



Community Wellness Hubs

A Toolkit for Advancing Community Health and Well-Being Through Parks and Recreation

National Recreation and Park Association
June 2, 2022

Every day, in communities across the country, park and recreation professionals are making their communities better places to live, learn, work and play through their role as stewards of **Community Wellness Hubs**. To help park and recreation professionals maximize this role, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is releasing *Community Wellness Hubs – A Toolkit for Advancing Community Health and Well-Being Through Parks and Recreation*.

This toolkit contains evidence and practice-based strategies, resources and case study examples to give park and recreation professionals ideas and guidance to advance parks and recreation as Community Wellness Hubs. It provides a process guide to creating a Community Wellness Hub in alignment with

seven dimensions of well-being. The toolkit is based on an evaluation of 15 local park and recreation agencies that planned, developed and created wellness hubs between 2020 and 2022.

The resource comprises five primary sections with additional resources embedded throughout:



1 | Community Wellness Hubs

How Parks and Recreation Advance Health and Well-Being

Learning Objectives | Section 1

This section provides an overview of Community Wellness Hubs, how they advance community health and well-being by addressing the root causes of health inequities, and why it is integral to ensure health equity is at the center.

What Is a Community Wellness Hub?

Parks and recreation are vital to community health and well-being. Access to these spaces, programs and services remains essential to community vitality and is a key factor in advancing health equity, improving individual and community-level health outcomes, and enhancing quality of life. Park and recreation professionals, in partnership with community members, are uniquely suited to serve as stewards of Community Wellness Hubs. Community Wellness Hubs are trusted gathering places that connect every member of the community to essential programs, services and spaces that advance health equity, improve health outcomes and enhance quality of life. Community Wellness Hubs are essential to health and well-being — they remove barriers and bridge gaps to help people access vital health and social resources, ensuring that all people can thrive.

How Do Community Wellness Hubs Advance Health and Well-Being?

Community Wellness Hubs build on the existing strengths, assets and foundations of local park and recreation agencies, working to address the root causes of health and social inequities and promoting health across multiple levels of intervention. They serve as essential infrastructure and provide essential services that center people and their individual lived experiences and unique needs. They leverage partnerships and the resources, skills and knowledge of other sectors to integrate programs and services that advance equity, resilience, and health and well-being.

Park and recreation professionals can transform a specific physical space (community or recreation center, park, etc.) into a Community Wellness Hub by providing an equitable and inclusive set of programs and services in one central location. They also can function as stewards of Community Wellness Hubs at a larger, system-wide level, shifting their agency mission, operations and practices to function in a more holistic, intentional and interconnected way and delivering services out in the community. This holistic lens is a critical piece of the puzzle.

To address today's public health challenges — chronic disease, mental health conditions, substance use disorders, social isolation, food insecurity, gun violence and more — park and recreation professionals must focus solutions on addressing the root causes of health and social inequities (the problem) to truly advance well-being.

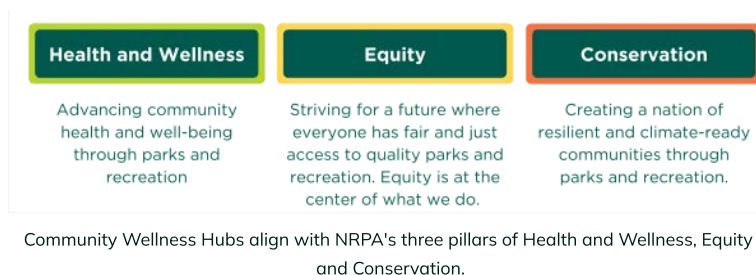


Children sit down to enjoy lunch during Camp Superstars, a program hosted by the DeKalb Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Affairs in Decatur, Georgia. Photo courtesy of Dawn Cribb.

While Community Wellness Hubs will look different in every neighborhood, city and county, they are united by their shared goals of advancing health equity, improving health outcomes and enhancing quality of life for all people.

“

Working one person, one family and one community at a time.” – Venita Owens,
President, Baylor Scott and White Health and Wellness Center



Health Equity at the Center

Health equity must be at the center of Community Wellness Hubs — when health equity is achieved, all people can thrive. Hubs must focus on addressing the root causes of health inequities. That requires challenging and dismantling the unfair **systems, which include power structures, policies, social norms, relationships, environments (physical and social), and resources**, that have created barriers to health primarily for Black, Indigenous, people of color, low-income communities, and other historically disenfranchised communities. To address the root causes of health and social inequities and ensure all people can benefit from parks and recreation, professionals must focus on enacting systems change approaches. **Systems change approaches** address power structures, policies, social norms, relationships, environments (physical and social), and resources.

This also requires solutions that are informed and co-designed by community members and groups that are most impacted by these health and social inequities. [Section 4](#) of this toolkit provides more guidance and examples of how park and recreation agencies can take actions grounded in systems-change approaches.

Health Equity

Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing obstacles to health — such as poverty and discrimination — and addressing lack of access to healthy food and safe environments, including parks and recreation, healthcare, good jobs with fair pay, and quality education and housing.

Learn more and take action to advance health equity through [NRPA's Elevating Health Equity Through Parks and Recreation: A Framework for Action.](#)

2 | Create a Hub

How to Approach Creating a Community Wellness Hub

Learning Objectives | Section 2

This section provides guidance on how to approach creating a Community Wellness Hub in partnership with key stakeholders and community members. It outlines four core phases and key considerations that should be part of the development and implementation process throughout.

When creating a Community Wellness Hub, there are four primary phases to work through. In addition to each phase, there are key considerations that should be present throughout the development process. Before you begin working through the components, here are some key questions you'll want to consider

- **Are there existing organizations, coalitions or partners that are already supporting community health efforts?** If so, do you have a connection or relationship with them? Should you become an active participant and contributor to existing efforts? Are there any gaps in these relationships, especially pertaining to those most impacted by health inequities in the community?
- **Are there clear, unmet needs that have been identified by the community?** What have you heard from the community in terms of issues and challenges that affect health and well-being? What information, data sources, assessments, voices and perspectives are informing this?
- **Who is leading conversations about the needs and priorities of underrepresented and historically disenfranchised groups in the community?** What is your relationship with those leading the conversations? How can you build trust with those groups and genuinely partner with them or support their efforts authentically?

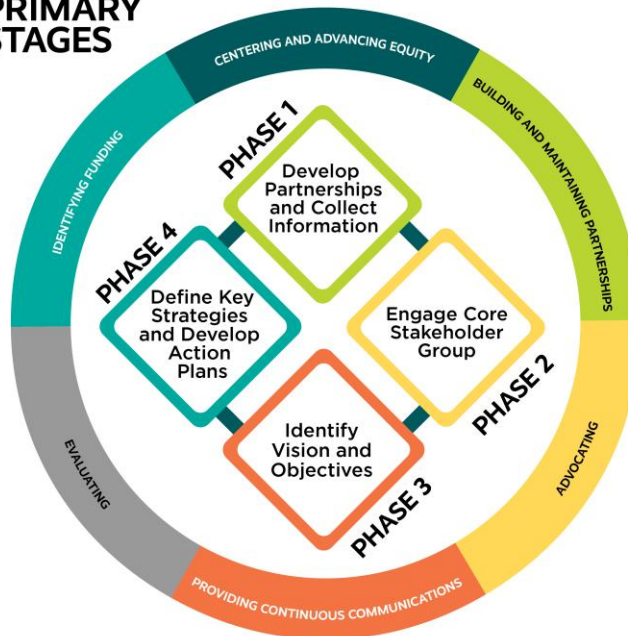
Answering these questions up front will help determine next steps and strategies related to creating a hub, and what your agency's role should be in advancing solutions to health and social inequities within your community.

Section 2a: Four Primary Development Phases

The development of a Community Wellness Hub should be built in phases, with each phase building on the previous one. An overview is provided for each of the core phases below. NRPA plans to provide additional training and resources on the steps outlined in this process in the future. It is essential to engage

community members, especially historically disenfranchised and underrepresented populations, during each phase. Park and recreation staff of all levels as well as cross-sector, cross-disciplinary and community-based partners and decision-makers also should be involved in each phase. Remember, an “upstream” approach requires surrounding the problem (the root cause) with all the stakeholders who are impacted by it and have a role to play in creating a solution.

FIGURE 1
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Phase 1: Develop Partnerships and Collect Information

Start by building, strengthening and/or joining an existing partnership or a coalition to support the hub in the short and long term. Engaging with community members, partners and organizations to understand current needs, assets and resources, and gathering information and data from a variety of diverse sources are a key part of this phase. Community health needs assessments and community asset mapping are activities to conduct during this phase to collect information about the needs and opportunities that exist across the community from diverse voices. Identify like-minded organizations with resources and assets that can support the hub's vision and goals.



Park and recreation agencies share materials that represent health and well-being at a 2019 NRPA training. NRPA photo.

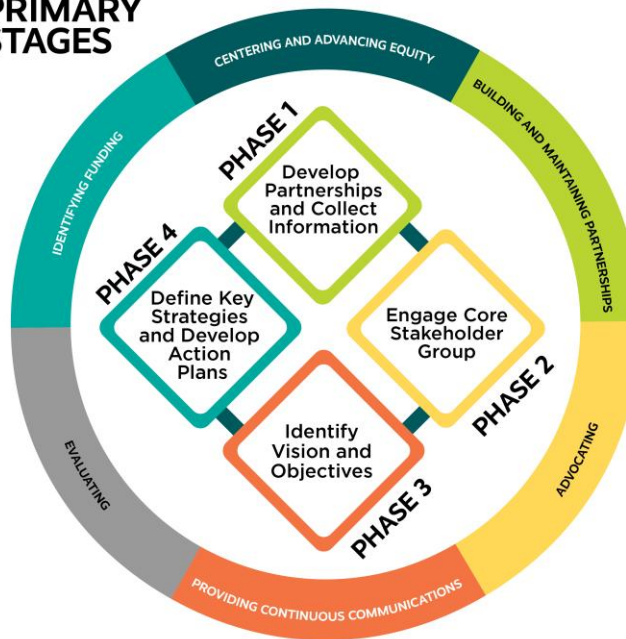
Community needs assessments [20] can be used as an exploratory method to identify opportunities and gaps to design a new initiative, or they can be used to confirm ideas and assumptions about community needs and interests. The needs-based approach helps to identify areas of concern for the target population, including gaps in services and barriers to accessing services, and will inform the vision and objectives.

