



Programming with Purpose: Creating Welcoming Park Experiences

October 16, 2025

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

Welcome!

Introduce yourself in the chat. Share your **name** and **pronouns**, your **agency**, and your **favorite thing** to do in a park!

Forest Ridge Park, Raleigh, North Carolina →

One of a series of activities hosted by Raleigh Parks to increase participation in recreation programs by under-resourced communities

Gehl — Making Cities for People



Agenda

- Program Overview
- Welcome to Raleigh Parks Presentation
- Q&A with Speakers
- Wrap Up
- *Committed Cohort-
Transition to Discussion
Groups*



Trust for Public Land is a national nonprofit, working to create parks and protect land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come.

**We believe in
OUTSIDE FOR ALL**





Today, 100 million people across the U.S, including 28 million kids, don't have a park within a 10-minute walk of home.



10-Minute Walk[®] Mission: Closing the Park Equity Gap

Present day inequities in park space and outdoor access are often the result of decades of problematic policy decisions.

Without policy solutions, the gap will continue to widen.

Park Equity Communities of Practice



**Planning for Policy
Action**



Crossing Sectors to Create Parks



**Programming with
Purpose**

Programming with Purpose

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April 9

Community relationships facilitate the development of community identity, which is a foundation for building community power.



Increasing **social contact among people of different backgrounds** is foundational to a healthy democracy.

Core Research Question

How can recurring programs in parks and greenspace increase social contact among people from different backgrounds?



Research Sites

2023, 2025, 2026 *Application opens Jan. 2026*

This is especially important at a moment when **the nation's social fabric is badly torn.**

Interpersonal
▼



Isolation

Americans are increasingly socially isolated.

Polarization

Americans live highly segregated lives.

Distrust

There is a crisis of confidence in institutions.

Disengagement

Americans have increasingly withdrawn from civic life.



▲
Institutional

Parks and
greenspace can
be leveraged as
**America's
common
ground.**

+60%
higher rates of membership in volunteering
or activism groups in top 25 ParkScore cities
compared to lower-ranked cities



What stops people from participating in park programs?



What stops people from participating in park programs?

Practical Barriers

Cost of
programs

Transportation

Language
accessibility

Childcare

Social Barriers

Sense of safety

Sense of
belonging

Lack of trust

Feeling
connected to
others

Welcome to Raleigh Parks!



Raleigh

Welcome to Raleigh Parks

**Trust for Public Land
Community of Practice:
Programming with Purpose**

October 16, 2025





Raleigh

Agenda

- **Introductions**
- **Background**
- **Welcome to Raleigh Parks**
 - Program Overview
 - What's working - and what's not?
- **Program Impact**
 - Participant Story
- **Q & A**



Who We Are



Tierney Sneeringer
Raleigh Parks
*Cultural Outreach and
Enrichment Program Director*



Debbie Huston
Raleigh Parks
Contracts and Grants Analyst



Raleigh

What's Happening in Raleigh?

- Raleigh is the **capital** of North Carolina
- Population of **~0.5 million**, with **~1.2 million** in Wake County
- In the last 10 years, Raleigh's population has **increased by 15%** and **250,000 more residents** are projected in the next 10 years
- Influx of residents from both elsewhere in the U.S. and other countries
- Many residents have **limited structured interaction** with Raleigh Parks



Financial Assistance Program

Raleigh Parks strives to provide programs to all. The Financial Assistance Program is designed to provide individuals and families an opportunity to participate in programs that they may not be able to afford without assistance.



Cultural Outreach and Enrichment

Discover, learn, and connect with Raleigh Parks through our Cultural Outreach and Enrichment Program (COE)! COE offers programs and events that bring people together and celebrate the many cultures that make Raleigh a great place to live.



Raleigh

Social Contact Theory

When people from different backgrounds spend time together and work toward a shared goal, they're more likely to get along and break down stereotypes.





The Catalyst

- \$25,000 On Common Ground grant award
- Summer/Fall 2023
- Used for pilot program of Welcome to Raleigh Parks
- Based on TPL's Common Ground Framework
- **Inclusive Activities**
 - Icebreakers and team-building exercises
 - Intergenerational programs
 - Allowed additional participants
 - Programs based on participants interests



Program Overview:

Welcome to Raleigh Parks





Raleigh

What is Welcome to Raleigh Parks?

