



**Safe Routes**  
**PARTNERSHIP**  
*Active Paths for Equity & Health*

# Safe Routes to Parks: How to Get There Together!

Lansing, Michigan  
February 15, 2024



## **MISSION**

The mission of the Safe Routes Partnership is to advance safe walking and rolling to and from schools and in everyday life, improving the health and well-being of people of all races, income levels, and abilities, and building healthy, thriving communities for everyone.



# About Me

## Vanessa Cascio

Policy & Program Manager at Safe Routes Partnership

- From: Tucson, Arizona
- Favorite travel modes: Walking, public transit, biking
- Loves: Sunshine, baking chocolate chip cookies

Want to get in touch?

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## Goals

- Understand Safe Routes to Parks and why it's useful
- Identify actionable examples to promote safer walking and biking to parks and other everyday destinations
- Articulate why equity is an essential part of this work and how to embed it in what you do
- Build community and excitement for this work



Photo credit: Blue Zones Hawaii



# Agenda

- Introduction
- Reflection
- What is Safe Routes to Parks?
- Defining Engagement & Equity
- Tools & Actions for Equitable Engagement
- Sustaining Safe Routes to Parks
- Closing

## Reflection: Why are you at this session?

- Write down 2-3 big goals that you have related to walking/rolling/parks/access to everyday destinations.
- What are some of the challenges or questions you face as you work toward those goals?





# What is Safe Routes to Parks?





**Safe Routes to Parks** is a movement to make access to great parks safer, more convenient, and more equitable for people walking, biking, and taking public transportation.





## Safe Routes to Parks means...

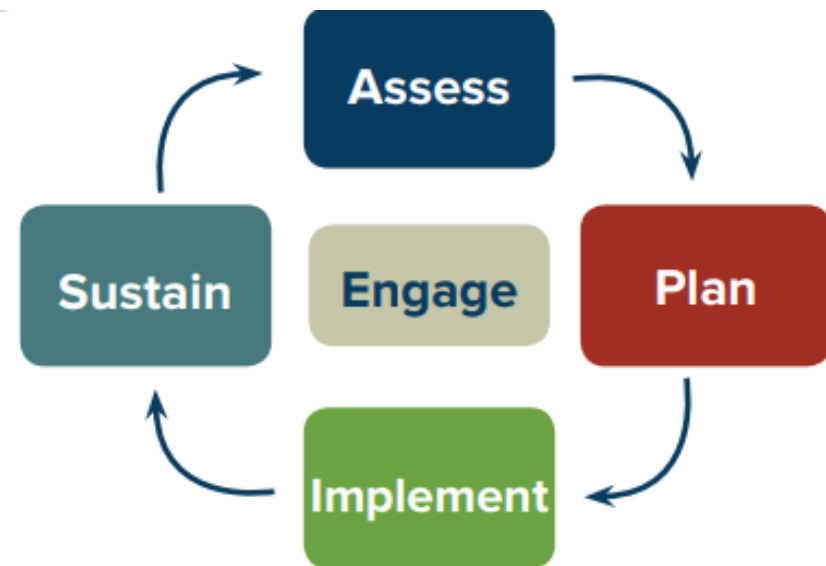
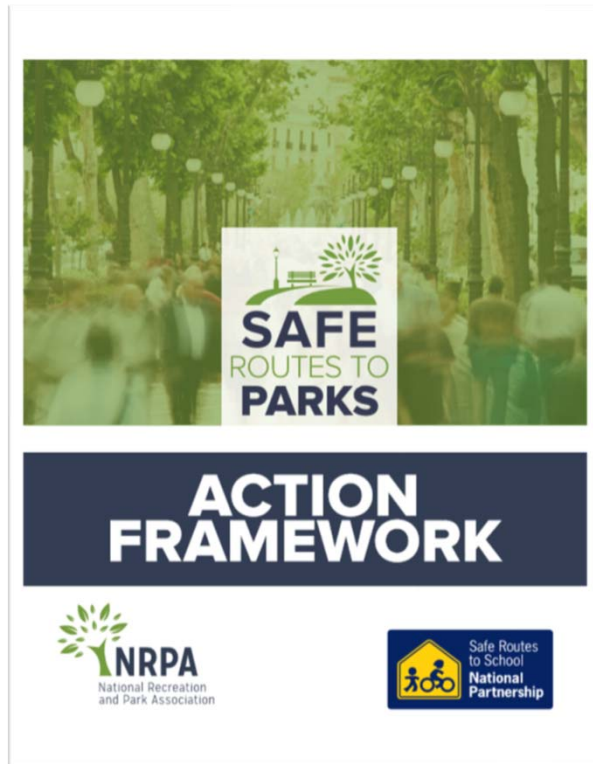
- Convenient, affordable transportation options (walk, bike, transit) along routes that are safe from traffic and personal danger for people of all ages and abilities.
- Routes start or end at well-maintained, well-programmed parks conveniently located within a 10-minute walk of where people live.
- Long-Term Goal:
  - Improve health and well-being for people of all ages, races, abilities, and income levels.