Another tool to inform program design is **community asset mapping** [61]. Asset mapping is an interactive group activity that involves identifying and categorizing resources in the community and among stakeholders, or, in some cases, mapping them geographically. This activity uses a strengths-based approach that focuses on highlighting people, organizations and spaces that currently exist in the community and contribute to community well-being.



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Phase 2: Engage Core Stakeholder Group

Once you've started convening partners around the hub's development and analyzing data from the needs assessment and asset mapping, begin to determine key strategies and activities of your hub. It's critical to ensure that you're gathering information from all potential stakeholders and beneficiaries. To develop overall vision, goals and an action plan, you'll want to create a core stakeholder or advisory group.



People gather for a community engagement event in a local park. Photo courtesy of City of Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services.

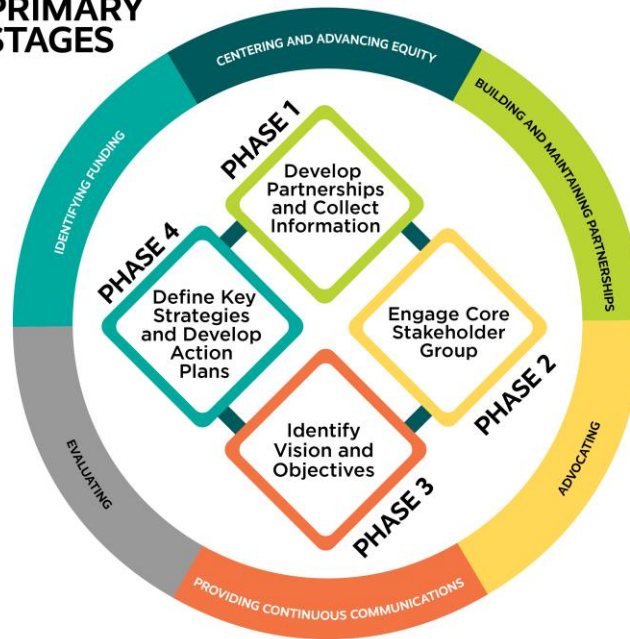
Stakeholder engagement will require dedicated time and energy spent on building trust and strengthening relationships. Engaging stakeholders is a necessary element of program design because their perspectives drive components of the program's design, operations and outcomes. Examples of stakeholders include community members, agency staff of all levels, partners — such as health departments, local government, universities, nonprofits and community-based organizations, and many others. It is critical to ensure that stakeholders include a diverse set of perspectives and experiences, including historically disenfranchised populations and those most impacted by health inequities. Stakeholders should be engaged early in the process to increase acceptance and participation in the program and to provide valuable feedback in the planning process.

This phase also requires broader community engagement regarding how the hub can meet the community's needs, as well as continued identification of assets and resources that potentially could align with the hub's key strategies.



If we don't listen to our community, we are going to miss the mark. It should be a two-way relationship between the community and the hub. – Paula McDevitt, Director, Bloomington (Indiana) Parks and Recreation

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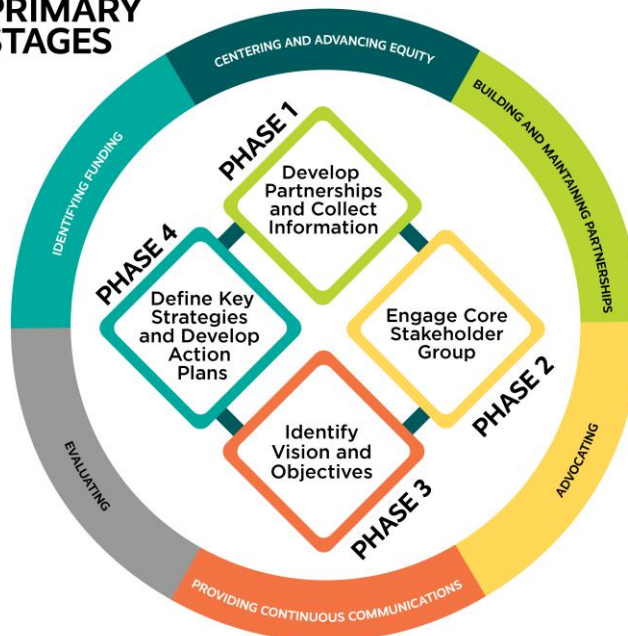
Phase 3: Identify Vision and Objectives

During the next phase, the core stakeholder group will help guide collective decisions as you identify your hub's vision, mission, overarching goals, and specific short-, medium- and long-term objectives. In this phase, you'll work through the following:

- **Define the vision and mission of your hub**
 - Define the need. What is the reason behind your hub and what will it address?
- **Identify overarching hub goals (ideally, three to five goals)**
 - What do you expect the effects of the hub to be? What will its impact be on the community?
- **Break down overarching goals into short-, medium- and long-term objectives**
 - What will you work to accomplish in the short, medium and long term to achieve your overarching goals?
 - Use the common acronym **SMART** to describe your objectives. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) describes SMART objective characteristics as:
 - **Specific:** Concrete, detailed and well-defined, so that you know where you are going and what to expect when you arrive.
 - **Measurable:** Numbers and quantities provide means of measurement and comparison.

- **Achievable:** Feasible and easy to put into action.
- **Realistic:** Considers constraints such as resources, personnel, cost and time frame.
- **Time-Bound:** A time frame helps to set boundaries around the objective.
- **Sample SMART objective:** Our Community Wellness Hub will increase access to healthy food and nutrition education, with a focus on reaching food insecure community members. By September 30, 2022, [Park and Recreation Agency] will establish a formal partnership with a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment services provider to offer enrollment support at [park and recreation site location] twice a week. We also will offer a healthy cooking program for families, reaching 25 families within six months of offering the program.
- **Identify resources**
 - What resources are needed to reach these objectives?

FIGURE 1
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Phase 4: Define Key Strategies and Develop an Action, Implementation, and Evaluation Plan

This is the action-oriented phase where you begin implementing the hub's plans around key strategies and activities to achieve your short-, medium- and long-term objectives. You will want to work with your core stakeholder or advisory group, as well as your broader group of partners to gather input on the best strategies or solutions for the development of an action and implementation plan. You will want to review the [Dimensions of](#)

Well-Being and Hub Strategies sections in this resource and ensure equity is centered as you develop the action plan. It is important to outline how your hub's overall goals and short-, medium- and long-term objectives align with your action plan.

Create an action plan that includes the following:

- List the objective.
- Name each of the key activities required to meet the objective.
- Identify the person responsible for leading each step.
- Indicate the timeline for beginning and completing each step.
- Identify the resources required for each step.
- Name any expected challenges you may need to navigate.
- Define the target outcome.
- Identify how and when you will measure and report on progress toward the target outcome.

Once your action plan is written, make sure to disseminate it widely in your community to partners and stakeholders.



Our goal has and continues to be poised to be used as a resource and a holistic safety net for our community. – Erica Benoit,
Community Engagement Coordinator, City of Bristol (Connecticut) Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services

Section 2b: Key Considerations Throughout the Development of a Community Wellness Hub

There are also key considerations you'll need to keep top of mind throughout the development of a Community Wellness Hub. As the process guide demonstrates, these factors should be present and addressed in every phase of planning:

FIGURE 2



Centering and Advancing Equity

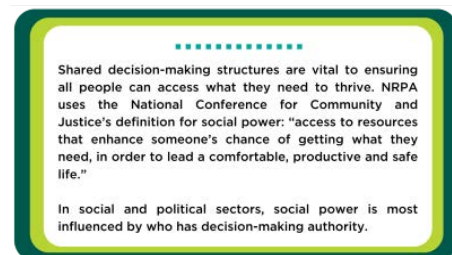


Meals are served to community members during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Photo provided by Asheville (North Carolina) Parks and Recreation.

Throughout the planning and implementation of a hub, it's essential to keep equity at the forefront of all decisions, processes, engagement and communication strategies, and policies that you may develop. This should include sharing leadership and decision-making authority with community members and groups most impacted by racial and health inequities. When the needs of those most impacted by inequity are addressed in both process

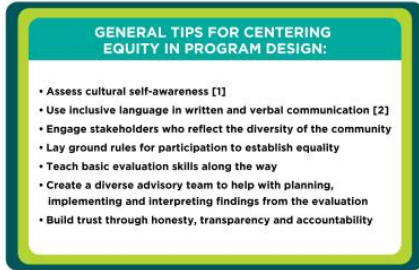
and product, you are more likely to achieve your goals of advancing community health and well-being for all.

To ensure community voices are represented in the design, planning and implementation of the hub, be mindful of representation and address power dynamics. Inviting community members to be a part of the conversation will require intentionality and planning. For example, if community members are providing feedback or advising the hub, budget for funding to provide stipends or gift cards for their time. When building an inclusive coalition, consider recruiting a small group versus just one person. Think of whom you are not currently engaged with, then invite those community members to join the conversation. Avoid tokenism (an inauthentic effort to engage underrepresented groups for the appearance of diversity) and



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focus on **building strong, trusting relationships** with the community.



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When bringing together multiple partners and community members, pay close attention to power dynamics. Co-create agreements (e.g., a charter) and be very clear about how decision-making will happen as a group (power sharing), making every effort to center the voices of those most impacted by inequities. Find ways to support power

building of local grassroots organizations and neutralize power between partners that have funding and resources, and those that do not. Ensure that the policies and practices you have in place sustain a culture of power sharing.

Dive deeper with these equity and community organizing resources:

- *Elevating Health Equity Through Parks and Recreation: A Framework for Action* [1]
- *Equity Language Guide* [2]
- *Equity in Parks and Recreation: A Historical Perspective* [3]
- *It's All About the Base: A Guide to Building a Grassroots Organizing Program* [4]
- *Racial Equity Toolkit, An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity* [5]
- *HealthEquityGuide.org: A Human Impact Partners Project* [6]
- *Race Forward, What Is Racial Equity?* [7]
- *NPRA's Equity in Practice Resource Library* [62]



Rec-equity: we've reallocated our resources and staff to parts of our community that need it most. This includes going to housing units to offer programs, so that community members don't always have to come to us."
– Crystal Ross, District Manager, City of Dallas

Building and Maintaining Partnerships

Community Wellness Hubs rely on continuous participation from partners. In this model, parks and recreation largely serves as a convener of health partners with the goal of connecting community members to a diverse set of health and wellness offerings. Community Wellness Hubs do not need to be the direct provider of all health and wellness services. Given the many directions a hub can take, considering the different types of partners and organizations that will be necessary or the key for achieving overall goals is important.