*The goal of Welcome to Raleigh Parks is to **build community relationships** while increasing awareness of the range of **programs and resources** available through the Raleigh Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department.*





Raleigh

Fast Facts

- 3 cohorts completed (Summer/Fall 2023, Fall 2024, Summer 2025)
- 24 participants per cohort
- **Focused on two under-resourced and isolated populations:**
 - Individuals receiving financial assistance
 - English language learners
- Prioritized geographic variety
- Incentivized participation
- Engaged families on a recurring basis (3 months of programs)





Range of Programs



- Trolley Tour – **Historic Resources**
- Soccer Fan Fest – **Special Events**
- Futsal & Pizza Party – **Health + Wellness**
- Choose Your Adventure: Fishing & Kayaking – **Outdoor Recreation**
- Grow Your Own Way: Gardening & Cooking Class – **Community Centers**
- Intergenerational Ceramics Class – **Arts**
- Water Safety + Swim – **Aquatics**
- Night Bugs – **Nature Preserves**
- Community Meal + Feedback Session



What's Working

- “Concierge Experience”
 - Focusing on families: Intergenerational programs
 - Providing convenience: Food at every event
 - Incentivizing recurring participation: Raleigh Parks gift card
- Logistical support - knowing our staff and who to go to

“The variety of events and variety of locations. Feeding us and not having to meal plan helped.”
– Welcome to Raleigh Parks Participant