# Safe Routes to Parks Across the Country



# The Safe Routes to Parks Framework



# Why Safe Routes to Parks?



Photo Credit: Cultiva La Salud (Merced, CA)

- New Partnerships
- Interest groups that wouldn't normally be interested in walking and biking
- Funding and opportunities for bundling projects
- Expanding the network

# Safe Routes to Parks Boost Health

- Parks boost physical activity when coupled with at least one other “intervention.”
- Every dollar (\$1) spent on interventions to improve access to parks led to **\$3.00 worth of benefits** – including improved health due to physical activity.

## Physical Activity: Park, Trail, and Greenway Infrastructure Interventions when Combined with Additional Interventions

Print

Snapshot

What the CPSTF Found

Supporting Materials

Considerations for Implementation

### Summary of CPSTF Finding

The Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF) recommends park, trail, and greenway infrastructure interventions when combined with additional interventions to increase physical activity. Evidence from the systematic review shows these interventions increase the number of people who engage in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity in the park, trail, or greenway. Studies also show increases in the number of people who use the park, trail, or greenway.

There were no economic studies that evaluated park, trail, and greenway infrastructure interventions when combined with additional interventions. However, CPSTF finds the economic benefits exceed the cost for park, trail, and greenway infrastructure interventions when implemented alone.

CPSTF finds insufficient evidence for park, trail, and greenway infrastructure interventions when implemented alone.

### Intervention

These interventions combine infrastructure interventions with one or more additional interventions. Park, trail, and greenway infrastructure interventions improve the built and natural environments by creating or enhancing public locations for physical activity, relaxation, social interaction, and enjoyment. Locations include the following:

- Parks designated public areas that often combine greenery with paths, facilities for physical activity and recreation, and places for relaxation and social interaction
- Trails and Greenways routes for walking, hiking, or cycling in urban, suburban, or rural areas (e.g., “rails to trails” conversion projects). These may involve street conversions that provide opportunities for walking and cycling (most often in urban areas).

Additional interventions include the following:



# Parks boost physical activity when paired with...



- Community engagement
- Structured programming
- Public awareness
- Access enhancements





Are there opportunities to include parks, greenways, and trails in your work?



# Defining Equity and Engagement





# Equitable Community Engagement...

- Centers communities most impacted, especially **communities of color** and **low-income communities**
- Works towards building community-led solutions to community priorities through **relationship-building** and **trust**
- Shifts **power and decision-making** to community members



SAFE ACCESS TO PARKS IS A RIGHT &  
A NECESSITY FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES.



Parks offer abundant physical, social, and mental health benefits to people playing, exercising, and spending time in them.

**PEOPLE WHO LIVE WITHIN WALKING  
DISTANCE OF A PARK VISIT MORE OFTEN AND  
GET MORE OF THE BENEFITS.**

2/3 of urban  
Americans live within  
a 10-minute walk of  
their nearest park



One third of urban  
Americans live more  
than a 10-minute walk  
from their nearest park  
and, on average, visit  
half as often.

LIVING NEAR A PARK DOESN'T ALWAYS  
MEAN IT'S SAFE OR EASY TO GET THERE.



Especially for kids, older adults, and people with disabilities.

