TRUST FOR **PUBLIC LAND**™

The 10-Minute Walk® Communities of Practice

HIGH IMPACT AREAS FOR PARK EQUITY

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Overview of 10-Minute Walk® Program

The Park Equity Divide

Parks and green spaces are helping confront some of today's most pressing urban challenges. They offer places to play, exercise, unplug, and connect with others in our communities. Trust for Public Land (TPL) has mapped park access for 14,000 U.S. cities, towns, and communities, and found that **1 in 3 residents does not have a park or green space within a 10-minute walk of home**.

Further, there is a significant disparity in who has access to available park space, and not all parks are created equitably. Low-income neighborhoods, as well as systemically under-resourced BIPOC populations, have access to significantly less park space than residents of high-income neighborhoods. Quality of park spaces and surrounding conditions impact the extent to which communities can realize the social cohesion, improved health and wellbeing, and environmental resilience parks and green spaces support.

Our goal is to help close the park equity gap for the 100 million people—including 28 million children—who lack access to a close-to-home park or greenspace. Trust for Public Land works through the 10-Minute Walk® program to support systems-changes that lead to sustainable change within the cities and communities we partner with.

How The 10-Minute Walk® Program Works

- **Capacity building, peer learning & exchange.** Through our **Park Equity Communities of Practice** and roundtables, we bring together mayors, municipal leaders, partners and communities to break down silos and advance learning through webinars, workshops, and discussion.

- **Test and accelerate action through pilots and direct assistance.** We work with cities to provide tailored support to address a wide range of parks-related activities—from assessments and planning, to funding and policy, to measurement of benefits. Through **Park Equity Accelerator** projects, we aim to identify high-impact policies, practices, and insights that can be informative and inspirational to other communities.

- **10-Minute Walk® policy recommendations.** We conduct research and partner to identify promising policy solutions for expanding quality park access. We synthesize lessons learned into sound, impactful policy recommendations that can more effectively and equitably close the park equity divide.

- **Partnerships to scale impact.** The 10-Minute Walk® program works closely with allied organizations to create alignment around park equity goals across sectors and city departments. We also seek cross-sector partnerships to leverage the multi-benefits of parks as a vital element of sustainable community development.

Park Equity Communities of Practice

To close the park equity gap, the 10-Minute Walk® program works at every scale—locally to nationally–to identify barriers to advancing park equity in cities. Through planning processes, policy and funding, we aim to ensure investments are directed to those who need them most and in ways that are driven by community needs and priorities.

The Park Equity Communities of Practice are a learning and capacity-building network. As part of the Communities of Practice, our collaborative sessions provide space for learning, exchange, and workshopping ideas, as well as generate policy recommendations, resources, and guidance that supports changing park equity practices on the ground. Anchored in a rigorous, research-to-practice approach, we provide capacity building sessions, trainings, and peer exchange to leverage expertise from cities across the country. The Communities of Practice work hand-in-hand with cities to:

- Elevate leading-edge practices for addressing park equity via policy and other systemic changes.

- Identify replicable and adaptable models, and workshop barriers and strategies to test on the local and national scale.

- Foster a peer network that serves as a collaborative hub for 10-Minute Walk® cities and other sectors and partners to advance park equity.

Deep-Dive Tracks

The Communities of Practice offer multiple deep dive tracks, where city and park practitioners engage in a year-long series of workshops related to a specific strategy for closing the park equity divide in their respective cities. Through these sessions, participants have access to subject matter experts, innovative city examples and best practices, and peer-to-peer discussion to workshops solutions together. In each of the tracks this past year, Trust for Public Land fostered discussion and collaboration between practitioners and policy-makers to better understand current opportunities and challenges and chart the path forward.

In 2022-2023, we hosted three separate "tracks" to provide sustained, deep-dive engagement around a high-impact area of focus, which represents a significant challenge or need in the field and are most relevant to practitioners' interests. **200 city practitioners and subject matters experts from 60 cities** participated in one or more of the following tracks:

- **Community Engagement for Lasting Impact.** Exchanged best practices and opportunities for conducting meaningful, equitable community engagement and gathered tools to apply learnings in their respective communities.

