



Social Equity and Parks and Recreation

Our nation's public parks and recreation services should be equally accessible and available to all people regardless of income level, ethnicity, gender, ability, or age. Public parks, recreation services and recreation programs including the maintenance, safety, and accessibility of parks and facilities, should be provided on an equitable basis to all citizens of communities served by public agencies. Social equity is a critical responsibility borne by every public park and recreation agency and the professionals that operate them. It is a right, not just a privilege, for people nationwide to have safe healthful access to parks and recreation.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) believes park and recreation agencies, through the provision of equal access to parks and recreation, should cultivate community ties through programs and services for all which produces public benefits by connecting people more deeply to the fabric of the community. This sense of connectedness makes communities livable and desirable.

The benefits of social equity and universal access to public parks and recreation are many, including:

- Public enjoyment and engagement. Where parks and open space are plentiful and recreation services strong, residents enjoy the closest attachment and engagement within their communities; and studies indicate higher levels of local gross domestic product and economic well-being;
- Quality recreation time with family and friends. Parks and recreation services provide a space and a reason to partake in enjoying quality time, relaxation, and fun among family members and friends, thus strengthening the social and familial bonds that provide balance and satisfaction in life;
- Improvement of mental and physical health. Parks and recreation can reduce the impacts of chronic diseases, especially in such vulnerable populations as children, seniors, and the underserved; and
- Measurable decreases in rates of crime and other detrimental activities. Communities are safer as a result of a wholesome atmosphere created by well-managed parks and recreation services in communities through healthy activities and programming for all people.

NRPA encourages initiatives that increase social equity in state and local park and recreation agencies and their communities. NRPA works to achieve these outcomes through legislative and advocacy efforts, research, and knowledge sharing, and providing practical tools to public park and recreation agencies across the country.

Upholding social equity is one of the core means of assuring the value of parks and recreation for future generations.

Supporting Points

The following demonstrate support for social equity as it relates to parks and recreation.

- Living close to parks and other recreation facilities is consistently related to higher physical activity levels for both adults and youth.
- Adolescents with easy access to multiple recreation facilities were more physically active and less likely to be overweight or obese than adolescents without access to such facilities.
- Organized park programs and supervision may increase use of parks and playgrounds and may also increase physical activity, particularly among youths.
- A study conducted on the Wilmington, Delaware, park and recreation system in 2009 revealed that approximately 15,498 Wilmingtonians actively participate enough in parks to have a positive impact on their health. Of that total, 13,996 were under the age of 65 while 1,502 were over the age of 65. Residents of Wilmington saved \$4.3million in health care costs as a result of park use in 2008.
- People's perception of their community's performance in social offerings, openness and beauty, which includes the availability of parks and green spaces, has a greater impact on their emotional bonds to a place than their demographic characteristics, according to the three-year Soul of the Community study.
- A 2011 study from the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts Amherst highlighted that the construction of cycling infrastructure creates an average of 11.4 jobs per \$1million spent, versus construction of road infrastructure which creates an average of 7.8 jobs per \$1 million spent.
- An economic study conducted in Long Island, New York, indicated the region's parks and open spaces generate an annual economic benefit of \$2.74 billion for local government and tax payers.
- The study also revealed that the development of a new residential area is eight times more costly to the public than conserving Long Island's parks and public space.
- In 2011, the Summer Night Lights program, an anti-gang initiative in Los Angeles that involves keeping parks open at night with extensive programming and free food, has led to a reduction in gang-related homicides in areas surrounding these particular parks by 57 percent. Furthermore, gun fire has decreased by 55 percent, and the number of victims shot has decreased by 45 percent.
- The Kansas City Police Department reported that in 2008 crime decreased by 74 percent in Kansas City's Kessler Park when 2.6miles of Cliff Drive, a state scenic byway located in the park, was turned car-free on weekends.

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