## COMMUNITIES WITH SIDEWALKS



High-income



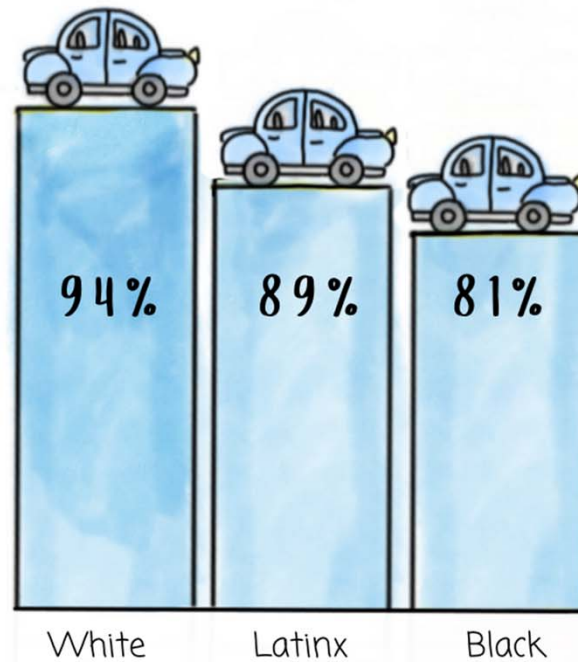
Low-income

### **ALL STREETS ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL.**

All streets are not created equal. It's a lot harder to walk or roll anywhere when your neighborhood lacks sidewalks, crosswalks, lighting, and walking and biking paths.

## WALKABLE PARKS MATTER BECAUSE NOT EVERYONE HAS ACCESS TO A CAR

Households with Access to an Automobile by Race



People of color are more than twice as likely to not have a car (14%) than white people (6%).

A PARK'S LOCATION MATTERS, BUT THE QUALITY OF ITS FACILITIES ARE IMPORTANT, TOO.



ON AVERAGE, PEOPLE 65+ MAKE UP 20% OF THE POPULATION



...BUT ONLY 4% OF PARK USERS.

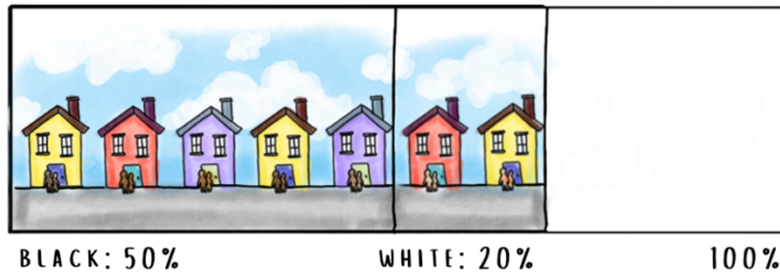


When walking loops are present in parks, there are 2x as many older adults using the space.

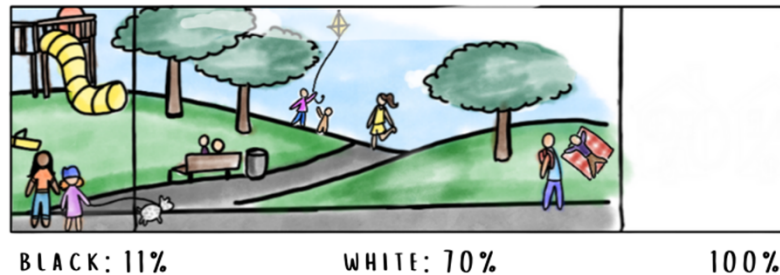
SYSTEMIC RACISM AND OVERPOLICING ARE  
ADDITIONAL BARRIERS TO PARK ACCESS FOR  
PEOPLE OF COLOR ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