- **Developer Park Partnership Strategies.** Tackled questions related to development-driven parks, including practice, policy, and partnership related to planning and building park systems.

- **Park Qualities Incubator: Mapping Park Experiences.** Discussed and co-developed new approaches to measuring "park experience types" (e.g., natural areas, recreational activities, and social gathering areas) as a next step towards building a set of park quality attributes for use in equity and impact analyses.

Executive Summary

As a venue for learning and open and honest exchange across diverse experiences and perspectives, the Park Equity Communities of Practice are a unique platform to gain insight on what challenges are most pressing, and what innovations are most promising in the eyes of parks practitioners working to serve local residents with a more accessible, high-quality, and equitable park system..

While each track yielded specific insights and learnings, The 10-Minute Walk® program identified the following themes that resonate across all of the 2022–2023 Communities of Practice tracks:

- **A local park equity goal provides a north star.** Throughout the year, cities shared the importance of establishing a clearly stated local park equity goal that explicitly sets a timeline to prioritize investing in under-served and -resourced neighborhoods. This visioning is an important condition to develop or reform local policies and practices to support equitable outcomes and enable collaboration across municipal departments. For example, *Park Qualities Incubator* track participants reported that a city-wide park equity goal sets the foundation to identify areas and create metrics to target investments based on racial and economic data. Through a data-driven approach, cities can better advocate for a more equitable distribution of park resources, funds, and programming.

- **Partnerships are key.** Across tracks, participants were aligned in their awareness that "parks departments cannot do it alone." For example, the majority of participants in the *Development Policy & Partnership* track spoke about the need for related policy, but also the important role that the private sector can play in funding, building and maintaining parkspaces. Related to this, practitioners also emphasized the need for intra-city collaboration around land use, and that Parks and Recreation departments should collaborate closely with other city departments, such as planning, housing, economic development and transportation, to maximize benefits and minimize unintended consequences on local communities.

- **Strategies lacking community voices are incomplete.** Practitioners across tracks were especially interested in ways to integrate community voice and priorities into planning and decision-making processes. Participants in the *Community Engagement for a Lasting Impact* track agreed that the field needs more focused attention and models for formalizing high quality, well-resourced community engagement in park planning and programming. Strategies include compensating local expertise, civic education, and on-going engagement and activations with communities throughout the park development process (pre, during, and post). Tracks seek to support both resident-driven action, and city reception and capacity to change decision-making processes.

Systemic approaches to park equity are needed—and possible. Practitioners across tracks had robust conversations around unique local histories, policies, and built environments that give rise to systemic drivers of park inequities in their communities. Through this program, we identified key strategies, policy language, pressing challenges, and ripe opportunities to create standards of practice and policymaking in support of more equitable outcomes. The following section outlines salient takeaways and strategies to advance park equity through park qualities data, partnerships with private developers, and community engagement.

Community Engagement for Lasting Impact

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The Community Engagement track brought together 110 park practitioners and community partners from 47 cities to explore tactics and policies that use parks and green spaces to build community relationships, community identity, and community power. Using TPL's '**Common Ground Framework**,' we gathered policy examples and actionable community engagement strategies that untap the power of parks to serve as social infrastructure. To build the knowledge and skills for how cities can implement intentional and equitable community engagement locally, TPL explored the following with this cohort:

1. What works and doesn't work when engaging communities in parks planning, development and programming?

2. How can we improve and pivot community engagement strategies when practitioners often face constraints in funding, capacity, data and other resources?

Major Insights and Learnings

➔ **Community engagement must be intentional, both for new and existing relationships. Relationship building moves at the speed of trust. Think of building relationships with the community like you would with making a new friend.**

- Spend time and resources on existing community touchpoints and events, instead of just hosting your own meetings.