Cross sector partnership building and coalition building can be challenging, yet very rewarding. Thinking about the different assets your community or partner organizations have also is important. Identifying new partners, reaching out and beginning to build a relationship all take time, especially where there may be distrust. Make sure that time and money are both budgeted for in the beginning and throughout. It also is vital to ensure partnerships are equitable, meaning that work is shared with everyone involved and partners are compensated and acknowledged for their role. “This will move at the speed of trust” is a good reminder to spend energy and capacity on connections and relationships. “Think outside the box” when it comes to uncovering new partners and organizations that could be essential for the hub.



Partnering is key because we can't do it alone. – Phil Ginsburg, General Manager, San Francisco Recreation and Park Department

Dive deeper with these partnership, coalition, and network building resources:

- *Developing Effective Coalitions: An Eight-Step Guide* [8]
- *Collective Impact Resources* [9]
- *The Need for Cross-Sector Collaboration* (Becker and Smith) [10]
- *Readiness Matrix for Cross-Sector Collaboration* [11]
- *Partnership Building Resources* [12]

KEY PARTNERSHIP BUILDING TIPS FROM LOCAL AND RECREATION AGENCIES AND DEPARTMENTS

- Take your time building relationships – “Go slow,” remember “this will be built at the speed of trust” and “show up and listen.”
- Encourage hub staff and partners to “check egos and agendas at the door”; this will be needed to achieve collective action.
- Consider hiring a community engagement position or a Health and Wellness Coordinator, as you will need staff with dedicated time to build connections and ensure continuous communications.
- Step outside the box and look for ways to leverage each other’s strengths and ways to align efforts and resources.
- Clearly define and communicate roles and responsibilities of all partners, take failures in stride and use these as learning opportunities to refine your strategies or approach.
- Be mindful not to have broken promises; this is a fast way to lose trust with partners and the community.
- Capitalize on and celebrate small successes in collaborative partnerships — build from there as people are more willing to support or partner again once they are involved with successful efforts.
- Make sure all levels of hub staff [including park and recreation] are involved in “connecting the dots” among partners.
- Pay attention to creating inclusive spaces for partners and the community; engage with underrepresented groups to identify needs and desires and create ways to share leadership in planning and design.

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Advocating

It’s important that elected officials, external stakeholders and the public recognize the essential nature of parks and recreation and your Community Wellness Hub. Sometimes, advocacy work can be daunting, but it all starts with telling your story. As you maintain connections with partners, organizations and members of your community, keeping key decision-makers and policymakers informed is crucial. Providing updates and information to decision-makers and policymakers about the hub, especially the overall vision, goals and objectives, will be critical to its success. Oftentimes, these individuals are in charge of budgets or may have the opportunity to address important community wellness strategies via policy. Consider having a decision-maker or policymaker directly engaged in hub planning or implementation efforts and be mindful of power dynamics that may be present through their participation.



We did a lot of ‘political-will building’ by bringing council and park board members to meetings, events and conversations with the community.” – Daryl Quarles, Senior Program Division Service Area Manager, Dallas Parks and Recreation Department

Dive deeper with these advocacy resources:

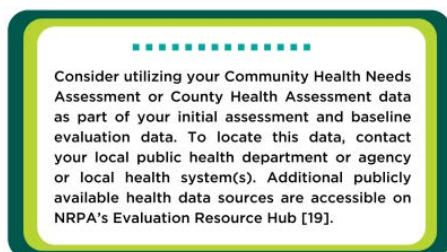
- Local Government Officials' Perceptions of Parks and Recreation [13]
- *Engagement With Parks Report* [14]
- Parks and Recreation Is Essential [15]
- Parks and Health: Making the Case [16] and *COVID-19 and Parks and Recreation: Making the Case for the Future* [17]
- NRPA's research reports [18]

Providing Continuous Communications

Maintaining continuous communication with everyone involved in the hub, as well as the community, is essential. This includes regularly communicating with the intended audience and broader community. Communications should be transparent throughout the process and can focus on hub progress updates, programs or initiatives being offered or how evaluation findings are being utilized for continuous, quality improvement of the hub. If possible, consider mechanisms and strategies for bidirectional communication. This means creating spaces and opportunities for your partners, organizations and members of the community to provide feedback or advice about the hub's progress and development.

Evaluating

When planning a hub, it is best to consider evaluation strategies up front, and set SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time bound) goals. Any assessments or data collection strategies happening in the planning phase of a hub also may serve as baseline or preassessment data. Additionally, considering a combination of process, development and outcome evaluation metrics is important. Having measurable, focused and understandable metrics that are related to your hub's efforts will be critical for understanding if you are making progress toward longer-term goals and outcomes, and where refocusing is necessary to achieve goals.



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Make sure to regularly communicate these metrics to hub partners and the community. Keep in mind that evaluation should be a continuous process rather than a linear effort. Consider setting a schedule of regular evaluation checkpoints, and revisit goals often.

Dive deeper with NRPA's Health Impact Evaluation Framework and Community Needs Assessment [20] tools.

Identifying Funding

Securing funding for staffing and needed resources to support the implementation of hub strategies is critical to success. Diversifying your funding can help ensure long-term sustainability. This might mean your funding comes from municipal funds, grants, private donations or private-sector partners, foundations, or from other innovative strategies (e.g., tax levy or community-schools funding). When thinking about funding, it's important to tell the story of your work. Tailoring your message based on your audience is a strong way to garner support and help leverage existing funds by clearly communicating the work you are currently doing through your hub.

Dive deeper with NRPA's *Guide to Fundraising* [21] and *Financing Health and Wellness Programs* [22] resources.

3 | Dimensions of Well-Being

A Holistic Approach Across Seven Interconnected Domains

Learning Objectives | Section 3

This section provides an overview of the seven dimensions of well-being. Community Wellness Hubs promote health and wellness within each of these dimensions and across multiple levels of intervention. Levels where parks and recreation can intervene include:

- Individual: knowledge, skills, attitudes
- Interpersonal: family, friends, social networks
- Organizational: institutional operations, practices, norms, environments
- Community: relationships with other organizations and community members
- Policy: laws, regulations, and rules

NRPA defines “health and wellness” as the optimal state of physical, mental and social well-being for individuals and communities. Contrary to historical definitions and perceptions of health, health and wellness encompass more than simply being free of disease [24]. Wellness is grounded in equitable access to resources and social supports, and involves the dynamic pursuit of activities, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of true health.

Community Wellness Hubs should be designed to advance health and wellness across seven **interdependent** and **interconnected** dimensions of well-being — cultural, economic, emotional, environmental, intellectual, physical and social. Park

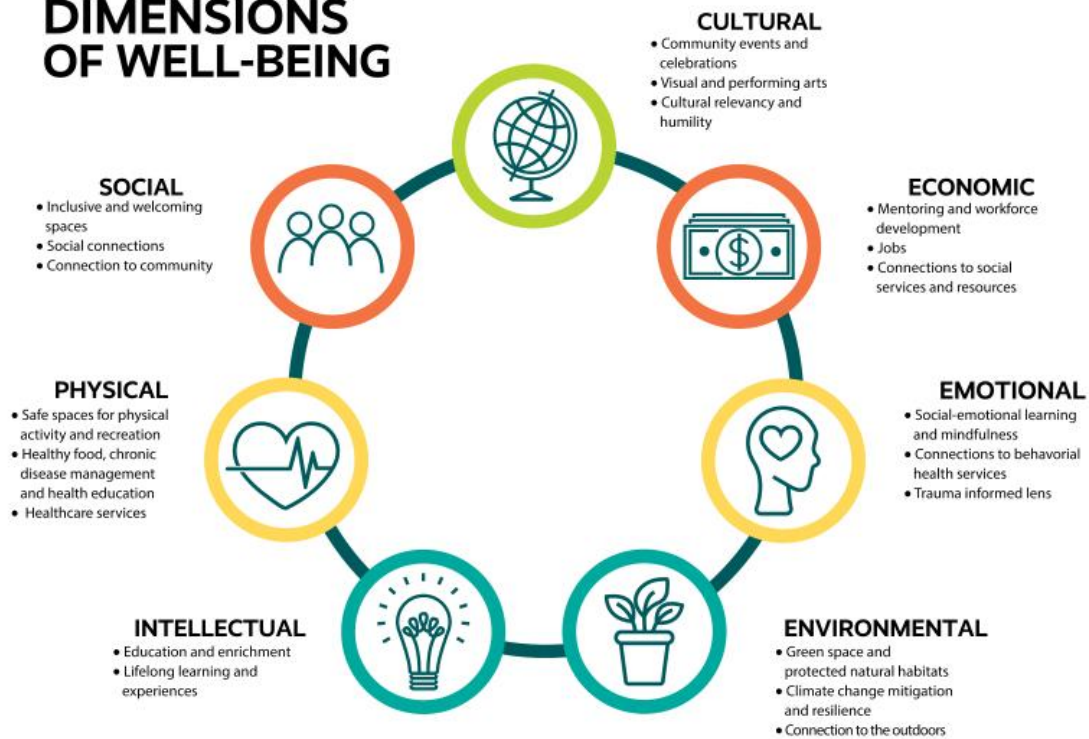
and recreation professionals can implement a variety of policy, environmental and behavior change strategies in alignment with each of these dimensions to function as a Community Wellness Hub.

The Seven Dimensions of Well-Being

The seven dimensions of well-being are adapted from several frameworks, including CDC's Healthy People 2030 Social Determinants of Health [25] framework, outlining community-based factors that improve health and well-being, and the National Wellness Institute [26] and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) [27] Wellness Dimensions, focused on individual characteristics of well-being. These dimensions are aligned with the strengths, assets and opportunities that exist within parks and recreation to advance health and well-being.