TEXAS, USA

NEIGHBORHOOD  
RESIDENTS BY  
RACE



NEIGHBORHOOD  
PARK VISITORS  
BY RACE

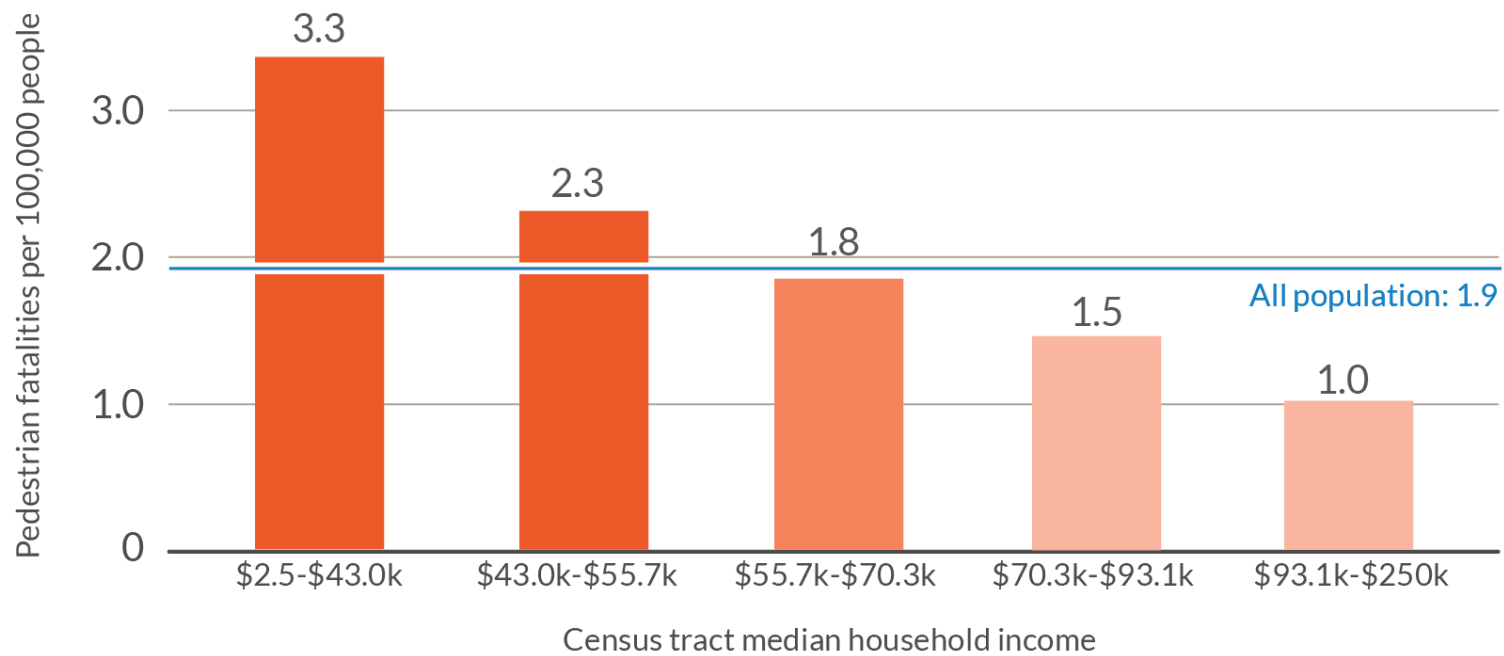


In one Texas community, Black residents make up approximately 50% of the local population close to the park, but only 11% of park visitors - while white residents made up nearly 70% of park visitors.



## People walking in lower-income areas are killed at far higher rates

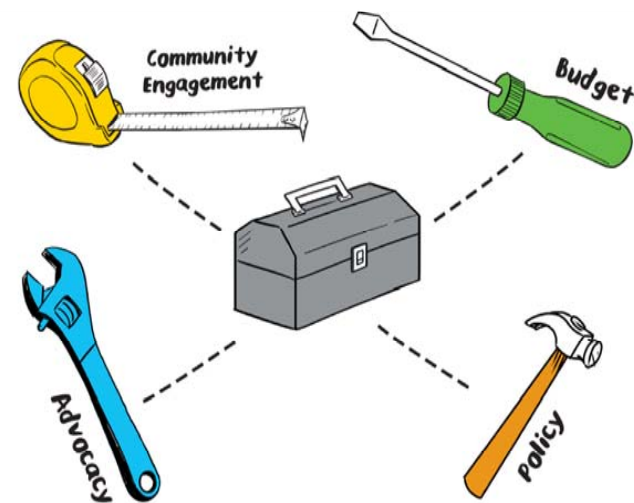
*Pedestrian fatalities per 100k people by census tract income*



Credit: [Dangerous by Design 2022](#), Smart Growth America

# We have tools to address these inequities

- Partner with, support, and/or hire community members to lead
- Advocate to prioritize funds that address community needs
- Adopt policies to make equity and engagement at the center of project planning



[We Built It This Way: A Primer on Transportation Inequity](#)

# Community Members as Experts

- **Content Experts:** Professionals, staff in your organization, service providers, and leaders with formal power who have knowledge, tools, and resources to address the issue.
- **Context Experts:** People with lived experience of the situation. They are the people who experientially know about the issue.
  - Youth
  - People with limited mobility or disabilities
  - People who can't drive and/or rely on biking, walking, and transit
  - Residents in low-income, communities of color that lack access to safe routes



# Engagement Makes Projects Better



- Depends on the knowledge of the community experts
- Helps get things right the first time
- Clarifies how to prioritize limited funding
- Identifies the actual barriers to access
- Creates better solutions
- Builds trust and stronger relationships for future work

# The Role of Community to Impact Decisions

## IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION

	<b>INFORM</b>	<b>CONSULT</b>	<b>INVOLVE</b>	<b>COLLABORATE</b>	<b>EMPOWER</b>
<b>PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL</b>	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
<b>PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC</b>	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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## IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