- Identify and invest in community leaders and organizations that have close ties to the community.

- Organize communities around their identity and culture, including employing local artists in design and programming and connecting to the heart and soul of the neighborhood.

➔ **Every community member has different pathways to accessing a seat at the table, therefore a "one-size-fits-all" engagement approach creates barriers for truly democratic, equitable engagement.**

- Identify and mitigate barriers such as timing and finances, by providing in-kind services like childcare, food, transportation, translation services, among others.

- Compensate communities for their time and expertise. Collaborate with nonprofits to funnel resources—such as free homegoods or vouchers to city services—if your agency is unable to directly pay community members.

- Meet the community where they are by holding meetings at established community centers and 'third spaces' like churches, schools, grocery stores, barber shops, among others.

- Consider quality versus quantity of data. Digital outreach may reach more people but potentially less diverse audiences and often more qualitative data like park observations have deep insights but are more resource intensive.

➔ **Community engagement tactics and events should reflect the diversity and dynamic relationships of the neighborhoods they serve.**

- Structure engagement to be active and collaborative, rather than passive and individual-oriented.

- Avoid one-time approaches and activate the site with consistent, inclusive programming led by community members.

- Ongoing community engagement and touch points for capital parks projects projects is critical to understanding local impact and avoiding further displacement.

- Segregation in parks settings limits social bridging and may even deepen divides if agencies do not intentionally create spaces that are diverse and interactive.

- Make engagement...engaging! Pursue nontraditional outreach methods like placing a mobile chalkboard to collect feedback on a park, and hosting hybrid meetings (in-person and virtual) to widen your reach.

➔ **Building community power requires creating processes and pathways that increase social capital, civic participation, and collective efficacy. For parks and green spaces to promote community power and equitable development, park practitioners need to take a holistic, intersectoral approach, and evaluate short- and long-term impacts.**

- Support and fund establishment of stewardship groups who can self-organize and help program the spaces.

- Equip community members with the skills to advocate for improvements, such as training them in complicated processes like passing a ballot measure.

- Coordinate resources and partnerships across departments and sectors, such as housing, transportation, health, climate, economic development, arts, among others.

- Refer to state grant criteria and **CAPRA** accreditation to guide community engagement standards and track key metrics.

- Plan for unintended consequences of new park development and renovation projects. Though parks departments are typically not the actors mostly responsible for green gentrification, they play a critical role in involving the community to influence the process.

- Houselessness and green gentrification are two interrelated, high priorities for parks departments and other agencies. These are very complicated and unique to communities, but it's proven that community engagement from the beginning of any project is critical to understanding the needs, perspectives, and identity of these at-risk communities.

Resource

Throughout the year, TPL collected and shared examples of park planning and programming models that center communities and equity. In **this guide**, find community engagement tactics and policies from nearly 50 cities that elevated parks and green spaces to improve social infrastructure, with a particular focus on empowering historically marginalized and excluded groups.

Impact

"On Common Ground" is a new research & advocacy opportunity at TPL, centered on lifting the capacity of parks and other public spaces to mitigate the impacts of polarization, oppression, and racism. In March 2023, nine cities from this Community Engagement track were selected to advance projects that promote social contact among residents. Through On Common Ground, 10-Minute Walk® cities focused on projects that aimed on strengthening civic life and social infrastructure, with a particular focus on bringing people together across lines of difference and building greater trust, civic friendship, and belonging.

At the Welcoming America Interactive in San Jose, CA, TPL launched the On Common Ground program with more than two dozen park advocates and professionals from eight cities Baton Rouge, Buffalo, Cleveland, Des Moines, Fayetteville, Greeley, Lexington and Raleigh, to leverage their parks projects programs to mitigate polarization and promote welcoming.