Raleigh

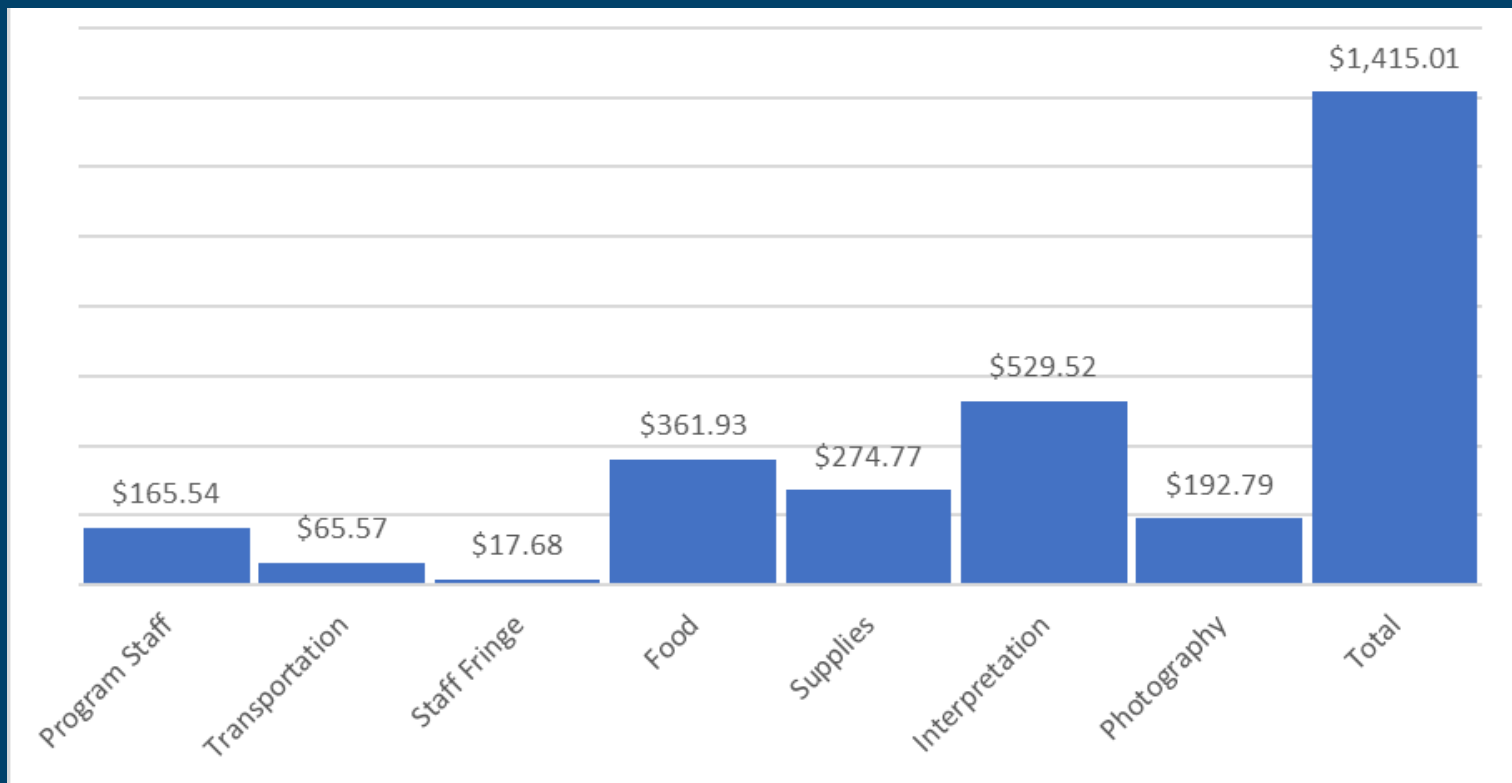
What's Working-*ish*

- Large investment of staff time
- Transportation logistics
- Interpretation costs
- Administrative hurdles of gift cards