FIGURE 3

SEVEN DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING



A more detailed description of each of the seven dimensions of well-being is provided below. Use the arrows to navigate through the slide deck.

SEVEN DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING



CULTURAL

Communities provide culturally relevant spaces, programs and services. Community members, including staff, develop a sense of belonging, inclusion and appreciation. They embrace, celebrate and value the identities, traditions and experiences of others. Community members also practice cultural humility, a dynamic and lifelong process focusing on self-reflection, personal critique and acknowledging one's own biases.





ECONOMIC

Communities provide access to economic opportunities and economic stability, including fair and good paying jobs, workforce development opportunities, and affordable housing, healthcare, food and other social resources. Community members are economically and financially secure, can contribute skills, talents and passions to the community, and have a pathway to economic opportunity.



EMOTIONAL

Communities understand, embrace and promote emotional and behavioral health, and provide spaces, programs and services that support emotional health. Community members can develop and explore feelings, values and attitudes; practice mindfulness and self-awareness; and manage emotions and behaviors.





ENVIRONMENTAL

Communities promote environmental justice and provide clean air, water and green space to ensure that all people, especially Black, Indigenous, people of color and low-income communities have access to and can connect with the outdoors in meaningful ways. They are resilient in the wake of climate change and are mitigating against future environmental threats. Community members are aware of how the natural and built environment impacts health, they spend time connecting with the outdoors and they take action to promote environmental justice.



INTELLECTUAL

Communities provide access to equitable and high-quality learning opportunities, and education. Community members can enrich the mind through an openness to new ideas, experiences, questions and thoughts, and through learning new skills and seeking to understand different perspectives and lived experiences.





PHYSICAL

Communities provide environments, programs and services that promote opportunities for all people to be physically active, safe, have access to nutritious and affordable food and have access to quality healthcare. All community members can easily and safely access opportunities that support the development of healthy eating, physical activity, rest, and self-care habits and behaviors that support healthy bodily functions.



SOCIAL

Communities provide opportunities for socialization, connection and relationship building. Community members can develop and maintain healthy relationships and meaningful connections, positively interact with others and contribute to the community.



4 | Hub Strategies

Systems Change Strategies and Approaches to Advance Community Wellness Hubs

Learning Objectives | Section 4

This section provides examples of systems-change strategies and approaches that park and recreation professionals can develop and implement in alignment with the seven dimensions of well-being. These align with the assets and resources park and recreation have, as well as NRPA's equity, resilience and public health priorities.

Across each of the seven dimensions, park and recreation professionals can implement systems change strategies and other innovative approaches to advance community health and well-being. Policy, environmental and behavior change strategies are some of the key systems change strategies park and recreation professionals can utilize to advance health equity and improve health outcomes.

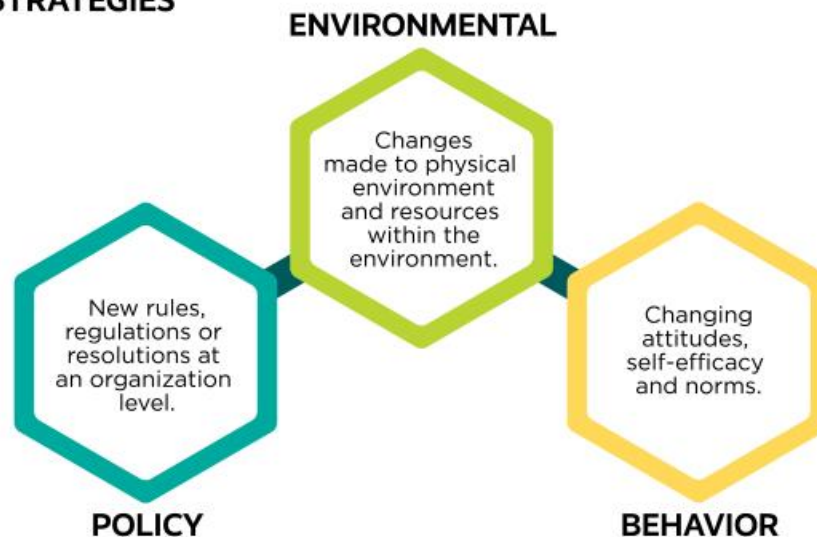
Policy change strategies include instituting new rules, regulations or resolutions at an organizational level (system-wide, site-wide, program-wide, etc.).

Environmental change strategies include changes made to the physical environment and resources and services available within the environment.

Behavior change strategies focus on changing attitudes, self-efficacy or confidence, relationships and norms. To be most effective, all strategies and approaches should be ongoing, instituted community-wide, and focus on long-term impact and sustainability.

FIGURE 4

SYSTEMS CHANGE STRATEGIES



Let's take mental health for example:

- **Policy:** Enacting an agency-wide policy ensuring mental health programs are provided equitably. This policy ensures that programs are available, affordable, accessible, and culturally specific for all community members, and prioritized and funded in under-resourced communities.
- **Environmental:** Ensuring access to green space for all community members within a 10-minute walk of home to promote the mental health benefits of the outdoors and offering structured programming that is proven to improve mental health (e.g., Tai Chi, meditation, yoga, mindfulness).
- **Behavior:** Sponsoring a community-wide Mental Health Awareness Day or Month that educates and encourages people to practice mindfulness and spend time in nature to support their mental health.

Within each of the dimensions below, we outline several policy, environmental and behavior change strategies that park and recreation professionals can implement to advance Community Wellness Hubs.

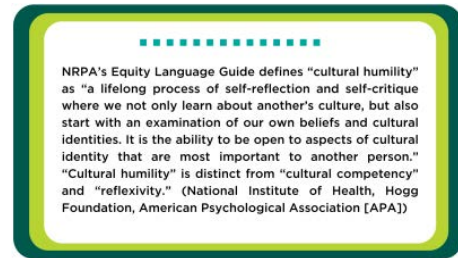
Review each dimension for ideas and examples, and explore resources included in each section for more detailed guidance, best practices, case studies and actionable ways to implement the strategies. Keep in mind that while you may see a particular strategy or approach listed in one dimension, these strategies and approaches are all interconnected and interdependent. Remember that all strategies need to be grounded in equity and co-created with community to ensure they meet their wants and needs.

A Note About Systems Change

No matter what a Community Wellness Hub focuses on, systems change approaches and systems thinking are critical to advancing long-term and impactful change. Local park and recreation professionals interface with many different external systems within a community, including: school, early childcare and education, healthcare, food and transportation systems. Local park and recreation agencies also have their own internal systems, including policies, procedures, infrastructure, resources, relationships, environments and social norms. This results in many different change agents that a hub has the opportunity to interact with and adapt to enhanced offerings and supports. Systems-thinking presents opportunities to tackle complex problems, which often require working across external systems, thinking upstream to address the root cause of the problem, and engaging with many different partners.

Opportunities for Parks and Recreation to Advance Cultural Well-Being

The heart of a community lies in its culture. Parks and recreation are essential to supporting and promoting cultural well-being. They serve as gathering places where people from different cultures and backgrounds can come together to engage and connect, and professionals are active leaders dedicated to building a sense of belonging, promoting inclusion, and helping community members embrace and celebrate difference. Park and recreation professionals advance cultural well-being by ensuring that programs and offerings are culturally relevant, codesigned by community members and promote multiculturalism. They strive to reflect the diversity and unique traditions and histories of community; providing opportunities to experience and learn from others; offering performing and visual arts programs; and training staff to understand diverse perspectives and strengthen cultural humility.



[Click on the image to make it larger.](#)



Children from Minnie and Lovie Ward Recreation Center in San Francisco sit in front of a summer art installation. Photo courtesy of San Francisco Parks and Recreation.

Assessing existing policies and practices at systems-wide and programmatic levels to ensure cultural relevancy and humility, as well as equitable recognition of non-dominant cultures and groups (e.g., acknowledging holidays and traditions in communications) are examples of strategies that can promote cultural wellness. Agencies also could adopt policies regarding staff training to ensure all staff members who will be

interacting with community members are provided with sufficient training related to core competencies and skills that promote diversity, equity and inclusion.



SYSTEMS CHANGE APPROACHES TO ADVANCE CULTURAL WELL-BEING



CULTURAL WELL-BEING SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE POLICY CHANGE

- Offer culturally respectful and inclusive program hours and environments, such as women-only pool hours, gender neutral restrooms, and guidance on why this is important.
- Adopt policies that require all staff to receive training on diversity, equity and inclusion core competencies.
- Ensure that different cultures are represented in decision-making processes and on advisory boards, and that community engagement efforts reach all people.





CULTURAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

- Offer events, festivals and celebrations that honor holidays or traditions of cultures represented in your community.
- Provide cooking, arts and cultural offerings taught by community members to share their traditional meals, recipes, music and crafts with peers.
- Ensure that promotional materials are available in different languages and that internal and external communications promote the use of equitable and inclusive language.



CULTURAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE BEHAVIOR CHANGE

- Spend time building authentic relationships with community members from different backgrounds and an understanding the history of park and recreation inequities and resistance. This learned knowledge might provide inspiration for identifying opportunities to take actions that support equitable and inclusive access for all people.
- Acknowledge non-dominant holidays, traditions and cultural celebrations in communications and marketing promotions.



Resources to Explore Further:

- *Elevating Health Equity Through Parks and Recreation: A Framework for Action* [1]
- *Equity Language Guide* [2]
- *Equity in Parks and Recreation: A Historical Perspective* [3]
- *Community Engagement Resource Guide* [27]

- Parks for Inclusion Resources [28] and *Guidelines for Developing an Inclusion Policy* [29]
- NRPA's Equity in Practice Resource Library [62] and Certificate Program [63]

Opportunities for Parks and Recreation to Advance Economic Well-Being

Park and recreation agencies are essential to supporting and promoting economic health and well-being. In addition to the community-wide economic benefits generated by parks and recreation, the profession also promotes access to direct economic opportunity and financial security for individuals and families. Youth programs foster economic opportunity by supporting academic attainment, reducing absenteeism and encouraging youth to make positive and healthy choices. Park and recreation agencies are one of the largest providers of summer youth employment, and they provide workforce development opportunities and vocational training to young and future professionals, preparing them for 21st century jobs. They also connect community members to needed social resources, including housing, other workforce opportunities, healthcare, meals and supplemental benefit programs.