Parks and Land Development Policy
Major Insights and Learnings

Cities are partnering with developers and leveraging local residential and commercial land development policies as a strategy to reduce the park access gap. A Trust for Public Land (TPL) review found that, over the last five years, 62% of the land for parks and greenways that opened or expanded across ten large U.S. cities was acquired from developers. The cities analyzed were Aurora, CO; Cleveland, OH; Columbus, OH; Denver, CO; Irvine, CA; Lewisville, TX; Lexington, KY; Long Beach, CA; Portland, OR; and Washington D.C.

To help understand this trend, TPL convened 65 parks and planning practitioners from 37 cities to discuss the role of land use and development policy as well as partnerships with developers in shaping local park systems. Participants identified three critical questions that cities face in how their land development policies intersect with park equity, and the group shared recommendations for how cities can answer those questions.

➔ **How can cities ensure that park creation keeps pace with new development and growth?**

Cities should ensure that any parkland dedication ordinances or park impact fees within their development policies are calibrated to reflect the true cost of land acquisition.

- To ensure that parkland acquisition keeps up with growth, both the acreage and fee-in-lieu requirements of a parkland dedication ordinance and/or impact fee should be set at a level sufficient to acquire land within the service area of the new development. This will likely require formulas that reflect site-specific acquisition costs and land availability, rather than citywide standards.

Cities should establish a clear plan for improving any land that is dedicated.

- To help park development keep pace with growth, policies should include components that will support both land acquisition and development. Assess the relative strengths of partners in determining who is best suited to develop the park while ensuring long-term public access (e.g., asking developers or private partners to build the park prior to dedication or site development).

- To maximize the overall value of the site, city practitioners should provide allowances for less developable land acquisitions only if there are commensurate park development fees and staff capacity to develop the land into a park or greenway (e.g., floodplain or steep-sloped sites).

- Consider a formal process for allowing alternate compliance with parkland dedication requirements; this might include holding privately managed parks that maintain public access to a similar standard as public parks.

Cities should invest in the data, staff, and systems to understand how their development policies are—or are not—working.

- Invest in dedicated staff, whether within the parks and recreation agency or planning, to track both public and private parks in the city's overall park system. This will enable holistic planning to address actual park access and equity gaps and enable better coordination between agencies. It will also create increased predictability as part of the development review process.

➔ **How can cities leverage their land development policies to address historical park inequities?**

Cities should refine their nexus requirements to allow fees to be used to advance system-wide goals and address equity issues.

- If using a zone-based approach to define the "nexus" between a development and the associated parkland or fee expenditure, consider creating zones that allow for distribution of funds that advance system-wide goals. For example, cities might create a citywide zone to which a portion of collected fees can be used to address usage of community or regional parks throughout the city by residents of the new development. Or cities might consider creating zones specific to the characteristics of a neighborhood, such as a downtown zone, that would better reflect local development costs and usage patterns.

Cities should prioritize land and park dedication in areas that have existing service gaps.

- For example, use tools like TPL's **ParkServe**® mapping platform to understand existing park access gaps and prioritize land and park donation in areas where current gaps exist. In areas where the local level of service is already being met, consider how to allow for flexible spending elsewhere in the city (e.g., through funding of community parks).

➔ **How can alternative park development and management approaches be fostered while ensuring public space remains a core city value?**

Set in place city policies, practices, and standards to ensure that privately owned and/or operated parks are optimized for serving local residents.

- Consider alternate management partners, such as special districts or homeowner associations, that can increase the overall "pie" of park funding and free up city resources to invest in less-resourced neighborhoods.

- Make sure that these alternately managed spaces provide public access by staffing a public spaces program manager who can coordinate this network of privately managed spaces as part of the public park system.