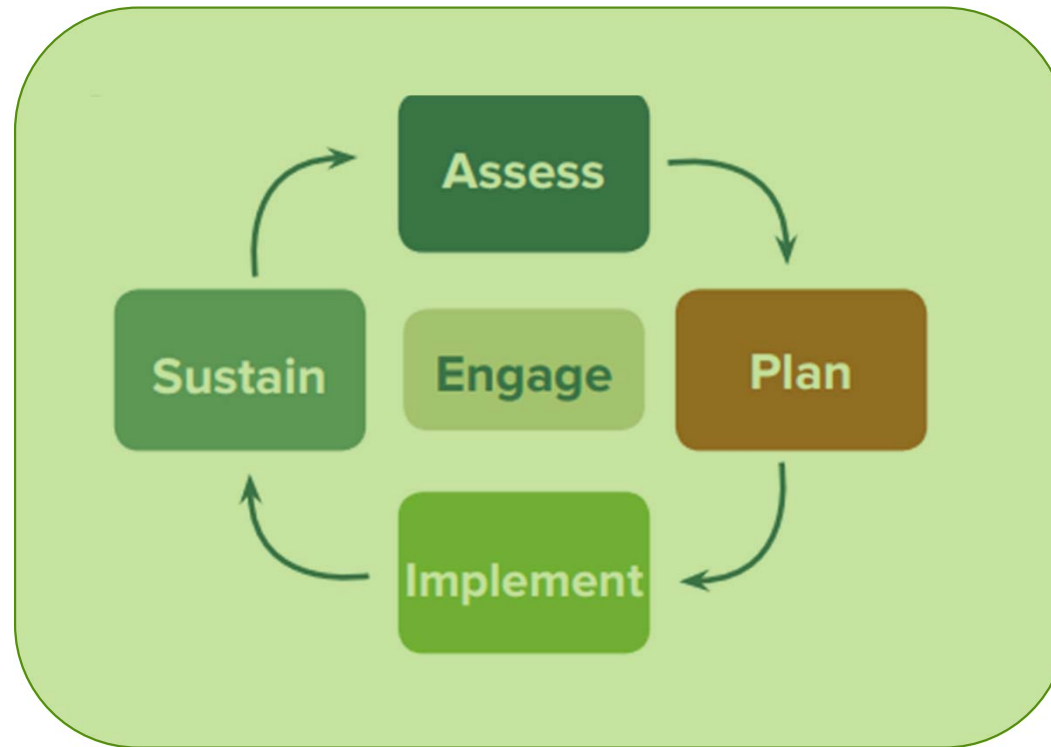


How does equity or community engagement show up in your work? Do you have an example to share?



# Tools & Actions for Equitable Engagement

# Equity is embedded at every step



Equity



# Reflect on engagement & equity

- Use the Pre-Engagement Reflection Exercise to reflect on:
  - Your Role
  - Your Own Identity
  - Your Organization or Agency's Role
  - Questions about the community, what the process may look like
  - Personal and/or organizational commitment(s)



## Pre-Community Engagement Reflection Exercise\*

Begin your community engagement process by reflecting on your role as an outside organization or government agency. This exercise will help you define your purpose, identify your community engagement strengths and weaknesses, and examine how your own power and privilege might impact the community you are working with. We encourage you to go through the list of questions thoughtfully and honestly, and to use the opportunity to spark deeper discussion.

### Reflection Questions:

1. What do you already know about this community? How did you gain this knowledge?
2. What do you wish to know about this community? What are you curious about?
3. What positions of power and privilege do you hold in relation to the community you are working with? Beyond your official professional role, consider race/ethnicity, language, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, citizenship status, etc.
4. How might your own power and privilege impact the community?
5. What has community engagement in this community looked like in the past? What does it look like currently?
6. What excites you about the community engagement process? What makes you nervous or unsure?
7. Think about your current project or initiative and finish this sentence: Successful community engagement will look like...
8. What keeps you doing the work that you do (public health, transportation, planning, engineering, education, community engagement, youth development, etc)?
9. What do we say we value as an organization or agency? Does what we say match what we do?
10. How can we better align our organizational/agency values with our actions? What does this look like?