Park and recreation agencies can assess existing practices and policies to ensure that equity is centered within their economic initiatives. For example, workforce development programs should be designed to prioritize youth who are economically disadvantaged and face additional barriers to employment, while removing barriers to ensure they can participate (paying people fairly, providing transportation, etc.). Agencies also can adopt policies or develop formal partnership models to co-locate social services in park and recreation sites or develop referral pathways to connect community members to economic and social resources. Additionally, as a large employer, park and recreation agencies should assess their hiring practices, career growth opportunities, pay scales, wages and workplace cultures, making changes as needed to ensure all people are treated fairly and equitably and have access to the same opportunities in the workplace.



Community members enjoy a Family Meals Night in their local park hosted by West Allis-West Milwaukee Recreation and Community Services. Photo credit: Amanda Schwichtenberg.



SYSTEMS CHANGE APPROACHES TO ADVANCE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING



ECONOMIC WELL-BEING SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE POLICY CHANGE

- Assess and modify existing recruitment, hiring and leadership development practices to ensure they center equity and promote workforce development and career opportunities for historically disenfranchised populations.
- Advance policies and practices that remove barriers to participation, including cost, transportation, unnecessary paperwork and documentation, etc.





ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

- Provide equitable workforce development opportunities where young people can develop knowledge, competencies and hard and soft skills needed for future careers in parks and recreation and other sectors.
- Provide year-round and summer employment opportunities targeted toward young people and compensate staff fairly.
- Partner with local education institutions, including high schools, community colleges, universities, or trade schools to support intern and vocational programs.



ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

- Connect people to federal benefit assistance, including programs like the SNAP [30], Special Supplemental for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) [31], Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) [32], SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) [33], Affordable Connectivity Program [34], and more.
- Provide opportunities for community members to receive assistance in resume writing, interview preparation or job application submissions, and provide access to internet, phones, video conferencing or other technology needs.





ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE BEHAVIOR CHANGE

- Host guest speakers, career fairs, clinics and coaching sessions to motivate, inspire and support job seekers. Bring these opportunities out into the community to ensure all can participate.
- Provide and promote training and opportunities for staff to better understand the root causes of inequities, including poverty, and the diverse lived experiences of your community members.



Resources to Explore Further:

- SNAP/WIC Resources [\[35\]](#)
- Workforce Development Resource Guide and Workbook [\[36\]](#)
- *The Economic Impact of Parks* [\[37\]](#)
- *Out-of-School Time Report* [\[38\]](#)

Opportunities for Parks and Recreation to Advance Emotional Well-Being

Park and recreation agencies support and promote emotional health and well-being. Park and recreation professionals support community members who are experiencing or impacted by rising rates of mental health conditions, substance use disorder, homelessness or other adversities. Agencies are establishing new practices, programs and services to better support and protect emotional health and connect people to needed mental and behavioral health services. Efforts include training staff on trauma-informed principles [\[39\]](#), adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) [\[40\]](#) and mental health first aid; strengthening partnerships with schools and mental health providers to connect youth to positive experiences in the community; partnering with care networks and coalitions to support people experiencing homelessness, substance use disorders or mental illness; and addressing the pervasive stigma around mental health conditions and substance use disorders.

To support emotional well-being, agency-wide and programmatic policies should be reviewed with a trauma-informed lens and should acknowledge mental health and substance use disorders as conditions influenced by numerous factors — including biological, genetic, economic and social factors — not solely by choices. Policies also can outline required staff training to build the knowledge, skills and competency of park and recreation professionals to best support all community members, or be used to decriminalize behaviors (e.g., encampments in public parks) or change law enforcement practices in parks (e.g., responding to a mental health crisis).



Community members participate in a yoga class held by El Paso Parks and Recreation.

Photo courtesy of El Paso Parks and Recreation, El Paso, TX.



**SYSTEMS CHANGE
APPROACHES TO
ADVANCE EMOTIONAL
WELL-BEING**





EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE POLICY CHANGE

- Adopt a policy that requires all staff are provided with Mental Health First Aid training in addition to Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)/First Aid to ensure they are trained to respond to a mental health crisis.
- Collaborate with community coalitions, continuums of care and other key stakeholders (e.g., law enforcement) to advance policies and practices that address people experiencing homelessness, substance use disorders, or mental illness with empathy, understanding and support.
- Pass policies focused on reducing harmful behaviors in public spaces (tobacco and e-cigarette reduction).



EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

- Offer opportunities that support positive childhood experiences (youth sports, mindfulness, outdoor recreation, etc.), which can counter the impacts of ACEs.
- Assess your environments, communications, operations, practices and policies to reduce stigma and foster a healthy environment that is supportive of people experiencing mental illness.





EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

- Offer a safe space for community members of all ages to find mentors, access counseling services and/or support groups.
- Assess your facilities and adjust them to promote mental health. This may include limiting noise and sensory overload, integrating plants and greenery into spaces, ensuring paint colors and signage utilize warm and soothing colors and graphics, and keeping an organized, open and clean environment.



EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE BEHAVIOR CHANGE

- Promote a deeper understanding of mental and behavioral health challenges by training staff in trauma-informed care practices, the impact of ACEs and neurodiversity.
- Support staff's emotional health by advancing an employee wellness program, providing access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), sharing resources to promote self-care, and normalizing conversations about mental health in the workplace.





EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE BEHAVIOR CHANGE

- Sponsor an awareness day or develop a communications campaign focused on elevating the role that stigma plays in your community.
- Implement harm reduction strategies in parks with high rates of substance misuse and partner with behavioral health and social service organizations to conduct outreach and provide education.



Resources to Explore Further:

- *Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Language Guide* [\[41\]](#)
- *Parks and Recreation: Addressing Substance Use and Mental Health Disorder* [\[42\]](#)
- Trauma-Informed Care [\[43\]](#) and Adverse Childhood Experiences [\[44\]](#) Learning Opportunities

Opportunities for Parks and Recreation to Advance Environmental Well-Being

Parks and recreation are vital to a thriving natural world, mitigating against the impacts of climate change, and creating an environment that promotes health and well-being. This is especially true for Black, Indigenous and people of color and low-income communities that have experienced the long-term environmental inequities caused by redlining, disinvestment and unfair power dynamics. Park and recreation professionals combat the causes and impacts of climate change by promoting healthy and resilient environments and encouraging behaviors that foster a love and appreciation for the outdoors. They plan, manage and maintain 11 million acres of public parks and green spaces across the country, providing critical infrastructure in communities that improves air and water quality and can withstand the impacts of stormwater and storm surge. They

protect our natural habitats and support healthy ecosystems. They connect people to the outdoors, providing interactive and educational opportunities that support environmental stewardship now and in the future.



A ranger leads a tour of Sweetwater Wetlands Park located in the City of Gainesville, Florida.
Photo credit: Angie Gould.

System-wide policies can be implemented to support environmental justice and access to the outdoors. That may include ensuring that the design and implementation of new park and recreation facilities incorporate green infrastructure and sustainability measures; adopting a policy that greener park development is prioritized in under-resourced communities; or ensuring that equitable programs are

available in the community that focus on environmental education, green jobs and workforce development opportunities.



**SYSTEMS CHANGE
APPROACHES TO
ADVANCE
ENVIRONMENTAL
WELL-BEING**





ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE POLICY CHANGE

- Promote policies that address environmental injustices with sustainable community-driven solutions. This may include ensuring that future park investments and capital projects are prioritized in communities most impacted by environmental inequities or collaborating with historically redlined neighborhoods to design parks and develop policies for improved neighborhood air quality.
- Champion community-driven policies focused on increased green spaces, stormwater management, improved tree canopy, and reduction of the urban heat island effect.



ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE POLICY CHANGE

- Develop site-based or systems-wide policies and practices to advance sustainable practices, including natural resources management, waste reduction and environmentally friendly facility management strategies.
- Develop equitable recruitment, hiring and leadership development practices and provide fair compensation for workforce development programs to ensure all can participate.





ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

- Offer science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics (STEAM)-based, environmental education or nature play offerings as part of out-of-school time and early childhood programs and services.
- Ensure facilities and environments promote opportunities to reduce waste and energy use (e.g., composting, recycling and facilities features like solar and automated lighting systems, etc.).



ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

- Create and promote community gardens, community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs or farmers markets at park and recreation sites to support sustainable food systems and encourage waste reduction.
- Install green infrastructure to reduce stormwater flooding, runoff and the urban heat island effect, and improve overall environmental quality.





ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE BEHAVIOR CHANGE

- Conduct an assessment of your community to understand how climate change impacts the local community, specific neighborhoods and populations, and the disparities that may exist.
- Sponsor and host a community-wide environmental education initiative to raise awareness, increase understanding and take action to support our natural environments as part of NRPA's Parks for Pollinators BioBlitz.



ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE BEHAVIOR CHANGE

- Provide public education on the environmental benefits of local parks and recreation, including cost savings and impacts of green infrastructure and other environmental solutions and policies.



Resources to Explore Further:

- Greener Parks for Health [\[45\]](#)
- Parks for Pollinators BioBlitz [\[46\]](#)
- *Climate.Park.Change* [\[47\]](#)
- Green Stormwater Infrastructure Certificate [\[48\]](#)
- NRPA's Climate Statement [\[49\]](#)

Opportunities for Parks and Recreation to Advance Intellectual Well-Being

Park and recreation programs support and promote intellectual health and well-being. Park and recreation agencies are one of the largest providers of youth, family and older adult community-based programming. This vital programming engages people in new experiences that foster opportunities to learn and build new skills and enrich the mind. These programs provide academic, educational and vocational support, leadership development and youth activism opportunities, mentoring, healthy lifestyle education and more, in a safe environment. Park and recreation professionals also provide opportunities for older adults to support and enhance their intellectual well-being, including hosting events and festivals for older adults, field trips, tours, offering adult learning courses, and promoting other activities that support and maintain cognitive function.

Policies can be implemented to ensure all people have equitable access to high-quality programs and services that support intellectual well-being (e.g., cost/transportation barriers to participation are removed), and that all people feel welcome, included and fully able to participate and benefit from programming. For example, agencies can adopt a policy that ensures new out-of-school time programming is prioritized in neighborhoods where programs do not currently exist, and agencies can adopt new practices of offering programs in hybrid or virtual settings to eliminate transportation barriers.