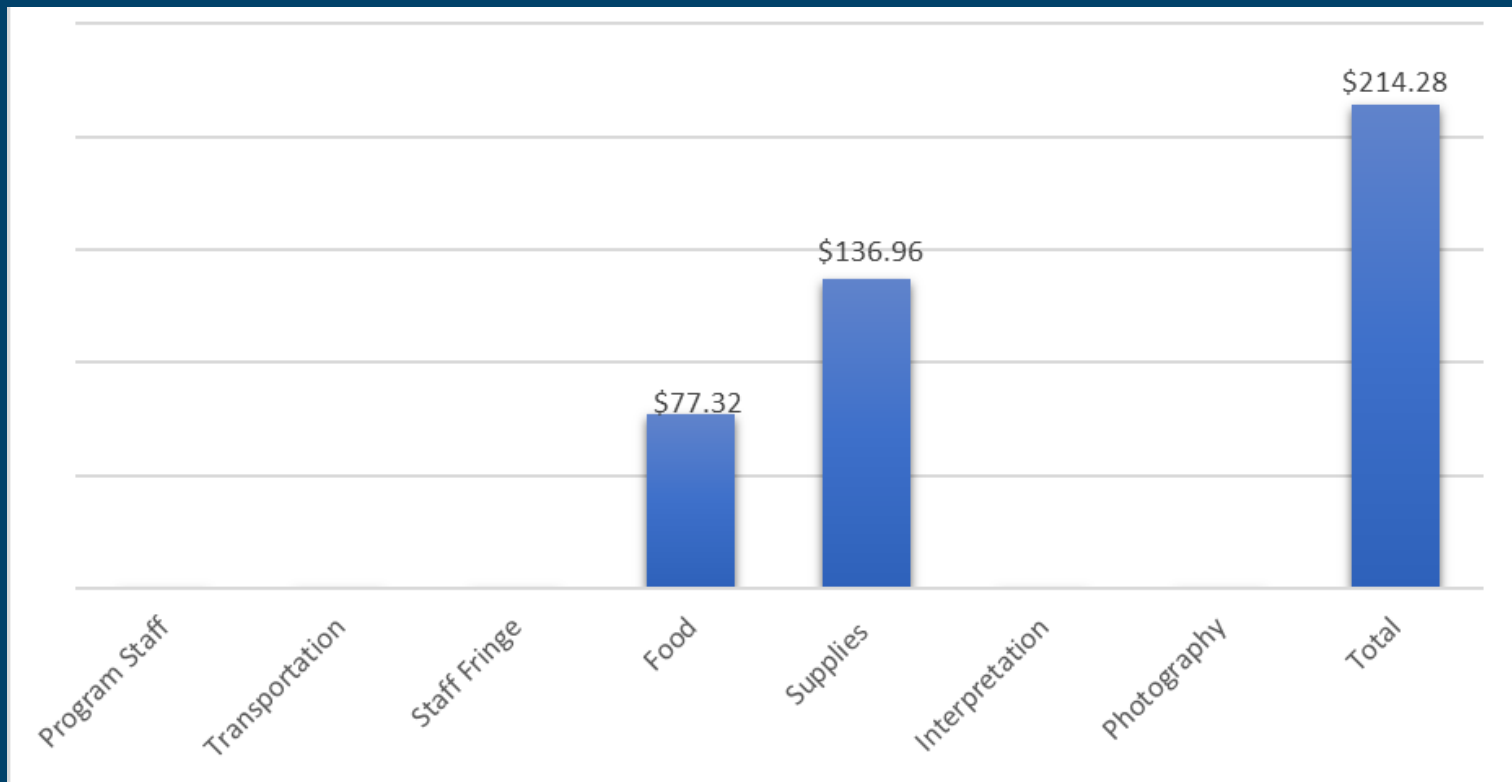
Average Program Budget: Grant Funded





Raleigh

Average Program Budget: Parks Funded





Moving Forward

- Inclusion in departmental Park System Plan
- New recruitment strategies
- Reevaluate when to offer the program
- Exploring ideas for potential expansion and new partnerships





Raleigh

Tips & Tricks

Do you want to replicate this program in your organization?

Focus on:

- Intentionality
- Community engagement
- Accessibility
- Collaboration
- Data-informed decisions



Program Impact





Impact of Welcome to Raleigh Parks

- Feedback was **overwhelmingly positive**
- Participants reported that they regularly had **positive interactions with people from different backgrounds than their own** during the program
- Participants continue to have **greater engagement with Raleigh Parks**
- Most participants said they would **stay in touch** with the other group members

“Fellowship. Meeting people that live in my community. Kids that go to the same school as my children. Knowing places I can go.”
– Welcome to Raleigh Parks Participant



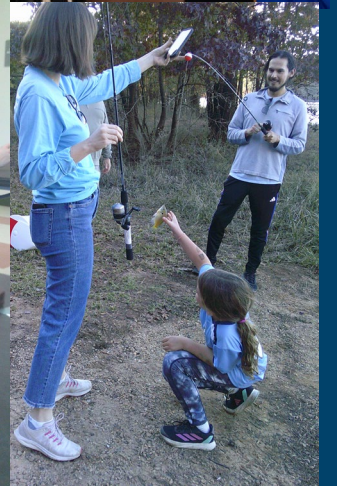
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Meet Irlanda!

- Irlanda participated in the Summer 2025 cohort
- Her husband participated in Raleigh Parks' English classes
- Four generations of her family participated throughout the summer









Raleigh

Questions?



Raleigh

Thank You!

Contact Us

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Debbie Huston, Contracts & Grants Administrator

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Q&A with Raleigh



Programming with Purpose- Session 1 Exit Ticket



Complete your Exit Ticket!

Click the link in the chat or
scan the QR code to complete
your exit ticket before you log
off today:

<https://forms.office.com/r/zN1aewh8FC>

December 11

First
Impressions:
Hosting and
Engaging
Program Kick-off

Sign up for
our next
webinar!

Committed
Cohort

Stay on the line

We will split into
peer discussion
groups shortly!

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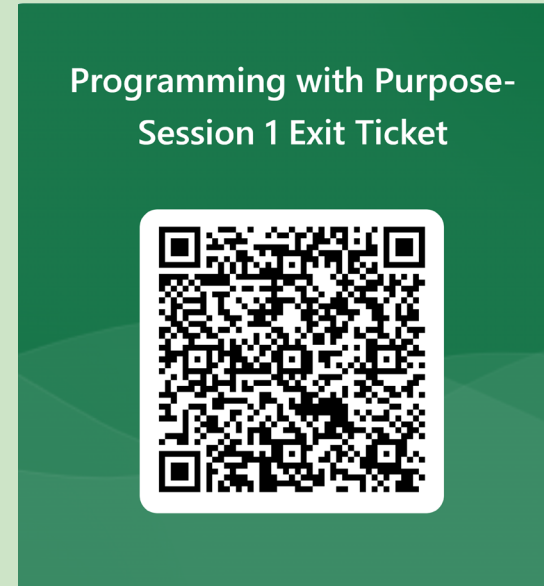
christina.jang@tpl.org

kate.gannon@tpl.org

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

Thank you!

Please complete the exit ticket



Next Session: **December 11**

First Impressions: Hosting and Engaging Program Kick-off

***If you're registered for the extended learning and exchange,
we'll get started with our breakout activities shortly!***



Welcome!