- Consider requiring these privately managed sites to meet the following criteria for ensuring public access:
  - Provide welcoming signage visible from a public right of way
  - Advertise sites as publicly accessible through listing on park agency or other city agency websites
  - Require the same maintenance and access standards as city parks
  - Ensure that the sites are permanently protected from development

Resource

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. *Parkland Dedication Ordinances, Impact Fees, and Park Equity: Building a Road Map for City Leaders and Practitioners*, produced by TPL, outlines a variety of approaches and considerations that cities must account for when constructing equity-driven land development policies. There is a clear need for city leaders to reconsider their land development policies in order to achieve park equity goals. **This report** is an initial step, intended to share the policies that exist today, as well as the challenges and limitations of those policies, and to outline questions that should be answered in order to maximize the opportunity of land development policy. This report will serve as a foundation for TPL to build additional resources, case studies, partnerships, and direct support to cities on questions of land development policies and parks.

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Park Qualities Incubator: Mapping Park Experiences
Major Insights and Learnings

Not all parks are created equal, yet current park access metrics treat all parks the same. Better data tells better stories. To deepen our understanding of the qualities that make parks special, and to illuminate hidden inequities, Trust for Public Land convened 80 participants from 40 cities to develop a methodology for mapping park experience types. This five-session discussion series focused on three key questions:

1. What are the most common park experiences and who does or doesn't have access to them?

2. How can these experience types be incorporated into park equity analyses and planning efforts?

3. What are other innovative measures of park qualities that can build upon this framework going forward?

→ **What are the most common park experiences and who does or who doesn't have access to them?**

Following presentations from leading health scientists and practitioners, participants aligned on three common park experience types—each of which aligns with important health benefits—and the ways park and recreation agencies seek to encourage these experiences:

1. **Get active.** People love to play and exercise, with park programming and amenities associated with increased rates of physical activity.

2. **Gather with others.** Parks offer a place for people to socialize and spend time with others. Notably, parks were one of the few safe havens for socializing during the COVID-19 pandemic, offering a lifeline to seniors and others across the country.

3. **Enjoy nature.** People also love visiting parks to spend time in nature, whether that's for contemplative or active reasons or both. Some agencies have special divisions to manage natural areas, while others incorporate natural elements throughout the park system.

→ **How can these experience types be incorporated into park equity analyses and planning efforts?**

Define park experience types.

Participants sought to translate this park experience framework into planning and policy tools through hearing from examples in Portland, OR, Montgomery County, MD and Raleigh, NC. We developed a methodology based on common park data—amenities and natural areas—that can be applied by any agency to their park inventory to understand which neighborhoods have higher and lower amounts of each experience type (Table 1).

TABLE 1. PARK EXPERIENCE CLASSIFICATIONS METHODOLOGY

EXPERIENCE	CHARACTERISTICS	INSIGHT FROM THE COHORT
Get active	Amenities like fields, diamonds, courts, playgrounds, water play areas walking loops, fitness zones, trail heads, specialized facilities like a skate park	Participants felt using these amenities is an accurate proxy for active experiences.
Enjoy nature	Access to dedicated natural areas managed with public access, and park spaces with natural features	Participants had considerable debate on 'what is nature', and if it is best reflected as agency-managed natural areas or natural features of any park. We developed a hybrid approach allowing for both.
Gather with others	Amenities like picnic areas, dog parks, gardens, game courts, performance spaces, informal gathering areas like plazas and lawns	Participants struggled the most with the ability to measure social interaction. While picnic tables and game courts are 'social' amenities, all park amenities offer an ability to interact with others (e.g. playgrounds, sports fields, etc). For this track, we tabled development of this metric for further investigation.