SYSTEMS CHANGE APPROACHES TO ADVANCE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING



INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE POLICY CHANGE

- Support youth leadership and activism in the community by sponsoring and formalizing a youth advisory board to influence program development and decision making.
- Advocate and advance policies that dedicate funding within the park and recreation department budget to support youth development programs and services.
- Develop policies to ensure early childhood, out-of-school time, older adult and family programs and services are affordable and available to all, especially historically disenfranchised populations.





INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

- Provide out-of-school time programs for youth that offer academic support, evidence-based educational curricula (STEAM, social-emotional learning [SEL], environmental education, etc.).
- Provide early childhood education programs and nature play opportunities that promote early learning and development (socially, emotionally and physically) and connection to the outdoors.



INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

- Offer older adult programming (physical activity, mind games, hobby exploration, volunteerism, etc.) that provides opportunities for continued learning over the lifespan and supports cognition and emotional well-being.
- Offer intellectual programming in a variety of formats and provide support to access needed technology, ensuring all can participate.





INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE BEHAVIOR CHANGE

- Host community conversations, listening sessions, guest speakers and other enrichment opportunities to widen and deepen knowledge and understanding on diverse topics.
- Participate in campaigns to promote the value of out-of-school time programming in your community, especially during the summer months when school is out of session.
- Partner with other local organizations, including public libraries, community-based organizations, etc., to promote external educational and enrichment programs for community members.



Resources to Explore Further:

- *Healthy Aging in Parks Survey* [\[50\]](#)
- *Foods of the Month Nutrition Education Curriculum* [\[51\]](#)
- *Community and Home Gardening Curriculum* [\[52\]](#)
- *Guidelines for Excellence, Early Childhood Environmental Education Programs* [\[53\]](#)
- *Children and Nature Network Resource Hub* [\[54\]](#)
- *Out-of-School Time Report* [\[38\]](#)

Opportunities for Parks and Recreation to Advance Physical Well-Being

Park and recreation professionals provide and manage the essential infrastructure — spaces, facilities and other built environment features — that create opportunities for people to engage in behaviors and activities that improve and maintain physical health. This work includes providing accessible and inclusive spaces for everyone, and providing spaces for people to access healthy, fresh and affordable foods. Park and recreation professionals also provide high-quality programming that



Richland County Recreation Commission (Columbia, South Carolina) hosted its “Veteran’s Family and Friends Fun Day” where Richland County Sheriff’s Department employees joined in hula-hooping fun with community members. Photo courtesy of Leslie Wilson.

supports physical health and the ability to develop healthy habits. Spaces and programming can be leveraged to support physical health in other ways — connecting people to healthcare or social services, providing health education about the importance of rest and self-care, establishing cooling centers and shelters during times of extreme heat and emergencies, or offering programming targeted at improving community safety and preventing violence.

Park and recreation agencies also have an opportunity to influence physical health through policy changes to ensure environments and programs support health equity and the healthiest outcomes possible for all people. While system-wide policies are best practice, agencies also can adopt policies for individual departments, spaces, facilities or programs.



**SYSTEMS CHANGE
APPROACHES TO
ADVANCE PHYSICAL
WELL-BEING**





PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE POLICY CHANGE

- Advocate for the development of parks and open spaces, as well as other opportunities for physical activity (recreation centers, trails, sports facilities, etc.) within neighborhoods.
- Create formal joint-use or shared-use agreements with schools to use their facilities for recreational programs or develop policies governing fee structures and permitting to fair access and participation in youth sports programming.



PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE POLICY CHANGE

- Develop site-based or system-wide wellness policies to ensure programs are meeting healthy eating and physical activity standards (e.g., nutritional quality of food served in program).
- Collaborate with other local partners to advocate for food access, youth development, chronic disease management and healthcare services to be integrated into other city plans (master plans, transportation plans, etc.).





PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

- Provide out-of-school time youth sports, group exercise, evidence-based programs, and other inclusive recreational programs that promote physical activity for all.
- Provide access to healthy and affordable foods through meal programs, farmers markets and CSAs, food banks, mobile meal delivery services, community gardens and help connect community members to other nutrition services (SNAP/WIC benefits).



PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

- Partner with a local healthcare provider to offer healthcare or public health services, like screenings, vaccinations, or even primary care services onsite, or partner with a healthcare provider to refer patients to park and recreation programs.
- Activate park and recreation spaces to increase utilization of parks and recreation and improve perceptions of safety.





PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE BEHAVIOR CHANGE

- Provide health and wellness education and management programs to community members on a variety of topics — nutrition, chronic disease, healthy sleep, etc.
- Develop and implement communications campaigns that promote physical activity, healthy eating, and active transportation in local parks and recreation.



Resources to Explore Futher:

- Foods of the Month Nutrition Education Curriculum [\[51\]](#)
- Farmers Markets and Parks [\[55\]](#)
- Youth Sports Resources [\[56\]](#)
- Healthy Aging in Parks Resources [\[57\]](#)
- Partnerships With Healthcare Providers [\[58\]](#)

Opportunities for Parks and Recreation to Advance Social Well-Being

Park and recreation spaces and programs are essential to supporting and promoting social health and wellness. Parks and recreation provide spaces where people come together to build relationships and trust, connect with one another, and contribute to the larger community. These spaces provide opportunities for informal and organic social experiences, as well as programming intentionally focused on reducing social isolation and loneliness, building connections and positive relationships, and strengthening social skills.

In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, park and recreation professionals brought forward innovative and promising models focused on addressing social well-being, including conducting well-being checks with community members, bringing programs out into the community to offer fun,



Children learn how to play flag football at Meadowbrook Park in Columbia, Maryland.
Photo credit: Cara Marshall.

safe and physically distant programming, and offering virtual and remote programming.

Policy changes also can be used to influence social health. For example, even if a program's main goal is to help participants better manage pain associated with a chronic disease, programs can devote time to fostering positive social interactions and building

relationships among participants. Establishing a practice of opening a classroom 20 minutes before a class can create space for people to connect. Given the impact of COVID-19 on the social health and well-being of youth, agencies also could adopt a policy of integrating a SEL curriculum into existing out-of-school time programs, ensuring that youth attending the program are getting 30 minutes of intentional SEL each week.



**SYSTEMS CHANGE
APPROACHES TO
ADVANCE SOCIAL
WELL-BEING**





SOCIAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE POLICY CHANGE

- Ensure that program policies and practices, including marketing strategies (e.g., images and language), data collection tactics (e.g., registration forms), and environments are equitable and inclusive, so all feel welcome and can fully participate.
- Develop staff training policies to promote social well-being within all operations and programs. Training requirements may focus on SEL and/or diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) core competencies.



SOCIAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE POLICY CHANGE

- Develop policies to ensure the agency is investing time, funding and resources in building trust with community and enacting community-led decision-making practices.





SOCIAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

- Host a wide range of engaging, inclusive and culturally relevant events and programs to bring people together. Consider offerings that provide opportunities for intergenerational socialization, as well as multi-cultural, LGBTQ+ individuals and other diverse identities.
- Bring programming and services out into neighborhoods and offer programming in a variety of formats (in person, virtual, hybrid), eliminating other barriers to participation, including transportation, safety, hearing and vision impairments, etc.



SOCIAL WELL-BEING

SAMPLE PRACTICES TO CREATE BEHAVIOR CHANGE

- Provide volunteer opportunities across your agency to instill a sense of purpose and connection to community.
- Embed a social-skills or SEL curriculum into your existing youth programs, including out-of-school time services, youth sports, mentoring and other enrichment offerings.
- Conduct direct outreach to community members to check in on them and simply connect.
- Provide education on using digital devices, and provide access to digital devices, so people can communicate with family and friends.



Resources to Explore Further:

- *Elevating Health Equity Through Parks and Recreation: A Framework for Action* [1]
- *Equity Language Guide* [2]
- *Equity in Parks and Recreation: A Historical Perspective* [3]
- *Remote Physical Activity Programs for Older Adults: A Guide to Planning and Implementation* [59]
- *Youth Mentoring Framework* [60]

5 | Case Studies

Community Wellness Hubs in Action

This section of the toolkit features real-world examples of Community Wellness Hubs. Explore each case study to discover how park and recreation agencies and their community partners are implementing systems change approaches to increase access to high-quality programs, services and spaces across the seven dimensions of well-being.



City of Altus Parks and Recreation Department, Oklahoma

The [City of Altus Parks and Recreation Department](#), has grown its programming options from primarily youth-focused to serve all age groups. This effort has led to connections with public health, schools, libraries and the business community by marketing the changes as promoting health, tourism and economic development.

Quality of life is very important in Altus, but how to determine “quality of life” was decided by the community. Families walking safely on sidewalks and trails with their kids was key to the

community members of Altus, so the park and recreation department focused on initiatives to expand park use, including a “story walk” developed in partnership with the local library and with funding from multiple community organizations. A story walk allows park users to walk along a trail with pedestals at various locations along the path and read part of a story at each pedestal with interactive activities in between.

The community was involved in the story-walk process from the start and took the initiative to make things happen. Local students at a technical school created the pedestals and a local auto dealership painted the pedestals for long-lasting wear. The park department bought the materials for installation and installed the finished pedestals, and the library selected the books. Once the story walk was completed, parks and recreation promoted the trail in both English and Spanish messaging to the community through a grand opening event, as well as at various times during the year like spring break.

The parks department also leveraged its relationship with the school district to promote the story walk and other park opportunities through take-home fliers for kids and via school announcements. Additionally, the park department and school district have developed a shared-use agreement to make the most of the recreational facilities in the city. The schools are one way to get the message out about park and recreation opportunities through fliers in backpacks and school announcements.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic also has increased partnership opportunities with the health department by opening the park and recreation community center for vaccine clinics, utilizing libraries to get people online for vaccines, and supporting the health agency with vaccine calls. In fact, people travelled from other surrounding areas of City of Altus because the local vaccine system was streamlined and working well.

Altus also has a community-based services group that meets on a monthly basis. This group compiled a list of community resources into a single, online document for social service providers to use when conducting home visits and having discussions about meeting community members' needs.