Adapted from Safe Routes Partnership: [Let's Get Together: A Guide for Engaging Communities and Creating Change](#)



# Engagement & Equity: Partner on engagement



- Strengthens community & builds trust
- Expands your reach
- Includes new perspectives
- Maximize your resources
- Builds accountability
- Expands your knowledge of the community



# Possible Partners

- Schools
- Local food bank
- Health clinics
- Churches
- Local AARP chapters
- Public Libraries
- LGBTQ+ groups
- Cultural or Multilingual centers
- Senior Centers
- Rotary Clubs
- Local sports leagues
- Refugee serving organizations
- Disability advocacy organizations
- Environmental organizations
- Youth-led groups (youth councils, student government)
- Recreation Centers
- YMCA
- Artists
- Local businesses
- University Agricultural Extension offices
- Local Radio or News (incl. non-English)
- ***Who are other possible partners?***

# Engagement & Equity: Include new voices & perspectives



- Seeking input from people you don't often hear from
- Exploring different spaces to host events
- Make a list of community events
- Consult partners to see if your activities are accessible to everyone
- Budget for food, volunteer stipends, giveaways, childcare, etc.
- Translate materials in multiple languages and provide interpreters
- Provide digital and paper flyers

# Engagement & Equity: Go to people



Credit: Schuylkill County's VISION (Shenandoah, PA)

- Parks!
- Farmer's Markets
- Community Events/Festivals
- Back to School Night
- Local Businesses
- Libraries
- Recreation Centers
- Local Foodbank Distribution
- Other?

## Assessment & Equity: Understand community needs



- Involve residents, including youth, in assessment activities (walk audits, survey design, research).
- Meet with residents to hear their stories and better understand the community's history and current context.
- Collect and analyze data to account for various types of diversity within a community, including qualitative data about community perceptions of park access.

# The Walk Audit



## [A Toolkit for Planning and Conducting a Safe Routes to Parks Walk Audit](#)

- ✓ The why, who, and how to conduct a walk audit
- ✓ Walk audit checklist and tools
- ✓ [Available in Spanish](#)

**1. Sidewalks:**

- No sidewalks or paths
- Sidewalks are broken, cracked, or have trip hazards
- Sidewalks are blocked by overgrown landscaping, poles, signs, plants, vehicles, etc.
- Sidewalk is not continuous
- Sidewalk is not wide enough (two people cannot easily walk together side by side)
- Sidewalk has nothing separating it from the street (grass, trees, parked cars)
- Other problems: \_\_\_\_\_

Overall, the quality and safety of sidewalks is:

😊 😊 😐 😞 😞

**2. Street Crossings and Intersections:**

- The road is too wide to cross easily
- Traffic signals do not give enough time to cross the street
- The crossing does not have a pedestrian-activated button
- There is no crosswalk or it is poorly marked
- I have to walk too far to find a safe, marked crosswalk
- Intersection does not have a curb ramp for carts, wheelchairs, strollers, walkers, etc.
- Other problems: \_\_\_\_\_

Overall, the quality and safety of street crossings and intersections is:

😊 😊 😐 😞 😞

# Planning & Equity: Invest in communities that need it most



Credit: NeighborWorks, Scranton, PA

- Use data to drive priorities and investments in places that need it most.
- Work with local governments to reallocate funds to address solutions
- Building residents' capacity and knowledge to advocate for desired changes and participate in a planning process



# Power Mapping 101



www.saferroutespartnership.org



**Power Mapping 101: How Communities Can Make Connections and Improve Park Access**



A Community Power Map is a visual tool to help you identify individuals, organizations, or institutions that may influence the outcome of the positive changes to increase park access in your community. With [Safe Routes to Parks](#), change looks like improving conditions for people to walk or bike safely to their local park or green space. This might involve a single project like adding a safe crossing or slowing down vehicles on a busy street near a local park, or more significant changes to a city's policies or processes to make these safety improvements a regular occurrence. No matter how big or small, making community conditions different from what they are almost always requires engaging various stakeholders who may hold different positions on those proposed changes.

**Why Create a Community Power Map?**

Creating a Community Power Map guides us to consider how and who influences projects to get implemented and what it might take to move people to action. It can help you visualize who to contact, who you need to know, and who you may need to get on your side to implement those improvements. These individuals or entities might include formal decision-makers or elected officials, community organizations, businesses, residents, or local government agencies.