Assess the distribution of access to each experience type.
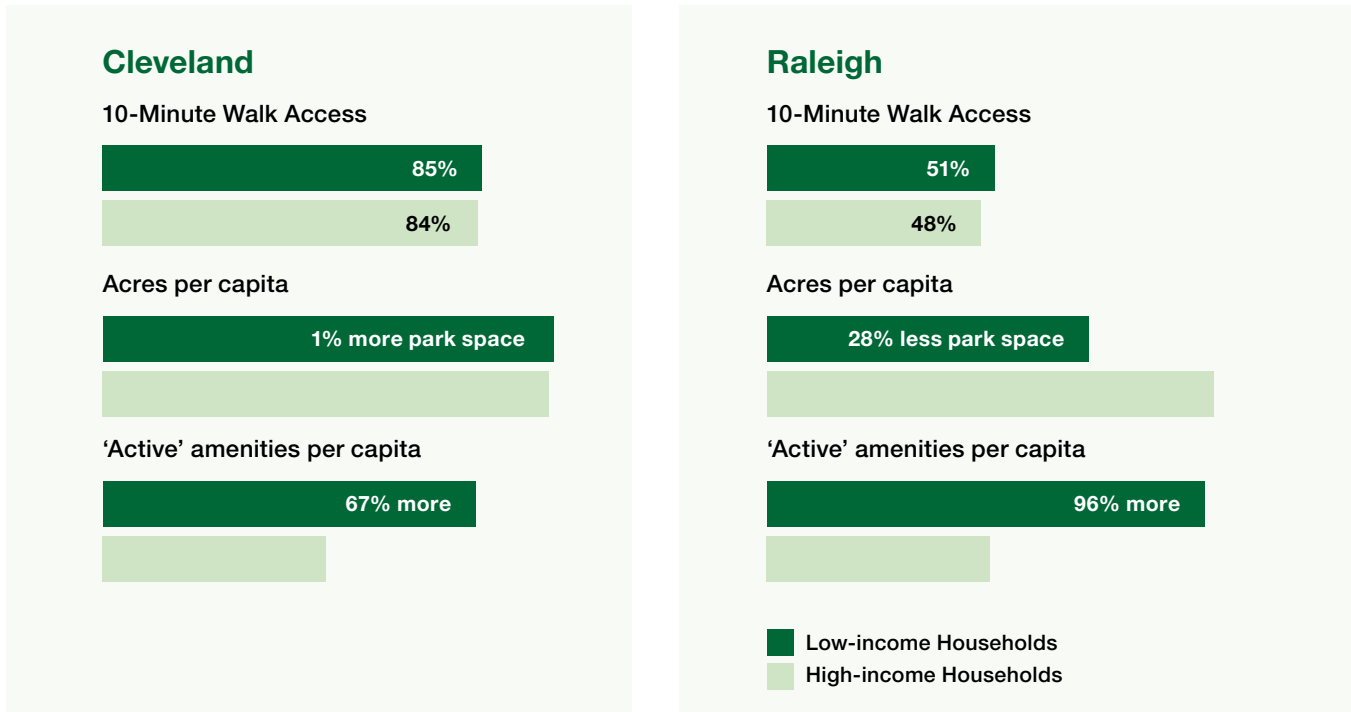
The classification of parks by their experience types (parks could have multiple experiences), could be incorporated into a spatial analysis comparing the distribution of experience types between neighborhoods by race and income. These experiences were aggregated at the neighborhood level (using census block groups), rather than the park level, to understand what each resident has access to across all nearby parks (Figure 1). This comparison, with better data, illuminates previously hidden differences in park access.