Dallas Park and Recreation Department and WellMed Charitable Foundation, Texas

The [Dallas Park and Recreation Department](#) identified the need to support older adults in their community. To meet this need, park and recreation staff explored and established a relationship with the [WellMed Charitable Foundation](#) and found a supportive and active partner.

The WellMed Charitable Foundation is the philanthropic partner to WellMed Medical Management, a network of doctors, specialists and professionals advancing a preventive healthcare model for Medicare-eligible persons. This is WellMed's first relationship with a park and recreation department. The foundation believes that more and more healthcare foundations and organizations are interested in the social determinants of health and this aligns with the work of a community wellness hub. WellMed also is interested in investing in and showcasing the value of older adults and the potential that they have to be resources to the community.

The Dallas Park and Recreation Department and the WellMed Charitable Foundation worked together to develop a 21st Century Activity Center versus a traditional "senior center." To make the most of their shared resources, the partners presented the need for the center and the vision for what could be

accomplished to the city council. The park and recreation department was not in a position to provide financial support to build the center, but it could provide staff and programs, which was a win for WellMed. Initially, there was doubt that parks and recreation and WellMed could come together, and it has been proven to be an amazingly successful collaboration. People could see the connection and trust between park and recreation and WellMed staff; that trust spread to others.

This public-private partnership was able to develop a 22,000-square-foot facility in a predominantly African American/Black, low- to mid-income area that previously had not been adequately served. The facility provides meals with curbside options, robust physical activity opportunities, routine health screenings (blood pressure, blood glucose, vaccine distribution, etc.), health education classes, and other health and social opportunities led by WellMed and park and recreation staff, with WellMed covering most of the cost of service for program participants in the first years of service. Programming is culturally appropriate for the neighborhood, with services provided in both Spanish and English. The staff of the facility are shared between both parks and recreation and WellMed and are reflective of the community that utilizes the center. Staff rely on each other and share the workload, resources and information through their solid partnership.



It's one thing to say, 'I need to eat better and get physical activity'; it's another thing to be able to go next door to use a facility that provides healthy meals and exercise classes.' – Carol Zernial, executive director, WellMed Charitable Foundation



City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation, Indiana

The Indiana University, School of Public Health's Department of Health and Wellness Design – Bloomington and the City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department has a long-standing formal relationship, which has been the key to equitable, community-centered health and well-being efforts. With the help of a full-time park and recreation department employee serving as a health and wellness coordinator, time has been spent ensuring all involved are formally trained on equity. By leveraging their relationship with the university, the department has access to a steady stream of student learners, who benefit from real-world experiences via the park and recreation department. The university also has a master's in public health program with an emphasis on recreation. With these solid infrastructure components, the department and university take time to regularly check in with their community through a master plan survey every five years, as well as focus groups with community members and a biennial survey that covers topics around safety, transportation, parks, and access to services and programming.

The partners also highlighted the need to regularly communicate and meet with other local agencies and community-based partners, seeing themselves as the natural conveners around the topics of health and wellness within the community. Whether that is fitness programming, employee wellness, strategic

partnerships with the local hospital or public health organizations, identifying who has resources and how local partners can work together to support the health and wellness of its community members have been critical to their success.

“

We see ourselves as the natural conveners.”

– Paula McDevitt, director, Parks and Recreation Department



San Francisco Recreation and Park Department, California

San Francisco's Community Wellness Hubs initiative was created during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic upon the closure of the public school district to in-person learning in March 2020. Realizing children had limited options to go during the day, putting their academic and social-emotional well-being at risk, the initiative rooted in partnership began. Across the city, 86 hubs — housed at park and recreation facilities, libraries and nonprofit organizations — offered children a safe place to do their distance learning schoolwork, have access to healthy meals, play safely with their peers, and generally experience a

sense of belonging and community that schools and out-of-school time programs normally provide.

The San Francisco Recreation and Park Department locations provided community learning hubs for vulnerable children impacted by school closures due to COVID-19. The hubs, which were permissible under the city health order, provided a space for kids to come and access technology needed for distance learning schoolwork.

For 16 months during the pandemic, the park department converted 37 recreation centers to serve as learning hubs and reassigned staff members to provide supervision to virtual learners. In partnership with the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Families, the park department, and the San Francisco Public Library system, about 2,000 kids from across the city (95 percent of them children of color) were provided with healthy meals, interaction with caring adults and opportunities for physical activity in addition to a learning space. During the summer, camps were offered by the park department to the San Francisco Unified School District, prioritizing kids who did not have access to in-person school in 2020. The camps provided sports for youth development, as well as wellness programming. In addition to the special arrangements for COVID-19, the park department continued to provide regular services, such as:

- Partnerships with elementary schools (offering youth sports programs, nature-based experiences and help with homework)
- Internships for high school students to work for the recreation and park department
- Programming for older adults, including a park prescription program for guided walks and time in nature
- An equity program focused on relationship building for kids of all ages to come to places like Peace Parks and enjoy safe spaces

The coordination of those three organizations was essential in providing both physical space and programming during the pandemic. Engaging the community in the development of the hub initiative was crucial in providing the services that were needed. Community facilitated meetings engaged the public to get their advice in designing a targeted initiative. Meeting community members where they are was prioritized by arranging meetings at times they identified as convenient. Through these efforts, park and recreation professionals were

able to receive better input in the planning stage, as well as through ongoing check-ins during the implementation stage, allowing the hub team to provide the best delivery of services

“

As parks professionals, we need to highlight the ‘why.’ This past year was a unique year, due to COVID-19, in which people understood that parks weren’t just amenities, they were must-haves. It was a moment where people really opened their eyes. We need to tell our story and explain why parks and recreation are so important.”

– Phil Ginsburg, general manager at San Francisco Recreation and Parks



City of Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services, Connecticut

In the City of Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services (BPRYCS) department, “wellness” is a word that is inclusive of physical, mental and social health. The department has a variety of holistic offerings, including recreation programs,

no-cost counseling services, positive youth development, fair housing/evictions support, and camps for the social development of kids. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the department found itself as the “go-to” department to help, providing food distribution, vaccination sites and childcare services.

One of the innovative strategies that BPRYCS has advanced in its role as a Community Wellness Hub has been to sponsor community conversations. In the wake of the murder of George Floyd, the department partnered with the city’s Diversity Council, Board of Education and Mayor’s Office to bring people together for a conversation. They provided a space for the community to learn what each city department was doing to address inequities and to let community members know that they could hold the city accountable for the progress of this work. More than 100 people participated, visiting the different departments to ask questions and learn about how each department was addressing key issues, like access for those with disabilities, LGBTQ+ community needs, as well as addressing concerns around community safety and police brutality. This opportunity allowed community members to engage with local leaders and understand the network of resources that are available to them.



You don't need to have a physical space for a wellness hub; it's really using the resources and relationships you have to create the wellness hub even without a physical location."

– Sarah Larson, Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services

A second conversation organized by the BPRYCS was held with social services and health providers to discuss what they are doing to address physical, mental and social health with an equity lens, leading service providers to evaluate programs, policies, pricing and interactions. Providers and community members discussed addressing local needs and who to engage, like building trust between pediatricians and Black communities and other communities of color; the ways healthcare is being actively approached with these communities; and how to ensure community members feel comfortable accessing resources.

Since community needs are constantly changing, the goal continues to be consistently making sure needs are being addressed and met through ongoing engagement processes with the community. Staff remarked on how rewarding it is to make people feel appreciated and welcome in their own homes and community. The BPRYCS staff also continue internal conversations and ask questions of their own work on an ongoing basis to ensure their continual support of the community, including:

- In general, how can we make programs, services, facilities and department information more accessible?
- How can we further reach and facilitate services for underserved populations?
- What are the primary languages spoken in our community, and do our marketing materials need to be translated?
- Are the fonts and colors on our materials easy to read, or are materials offered in other forms (audio, Braille, etc.) to meet community needs?
- Are our resources easy to find, and what types of communication methods do our community members prefer?

Centering Community Through 'Bristol Cares'

Created in 2008 in response to the economic recession, the City of Bristol, Connecticut, began a “Bristol Cares” meeting that meets once a month (60 to 90 minutes). This meeting includes about 75 social service providers/agencies/people in the community, including police and fire, housing, planning, health, parks and recreation, mental health, substance use, jobs taskforce, shelters, nonprofits and the community foundation. There is a specific topic each month, and it allows participants to share resources and events. This network also builds relationships in the community, allows for alignment/partnership opportunities, raises funding, creates shared programming, determines what is available and not available in the community, and provides opportunities to react to community needs.



Dallas Parks and Recreation Department and Baylor Scott & White Health, Texas

Dallas Park and Recreation Department and Baylor Scott & White Health (BSW) have had a public-private partnership for 11 years. Their collaborative circle of care model provides care for the community, specifically focusing on community members who are currently uninsured or underinsured. Their work focuses on wellness, nutrition, chronic disease education with an emphasis on diabetes, hypertension and kidney disease — as well as physical activity education offering fitness activities for everyone from “sit and fit” to high-impact aerobics. A farm stand and cooking demonstrations are available with the overarching purpose of improving the health of the community.



Baylor Scott & White Health was looking to address an identified community need to specifically prevent and treat chronic disease. They found that there were high levels of emergency room visits and a high prevalence of diabetes, among other chronic diseases, in critical-need ZIP codes in Dallas. They conducted focus groups with community members to see what could be done to address these concerns. Increasing opportunities for health education, nutrition and physical activity were identified as possible solutions.

The team at Baylor Scott & White Health knew a Dallas Park and Recreation Department already existed in one of the communities they were hoping to impact. The team developed a relationship with the recreation center manager, ultimately turning the recreation center into a shared-use facility. The goal of health for the community became the center of their collaborative work. The recreation center building was old and outdated before the partnership began in 2010, and a vision for updates to the building included a clinic with exam rooms, fitness rooms and educational kitchen. BSW and the Dallas Park and Recreation Department wanted to develop partnerships with organizations that could help provide additional programs, and enlisted partners that were in agreement to serve the community and for the community to become well and become whole. They wanted all the services offered together — food, physical activity, healthcare, education — to be offered for free or for minimal fees.

