

# Creating Equity-Based System Master Plans

## System-Wide Park Master Plans – Grounded in Equity

True to the very philosophy of public parks and recreation is the idea that all people—no matter the color of their skin, age, income level or ability—have access to programs, facilities, places and spaces that make their lives and communities great. Yet, due to a history in our country of racially discriminatory practices and policies in parks, land use and development, not all people have fair and just access to parks and green spaces, recreation centers and programs. A system-wide park master plan is a tool that can help us understand the history and current barriers to park access and set a vision and plan to remove these inequities and ensure parks and open space are providing the most benefit to communities. Thus, it is essential that this plan and process are grounded in community engagement, equity and inclusion. Our vision is that everyone has the just and fair quantity, proximity and connections to quality parks and green space, recreation facilities and programs that are safe, inclusive, culturally relevant and welcoming.

A system-wide park master plan is a comprehensive document and process that include an internal assessment, community engagement, resources and data collection, and development of an implementation plan.

1. **[Internal Assessment](#)**: Before starting the master planning process, lay the foundation for the vision and mission of your agency and the plan. Then, assess your capacity and understand what your agency needs to work with the community, elected officials and others in the development and approval of the plan.
2. **[Community Engagement](#)**: Work with the community in all aspects of the master plan process to ensure that the community has a voice and decision-making power in data collection, analysis, implementation plan and execution. To create an equitable plan, ensure that the process allows for under-represented groups and communities to participate in this decision making.
3. **[Resources & Data Collection](#)**: Conduct data collection and analysis to prioritize resource allocation based on level of need for both park access as well as outcomes associated with park access such as physical activity and climate resiliency. Include both qualitative and quantitative analysis in this data collection to understand where gaps and inequities in distribution, park quality, safety and inclusion may exist. These measures include geographic information systems (GIS), community engagement, audits and resource analysis.
4. **[Implementation](#)**: Create a realistic action plan based on needs identified and current and future resource, partnership and funding scenarios. If there are anticipated gaps in

funding, outline a plan to close the gap and how you will prioritize resources in the short term.

## NRPA's Working Definition of Equitable Park & Recreation Access

The just and fair **quantity, proximity** and **connections** to **quality** parks and green space, recreation facilities, as well as programs that are **safe, inclusive, culturally relevant** and **welcoming** to everyone. When people have just and fair access, our **health and social wellbeing** improve, and our communities can protect and better **recover from environmental, social and economic challenges**.

## A Multi-Benefit Focused Approach

Grounding your process and final master plan on the multi-benefits that parks bring to communities will ensure you are positively impacting communities. It will also help gain support from multisector partners and stakeholders and demonstrate that parks are a vital community infrastructure.

### Health

Parks are a fundamental component of overall health and wellness. Use health outcomes to prioritize resources and quantify just how much your parks and plan could be impacting the health and medical savings of your community.

### Economic Impact

Parks are a cornerstone to improving a region's quality of life — setting a bold but realistic plan can help entice employers and workers to an area, boost economic development, visitor spending and increase property values. It is also important for the plan to consider negative economic impacts that can result in displacement of people from the community.

### Active Transportation

A system-wide park plan can organize the connectivity of trails and open space to ensure there are options for active transportation and can also build from or be the foundation for an active transportation plan.

### Climate Resiliency

Parks are a critical part of our infrastructure when it comes to addressing the effects of climate change. A system-wide park plan can prioritize where sustainability practices, such as green stormwater infrastructure, may have the most benefit based on health and environmental outcomes.