FIGURE 1. MAPPING AVAILABLE ACTIVE AND NATURAL PARK EXPERIENCE BY NEIGHBORHOOD, RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA
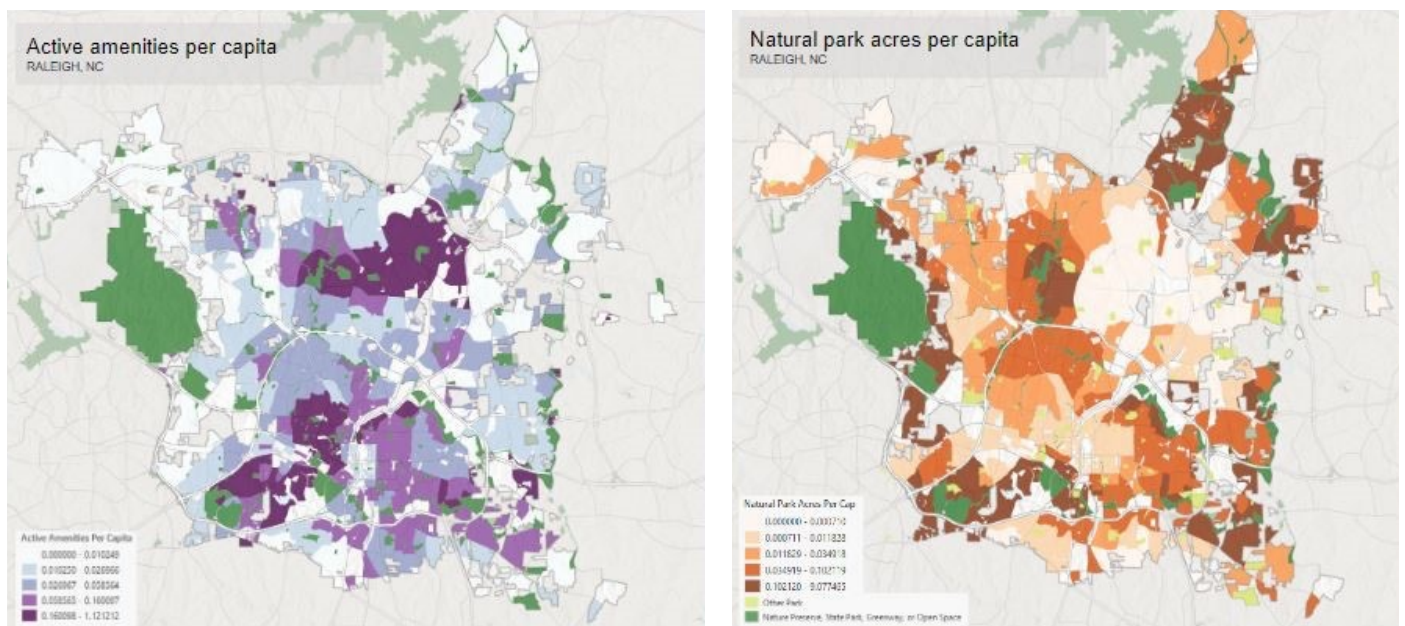
While nationally, there is relatively no difference in park access when comparing 10-minute walk metrics, we see considerable gaps when comparing park acreage per capita between neighborhoods by race and income. These differences continued when comparing park experience types between two pilot cities: Raleigh, NC and Cleveland, OH (Figure 2). While park access, as measured by 10-minute walk, is about the same, we see considerably less park acreage per capita in low-income neighborhoods in Raleigh, but significantly more active experiences in those same neighborhoods when comparing against high-income neighborhoods.

