increasing priority area for local leaders, and we know that, as our local official here in **[NAME CITY]**, your priorities are the same. Parks play a critical role in reducing health expenditures in communities already facing a strained economic system when people have access to them and use them often. For example, in Massachusetts, parks and green spaces contribute physical health benefits equivalent to about \$2 billion in reduced health costs related to lack of physical activity. In **[INSERT COMMUNITY]**, our parks contribute to the mental and physical health benefits equivalent to **[\$[INSERT DOLLAR AMOUNT FROM CALCULATOR]]** in reduced health expenses.



Photo credit: freepik.com

Parks provide spaces for us to connect and exercise and to help us become a healthier community.

But that's not all parks do for a community or its residents. In 2019, park and recreation operating expenses and capital produced \$218 billion in economic activity and supported nearly 1.3 million jobs. An investment in parks also will yield significant returns in your community's environment, business development, tourism and property values.

Holistically, parks are a smart investment. Investing in parks not only enriches the community's recreational and health resources as well as increases their resiliency, but also serves as an engine for economic growth. By providing access to new job opportunities, parks contribute to increased economic mobility, fostering a thriving and prosperous community. As you can see, parks' positive impacts are many. Overall, they leave residents healthier, happier and less reliant on local medical and mental health services.

We see your commitment to protecting and providing for your constituents to ensure our communities are healthy and thriving. With your support, **INSERT COMMUNITY NAME** park and recreation professionals can continue nurturing and improving green spaces for all to enjoy.

Demonstrate strong leadership and care for the communities you serve. Your residents will thank you for it.

Donors, Funders Focused on Investments in Social and Racial Equity Issues

Headline: Creating Equitable Green Sanctuaries Together

Byline: Park Professionals Everywhere

Imagine being a part of creating a future where all parks are created equal. We are all rooted in the same principles to build strong, healthy communities through robust parks and programs. However, when you look across communities from the wealthiest to the disadvantaged, it's not hard to see that not all parks are created the same or equal.

Today, we exist in a society where due to systemic racism and historical disinvestment, many communities across the country have limited access to parks and recreation programming compared to residents in wealthier neighborhoods. The parks that do exist in these marginalized communities often lack the same structural soundness and robust community programs that parks in wealthier communities have, creating underutilized and environmentally unjust parks and ultimately poor resident health and economic outcomes in those communities.



Photo credit: City of Plymouth Parks and Recreation

Parks offer positive impacts on our mental and physical health from spending time in green spaces.

Accessible and well-maintained green space is critical to helping residents incorporate outdoor physical activity into their daily regimen and leverage the benefits of living near green space. Many residents in underserved communities are often faced with barriers to establishing healthier lifestyles, such as lack of extra income to afford gym memberships, long work hours that often restrict daily access to health facilities, family and childcare obligations, and exposures to environmental injustices that further reduce their access to the transformative health benefits that parks offer. This leaves parks as the only free opportunity to achieve preventive healthcare.

When residents have easy access to parks in their communities, studies show they experience improvements in their overall physical health. Right now, only [INSERT PERCENTAGE FROM CALCULATOR] percent of [INSERT COMMUNITY] residents have access to a park within 10 minutes of their home. If that were true for 100 percent of our community, we would collectively save \$[INSERT DOLLAR AMOUNT FROM CALCULATOR] in health expenses.

An [Urban Institute report](#) funded by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) shows that when residents are active in their parks, the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and other debilitating health issues are reduced, leaving residents healthier. Evidence also supports the connection between parks and green spaces and children's physical health. A study using survey data of Latinx children in Houston found that those living in areas with a higher density of tree cover had lower levels of obesity and a higher health-related quality of life (Kim Lee, and Sohn 2016). Proximity and exposure to trees and greenery also can promote improvements in mental health by providing psychological relaxation and stress alleviation, as well as have substantial health impacts due to quality air and reduced heat.

If the health benefits weren't enough, an investment in better, healthier green spaces also yields job opportunities, both during park construction and in ongoing park management, providing employment and income stability for residents who need it the most. An investment in parks directly contributes to a vibrant local economy with increased business activity and a higher standard of living for the entire community.

We Need Your Support to Create Equitable Parks

We care about the families and friends who frequent our parks and participate in the recreational programming we offer. Our goal is to create communities that offer residents safe spaces to gather, exercise and become healthier versions of themselves. And for those spaces to benefit the communities they serve through cleaner air and cooling their neighborhoods. But we can't do it alone. Your support will help break the cycle of health and park inequity in marginalized communities across the country, starting with [NAME CITY/COMMUNITY]. We need your help to ensure every family has access to the transformative power and health benefits that parks and recreation has to offer.

Public parks are free to use, which levels the playing field for everyone to achieve improved mental and physical health. Your investment in parks and green spaces will enable residents in under-resourced communities to take charge of their physical and mental health and improve their overall quality of life.

Together, we can improve park access and health outcomes, thereby creating more just and inclusive communities.



Email Content

People Who Care About Parks

Subject: Share Your Voice: Let's Keep Our Parks Happy and Healthy!

Body text: Dear [ENTER FAMILY NAME],

It's families like you who make [ENTER COMMUNITY NAME] such a happy and healthy place to call home. At [AGENCY NAME], we are keenly focused on ensuring our community has nice parks that offer vibrant green spaces with robust recreational programming for you and your family to enjoy.