Developing a Community Power Map can also be important as you work with others in your community in a coalition or with community members impacted by the issue area to create a strategy to engage multiple stakeholders in your efforts. It also can be a tool to educate and empower community members who may be new to working to advance these types of changes.

www.saferroutespartnership.org | Facebook: Safe Routes Partnership | Twitter: @SafeRoutesNow | 2023

## Power Mapping 101: How Communities Can Make Connections & Improve Park Access

- Build capacity of community members to create change
- Understand who influences projects
- Identify important stakeholders
- Begin to identify strategies to engage them

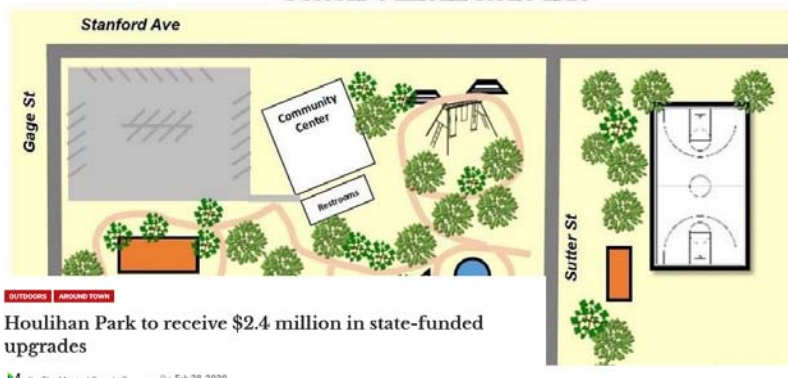
# Planada, CA: Community-led planning



- Community-driven process
- Walk audits
- Participatory budgeting to prioritize desired park improvements
- Presentation of plan and requests to MAC

Credit: Cultiva La Salud

CONCEPT LEVEL SITE PLAN



OUTDOORS AROUND TOWN

Houlihan Park to receive \$2.4 million in state-funded upgrades

M By The Merced County T... On Feb-28, 2020

## Implementation & Equity: Use short-term actions to build momentum



Credit: Hayti Heritage Center, Durham, NC

- Involve residents, including youth, in implementation activities
- Plan activities to engage residents in the changed environment
- Evaluate the impact of the changed environment on people of color, low-income communities, and other groups

# Little Rock, AR: Pop-up to permanent improvements



Credit: Central Arkansas Library System



AERIAL VIEW AT BRIDGE

- Installed temporary improvements (pop-up bike lane)
- Bike counter & community surveys to gauge use over 30 days
- Secured a \$1 million transportation grant for a permanent project

# Evaluate to measure impact

## What Gets Measured Gets Managed: A Step-by-Step Guide to Evaluating Safe Routes Projects from Beginning to End

- ✓ Evaluation strategies before, during, and after a project is complete
- ✓ A mix of tools to collect quantitative and qualitative data
- ✓ Evaluation Planning Templates and Examples



**What Gets Measured Gets Managed:**  
A Step-by-Step Guide to Evaluating Safe Routes Projects from Beginning to End



Improving safe routes throughout communities takes more than completing discrete projects; it takes sustained commitment to making continuous improvements over time. Evaluating both the process of creating safe routes and the outcomes can help build momentum toward change that extends beyond one stretch of sidewalk or a new stop sign. Evaluating as you go can help you identify opportunities to improve and adjust your approach along the way to be more effective and impactful. Additionally, baseline data can give better context for your project's impact; the average speed of cars after a traffic calming demonstration is far more informative if it is compared to the average speed of cars before the demonstration. This factsheet offers evaluation techniques for all phases of safe routes efforts as well as how and when they can be most useful so that you can incorporate evaluation from the beginning, rather than solely at the end.



# Takeaways:

- Reflect on your role and commitment for engagement
- Partner on engagement to expand your reach, build accountability
- Plan engagement activities to include new voices
- Engage residents to understand community needs and perceptions
- Plan, prioritize, and incorporate needs into plans and processes
- Implement early actions with residents to build momentum
- Collect and share data to show impact

# Reflection Questions

- Look back at your goals and barriers. Do you see any opportunities to use some of the strategies mentioned in the previous slides?
- What are one or two small actions that you or someone at your table could do to address the barriers you mentioned earlier?
- Work together! Write down your action steps.