Extended Learning and Exchange

- 30 minutes following each webinar
- Interactive peer exchange & small group conversations that build on the presentation
- Please come prepared to actively engage – cameras are **highly encouraged** in your breakout room
- Exit ticket required after each session

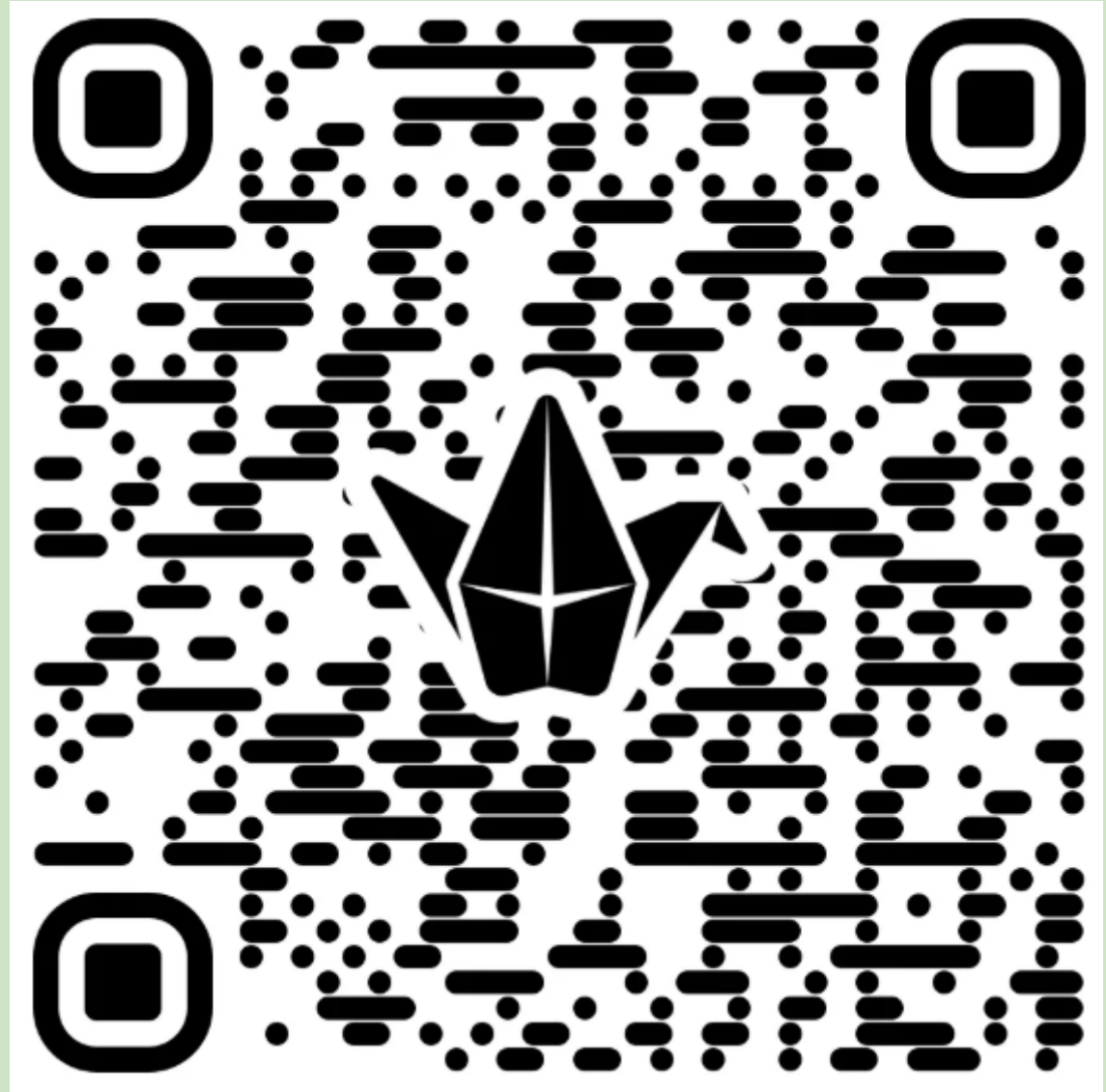
Welcome and Introductions!

Share your name, pronouns and organization and...

Tell your group about a program that you're currently recruiting for or have recently launched.



What recruitment strategies have been effective for your organization?



Breakout Groups

- Which of these recruitment strategies interest you to test? Why?
- If you were to test this strategy, what resources would you need? (staff time, space, funding, something else)
- What challenges do you anticipate when testing this recruitment strategy?
- Who else needs to be involved?

Group Report Out



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