Our staff here at [INSERT RECREATION ORGANIZATION NAME] understands how important your community park is to exercise, unwind, rejuvenate and connect with your family and friends. Did you also know that parks are an easy and accessible means to experience the transformative benefits of nature?

As our community navigates health and social challenges, parks are paramount in supporting mental health and fostering happiness. Whether through walking, organized sports or some other physical activity, parks provide a comfortable and reliable space to connect with others for little to no cost. These spaces also are sanctuaries for respite for our community members and improve our mental wellness and help provide clean air and cool our communities. As a result, families like yours are healthier and spend less money on health-associated costs.

To deliver the best-quality park and recreation services for the community to enjoy, we need to hear from you — the residents who help us make parks a better place. It is crucial to let your local park professional and elected official know how parks contribute to your health, happiness and community connections. Reach out to your local leader at [ENTER ELECTED OFFICIAL EMAIL or WEBSITE] and share how they can support your continued enjoyment of your community green spaces.

Using your voice will help us ensure the parks in your area are safe and well-maintained. We all have a part to play in keeping our parks in great condition. We can work together to ensure our parks remain inviting, safe and enjoyable spaces for everyone.

Best,
Staff Name OR Agency Name

How to Reach the Audiences

As NRPA members, park and recreation professionals are key messengers to reach the above audiences because they are the keepers of the parks and green spaces that communities need to thrive. The following table indicates channels through which they can communicate with those audiences using content provided in this toolkit.

Priority audience	What you can do	Best channel to reach target audience
Elected Officials, Policymakers	Share and create educational content. Host community events and invite this audience to attend. Uplift these events and resources on social media and in the media.	Community events, social media, local media
Donors and Funders	Uplift the impact of programming and community gathering that takes place at community parks. Emphasize the disparity of parks by neighborhood to make clear that park equity is a priority. Share educational resources about health and safety for local community members. Ensure they receive invites to all community events to create another stream of engagement and touchpoint.	Blogs, email newsletters, social media, community events
People who care about parks	Share and create educational content. Host community events (e.g., fitness classes, nutrition workshops). Partner with local organizations to host events in parks and recreation spaces that include a family and friend element for larger engagement and participation. Uplift events on social media.	Social media, direct mail, email



Photo credit: freepik.com

The outdoor spaces that we enjoy alongside our neighbors provide us with a much-needed respite from the pressures of daily life.

Paid Social Media Strategy

Paid digital communication — including but not limited to social platforms — provides an accessible, scalable opportunity for park and recreation organizations to raise awareness about the economic impact of parks in their communities and provide the target audiences with information to act to support and serve these spaces.

The following summaries outline what an effective paid digital plan could include and would require at low-, medium- and high-investment levels.

Facebook Ads

Strategy

Facebook ads provide an opportunity to deliver bold, graphical ads with high viewability to a large percentage of the electorate.

Recommended budget

\$20 CPM (cost per 1,000 impressions) for geographic/demographic/interest targeting.

Targeting

Each organization can target its communities by ZIP code and interests.

Facebook also enables ad targeting by demographic and interest-based targeting; more information can be found [here](#). We recommend targeting by ZIP code.

Timeline

Ad creative typically takes 48-72 hours for platform approval.

Assets required

Facebook ads contain post copy, headline copy, description copy, a destination URL and an image or video. More detailed specs for Facebook ads can be found [here](#).

Google

Strategy

Search ads provide the opportunity to get your messaging in front of users who are seeking information on specific, relevant topics and don't require a substantial investment in either media spend or creative development.

These topics could include fitness classes, nutrition workshops, community gardening resources, etc.

Recommended budget

Parks professionals can run effective search campaigns for as little as \$25/day.

Within the Google Ads interface, users set daily budgets, but actual spend is determined by search volume (up to the maximum daily budget).

Some days, Google Search Ads may spend above the daily budget but will never spend more than the number of days the campaign is running multiplied by the daily budget in a given month.

Targeting

Consider combining narrower keywords ("fitness classes near me") with broad geographics (citywide) and broad keywords ("health" "workout plan") with narrower geographies (specific ZIP codes).

Timeline

Search ads are generally approved and live within 24 hours of submission.

Earned Media Approach

Developing cohesive press releases and pitch notes that effectively highlight events and other efforts is a great way to build media relationships and garner a steady drumbeat of coverage that engages your audiences and generates awareness of the work happening in your community to ensure residents are healthy, happy and thriving.

A standard earned media strategy should include the following tactics:

- Reaching out to a targeted list of journalists at local digital, print and radio outlets who cover physical and mental health. There is an opportunity there to tell the stories of how local parks and green spaces are a means for preventative care for residents in the community.
- Pitch reporters at mainstream outlets with blog posts that offer humanized storytelling on the benefits of parks, painting your members as thought leaders on the topic for the reporters' media stories and needs.
- Prioritize outreach to key media targets based on paid media placements, such as an op-ed in a top-tiered media outlet or publication or upcoming community events where you can easily promote your work and offer reporters access to interview key community leaders and directors and your organization.

Build relationships with reporters at your local media outlets so that they think of you and members of your organization as spokespeople for park equity and their impact on communities' health.

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This resource was informed by existing resources, conversations and tools, including but not limited to Urban Institute's [*A Framework for Assessing Equitable Health Outcomes of Parks*](#) and other related material.