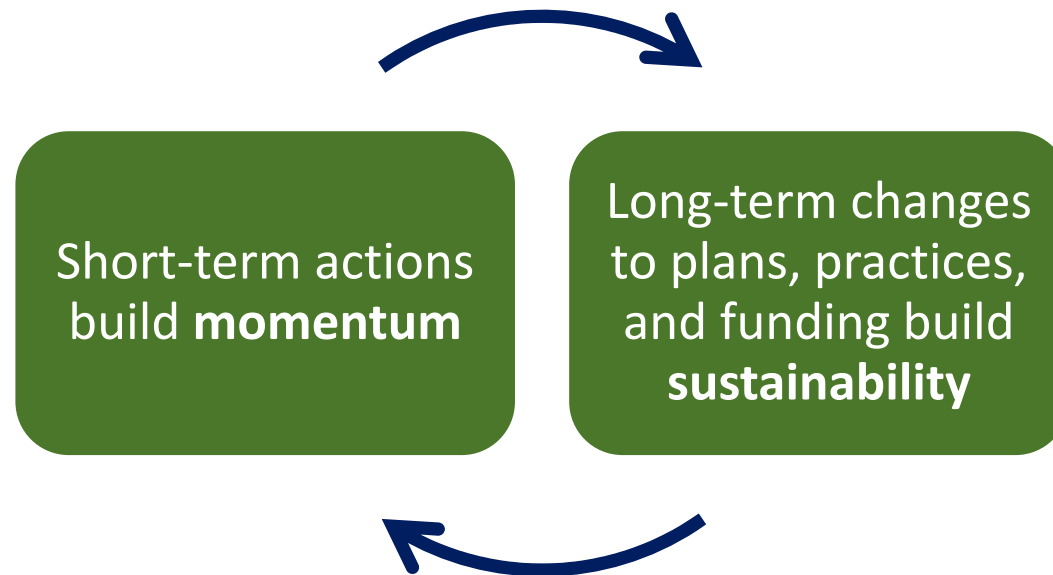


# Sustaining Safe Routes to Parks





# Our Approach



# Ideas to Sustain Equity and Engagement

- Increase participation and representation from community members on boards, commissions, and task forces related to parks and transportation
- Monitor who is and isn't using or benefitting from implemented changes and course correct as needed
- Advocate for standard project timelines to provide enough time and funds for appropriate engagement at each stage of a project
- Build a process for government agencies to select meaningful engagement strategies for different kinds of projects
- Integrate community needs and desires into plans, policies, and processes
- Prioritize equity in funds including city budgets, federal/state grant funds

## Bozeman, MT: Modeling a new way to engage



- Piloted a community liaison program
- Recruitment of liaisons from communities of color to lead engagement
- Informed the city's parks and active transportation plan
- Liaisons advocate for the city and budget funds to continue the program to build ongoing relationships into implementation

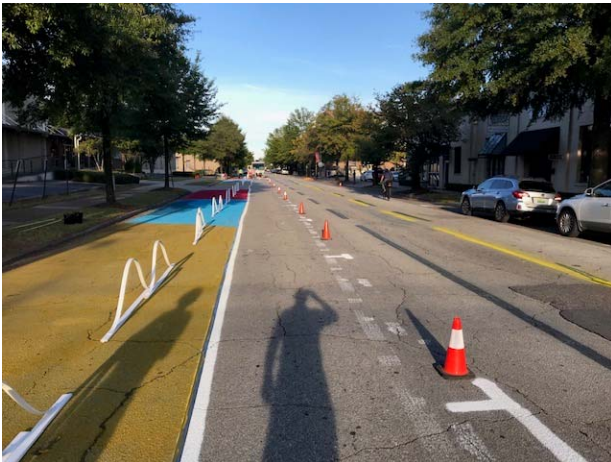


Credit: Human Resources Development Council

# Birmingham, AL: Making Complete Streets a reality



- Multiple ways to engage including:
  - 40 outreach events
  - Multiple surveys
  - Community conversations
  - Pop-up bike lane
- Demonstrates a desire for safe bike routes to Memorial Park and beyond
- Motivates the city to change its process. Every street set to repave is evaluated for bike lanes



Credit: REV Birmingham

# What is in your sphere of influence?

- **Timelines:** How would you shift timelines to include more significant community engagement?
- **Upcoming Plans/Projects:** Do you have any plan updates or projects coming up to try and apply this? Which partners would you connect with?
- **Partner for Engagement:** How could you team up for engagement? When?
- **Low-cost Temporary Projects:** Is there a project in an existing plan that could be useful to try as a low-cost temporary installation to build interest and momentum?
- **Project Prioritization:** How could you more clearly prioritize your equity goals in your project selection?
- **Standard Checklist:** What would you add to your project checklist to improve equitable outcomes? Engagement? Evaluation?

# Thank you!

Vanessa Cascio, Policy and Program Manager

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