Through shared costs of services, efficiency with available resources and collaborative grant writing, their vision became a reality. Clinical care, physical activity, and education and nutrition are all under the same roof at the wellness center with referrals by center staff linking all three areas. They continue to partner and build trust with the community, including ensuring culturally relevant programming like cooking classes featuring African American and Hispanic/Latin American recipes and translating written materials into Spanish. Access to resources also has been extended into the community through working with partners to hold educational classes in churches, equipping community members to become certified community health workers and share their knowledge, and hiring people who are representative of their neighborhood.

The development of the recreation center into a shared-use facility is impactful, however, it still only is accessible to those who live and/or can travel to the center itself. Partners decided to

package the idea, so it could be used on a smaller scale as a plug-and-play model in a community that needs it. In collaboration with the United Way, “Healthy City” work is being done and placed in high-need areas even without a specifically designated brick-and-mortar building. The concept focuses on the social determinants of health and brings in partners who are experts in their fields. Partnerships are critical, especially when serving an underserved community.



City of Liberty Parks and Recreation Department, Missouri

The City of Liberty Parks and Recreation Department (LPR) has developed a suite of evidence-based program offerings to support a healthier community. These efforts began in 2018 after receiving a grant from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), which offered instructor grants for evidence-based programming targeted to older adults. The first three programs were Walk with Ease, Fit and Strong!, and Active Living Every Day.

After some initial growing pains things were going well, but then the COVID-19 pandemic led to shelter-in-place orders. To continue providing wellness opportunities to the community, the classes transitioned to a virtual format. LPR spent four months adapting the evidence-based programs to a virtual offering via

Zoom. In 2021, the virtual version of Active Living Every Day was piloted as a part of the NRPA remote delivery pilot program. Virtual programs not only met the need of continuing the evidence-based program work during a health crisis, but also identified a previously underserved community that was homebound prior to the pandemic.



Making connections and building relationships with other community health organizations is important to support the coordination of resources required, utilizing a community wellness hub concept.”

– Heather Borchardt, Health and Wellness manager, Liberty Parks and Recreation

Further contributing to their success, LPR’s leadership has prioritized dedicating staff time to focus on building key connections and relationships within the community. These connections supported promoting programs, developing a participant referral system and offsetting overhead costs.

Seven clinics from the Liberty Hospital District referred patients with chronic conditions to LPR’s evidence-based programs, and, in return, LPR offered a significant enrollment fee discount to those patients. The health impacts were seen immediately but even with the discount, to have the biggest impact on the health of the community, the programs needed to be offered for free. LPR partnered with the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC), which oversees the local Area Agency on Aging. With Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) grant funds, MARC reimbursed LPR for select evidence-based programs and to purchase class materials. MARC also became another referral partner, identifying people who could benefit from the LPR programs as part of their managed care network. Since the materials and staff time associated with offering evidence-based programming can be cost prohibitive for some park and recreation departments, identifying community partners with “mutually aligned goals” that can help cover costs is key.

To help coordinate all the offerings available in the area and reduce overlap, the Northland Living Well Collaborative was formed to support all of the organizations that offer evidence-

based programs. This collaborative has been able to gain additional grant dollars to run even more programs.



West Allis-West Milwaukee Recreation and Community Services Department, Wisconsin

The West Allis-West Milwaukee Recreation and Community Services Department (RCS) operates under the local school district and is governed by the local Board of Education. This is a unique model in the state of Wisconsin and provides advantages, such as different funding structures and greater priority access to school district facilities and resources. This makes it easier to advance key activities within their community wellness hub because of the close link to school resources. Two successes of the department in the creation of their wellness hub are in the areas of mental health and nutrition.

Mental health and substance use support was not previously connected to parks and recreation in West Allis-West Milwaukee, but it was something the department recognized as an area of need, in which they could develop and play a more active role in the community. The department is a member of Safe and Supported, the local heroin and opioid task force, and formerly provided a training room for families to recognize signs of drug use/abuse, which is now a mobile program. They partner

with schools to provide a safe space for kids to attend out-of-school time programs and provide the Botvin LifeSkills (substance misuse and prevention program) for fourth and fifth grade students. RCS provides a number of alcohol- and drug-free community events and is an active member partner on the community's Mental Health and Substance Abuse Task Force.



Parks and recreation can't do this on our own—but we know people and organizations who can help and we have demonstrated how we can be of service beyond traditional programming. It is a relationship of 'help me to help you.' We can be the resource to connect people we know in terms of all the wellness dimensions."

– Shelly Strasser, Director of Recreation and Community Services, West Allis-West Milwaukee Recreation and Community Services Department

Nutrition is another key component that fits as a park and recreation wellness initiative. Specifically, the RCS provides:

(1) Mini Marketers – An initiative that promotes farmers markets to teach kids about farming and the value of locally grown produce, the ways food gets to the market, and an opportunity to empower kids to make good choices for themselves by purchasing fresh produce at the market to take home.

(2) Family Meals at the Park – A family meals program held once a week in the park as a sit-down family meal event, through the Federal nutrition programs (e.g., U.S. Department of Agriculture Summer Food Service Program) and through partnerships with the school district food service vendor, Sodexo, and a local food bank, Hunger Task Force. Families were able to enjoy a nutritious hot meal together and participate in nutrition education activities together provided by a West Allis Health Department dietician. This also included take home activities and supplies for each family.

(3) Online Ordering and Delivery Services – A program for families utilizing the WIC Farmers Market vouchers. Market vendors bundled and priced produce aligned with the value of the WIC farmers market vouchers, then families utilizing vouchers could use an online Google document to place orders through the park and recreation department, with orders curated and delivered to homes by department staff. This provided greater access to fresh market produce and helped alleviate the stigma of presenting the farmers market voucher checks in person.

The recreation and community services department sees themselves as the “air traffic controller” in the community based on relationships with public health and other key agencies. Being an entity and extension of the school district means the department follows the school district vision. The district has clearly stated equity measures referred to as “Equity Non-Negotiables,” honoring and recognizing all the different backgrounds that make up the community. Trusted organizations and community members provide input to the district, and in turn, the district can provide the information, needed services and respond to community needs.



Ozark Department of Leisure Services, Alabama

The Ozark Department of Leisure Services serves a smaller city, which allows it to have a close relationship with its residents. Department staff want to understand each person's needs and not make assumptions about those needs without input from the community.

Before starting the process of engaging with the community, staff visited the Sanchez Multi-Service Center in New Orleans, Louisiana that was a model for a community wellness hub to get ideas and see how they were operating. It inspired them to start their own local initiative, become more visible in the community, and build key partnerships and relationships.



***I have been met with open arms when
outreaching to partners in the community."*** -

*Ayanna Williams, City of Ozark- Ozark
Department of Leisure Services*

Ozark staff began conducting local outreach and research to 'find the people who were doing the work,' built relationships, and better understand community challenges. Through this outreach, local food access initiatives including gardens, providing SNAP-Ed nutrition education classes, and supporting community members with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) application process, came out as areas of work to partner on.

The Mary Hill Family Service Center is a community organization that provides local family and youth services. A parks and recreation staff member is on their advisory board and saw an opportunity to partner with them. That partnership has been an integral resource in bringing knowledge and key connections to the table. They helped facilitate a discussion on how to better coordinate and access the SNAP application process to help people apply, and to bridge gaps and encourage the local farmers market to accept SNAP benefits to expand affordable access to healthy food options.

In addition, the partners utilized resources and connections through the local Cooperative Extension office and subject matter experts in the community to help create classes and gardening opportunities best aligned with the interests, goals and work of the community.



Partners Supporting Community Wellness Hubs: East Tennessee State University, Center for Rural Health Research, Johnson City, Tennessee

As a university, East Tennessee State University (ETSU) has become a cornerstone in terms of providing support to rural communities regionally, statewide and across the nation. Specifically, the university boasts a Center for Rural Health Research that has a unique focus on both rural and public health. Housed within the university's College of Public Health, the center works closely with regional partners through the STRONG Accountable Care Community (STRONG ACC), which serves 21 counties in northeast Tennessee and southwest Virginia. STRONG stands for Striving Toward Resilience and Opportunity for the Next Generation.

The STRONG ACC engages hundreds of organizations from multiple sectors around a common agenda to improve health and wellness by promoting early childhood development, educational success, workforce readiness and economic prosperity. Successes have come from a strong focus on relationship building. "Where we see success is relational, especially in rural communities where everyone knows each other," says Michael Meit, director of research and programs at the ETSU Center for Rural Health Research. The STRONG ACC

and ETSU have capitalized on this approach by ensuring there is “an opportunity for everyone to be engaged.”

With the majority of rural communities facing health inequities, the Center for Rural Health Research has encouraged the communities it serves to first understand who they are trying to engage and serve. This includes making sure that the end users of wellness-related programs and strategies are involved from the start. This has included acknowledging the need to build trusting relationships, approaching each community with a sense of humility and emphasizing that you are there to learn. Focusing on rural communities also has included concentrating on rural economies. ***“Rural people and communities have been economically left behind,”*** says Meit. ETSU and regional partners work hard to ensure rural communities are not left behind. Rural jobs are critical and if they do not exist or are not available, this, in turn, impacts educational attainment and other social predictors of health. Thus, the university encourages the communities it works with to see this “bigger picture” when also thinking about the overall health and wellness of community members.

The work that ETSU's Center for Rural Health Research does to support communities in the region is focused on relationship building and cross-sector partnership building. Much of this is accomplished in partnership with STRONG ACC. Most of the center's work focuses on equity, which leads to the need to recognize power dynamics. When empowering voices of community members to get involved in community wellness efforts, careful facilitation is needed, especially when there are known “inequities of power at the table.” Community members do not necessarily have “credentials” to be there. The center emphasizes being mindful and inclusive of any dynamics between people and organizations that currently hold power and have resources and find ways to neutralize this when bringing many different voices to the table. Creating forums like community meetings, individual dialogues and regular communication is critical. When building partnerships and community-wide efforts, establish a positive narrative for the conversations and meetings (e.g., Are you lifting up the assets or focusing on deficits?).

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About NRPA

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is the leading not-for-profit organization dedicated to building strong, vibrant and resilient communities through the power of parks and recreation. With more than 60,000 members, NRPA advances this mission by investing in and championing the work of park and recreation professionals and advocates — the catalysts for positive change in service of equity, climate-readiness, and overall health and well-being.

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