FIGURE 2. COMPARING PARK EXPERIENCE TYPES BY INCOME IN TWO CITIES

Cleveland

10-Minute Walk Access
85%
84%

Acres per capita
1% more park space

'Active' amenities per capita
67% more

Raleigh

10-Minute Walk Access
51%
48%

Acres per capita
28% less park space

'Active' amenities per capita
96% more

Low-income Households
High-income Households

→ **What are other innovative measures of park qualities that can build upon this framework going forward?**
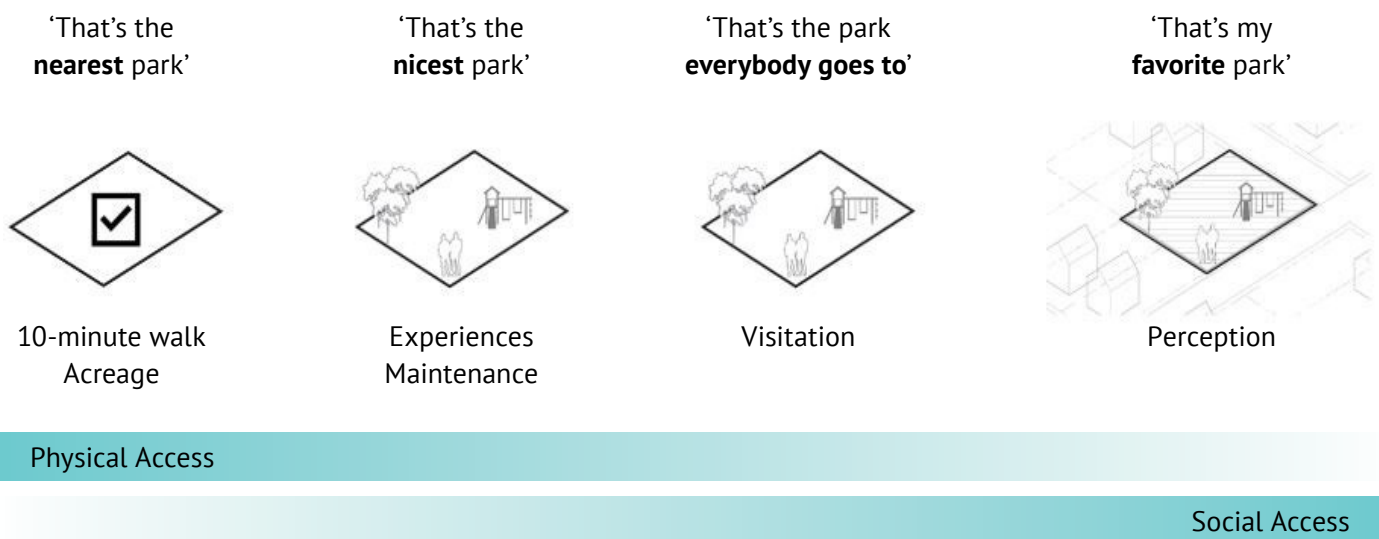
Mapping park access or even experience types only captures a portion of a park's qualities. Rather than try to develop a single composite metric, we are investigating ways of measuring each quality of a park individually (Figure 3). In this track, presenters from San Francisco and a consulting firm based in Colorado presented on recent innovations in measuring three of these qualities that reflect social access to parks: park maintenance, park visitation, and perception.

The City of San Francisco measures and publishes park maintenance data on its entire park system as part of the City Auditor's Office effort to track the success of bond initiatives designed to improve park conditions. These data reflect the work of 200 trained city staff, who each assess one or two parks every quarter. Each park's features (e.g., playground, basketball court) are assessed on a range of yes/no condition measures that reflect the feature's cleanliness, maintenance, and usability. These scores are averaged together out of a maximum 100% to produce a replicable metric that is tracked across time.

RRC Associates shared their work on measuring park visitation using mobility data and perception data through resident surveys. Notably, the use of resident surveys (rather than user surveys) allows for understanding the perceptions of those who don't currently use parks, but might in the future. Measuring perception through surveys allows for measuring inequities across non-spatial demographic variables—e.g., most neighborhoods will be evenly split by gender, whereas they are significantly segregated by race. Spatial mapping of park qualities will not illuminate disparities by demographics like gender that are not spatially segregated within a city.

FIGURE 3. DIFFERENT MEASURES OF PARK QUALITIES

Different Measures of Qualities

'That's the **nearest** park'	'That's the **nicest** park'	'That's the park **everybody goes to**'	'That's my **favorite** park'
10-minute walk Acreage	Experiences Maintenance	Visitation	Perception

Physical Access

Social Access

Resource

This track informed development of the park qualities framework. Find the full report **here**.

Resources for the Community of Practice

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

We create parks and protect public land where they're needed most so that everyone will have access to the benefits and joys of the outdoors for generations to come.

LAND AND PEOPLE LAB

The Land and People Lab is TPL's "think and do" tank that advances TPL's work through the power of evidence.

THE 10-MINUTE WALK® PROGRAM

The 10-Minute Walk® program helps cities expand access and green spaces for everyone.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE SESSIONS AND RECORDINGS

Find and download resources by track.

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Trust for Public Land is a national nonprofit that works to connect everyone to the benefits and joys of the outdoors.

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