

Park Equity, Life Expectancy, and Power Building

Policy Brief

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Prevention Institute is a national nonprofit with offices in Oakland, Los Angeles, Houston, and Washington, D.C. Our mission is to build prevention and health equity into key policies and actions at the federal, state, local, and organizational levels to ensure that the places where all people live, work, play and learn foster health, safety and wellbeing. Since 1997, we have partnered with communities, local government entities, foundations, multiple sectors, and public health agencies to bring cutting-edge research, practice, strategy, and analysis to the pressing health and safety concerns of the day. We have applied our approach to injury and violence prevention, healthy eating and active living, land use, health systems transformation, and mental health and wellbeing, among other issues.

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Dedication

Prevention Institute would like to dedicate this toolkit to three social, environmental, and health justice giants who fought tirelessly for park equity:

- Robert Garcia—civil rights attorney and park equity advocate
- Lewis McAdams—a godfather of the Los Angeles River
- Dr. Beatriz Solis—philanthropist and health equity advocate

Key Takeaways

- Urban parks and green spaces protect public health by providing opportunities for physical activity, time in nature, social connection, and respite. Parks also filter air, remove pollution, buffer noise, cool temperatures, filter stormwater, and replenish groundwater.
- Access to parks and green space is very unequal across lines of race and class. For generations, park inequities have unfairly and unjustly affected low-income communities of color. These inequities are the product of policies and practices like residential segregation, redlining, racially biased planning decisions, exclusionary zoning policies, and racial covenants.
- Park inequities persist today, due to the legacy of past policies and practices, and ongoing inequities in access to political and economic power to shape planning decisions and investments. A 2020 study found that parks serving communities of color are—on average—half the size of parks located in majority-white communities and five times as crowded.
- Achieving park equity will require transforming policies and practices to prioritize investments in communities experiencing the greatest park deficits, engage in meaningful community engagement, collect and make publicly available data on park inequities, fund technical assistance and capacity-building funds to support community-based organizations to be active players in parks and land-use decision-making, and ensure transparency and community oversight of park investments.

Introduction

Urban parks and green spaces are essential community infrastructure that protect public health by providing opportunities for physical activity, time in nature, social connection, and respite. Parks also filter air, remove pollution, buffer noise, cool temperatures, filter stormwater, and replenish groundwater.^{1,2} Urban parks and green spaces should serve every community in a fair, just, and safe manner.³

For generations, park and green space inequities have unfairly and unjustly affected low-income communities, especially people living in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods. Systemic racism and long-standing imbalances in political and economic power, technical knowledge, and opportunities to affect the allocation of park resources have resulted in these communities disproportionately suffering the greatest health, social, and environmental consequences associated with lack of access to parks and green space.

In the Los Angeles region, the movement to achieve park equity has been advanced by community-based organizations focused on park development, environmental justice, civil rights, social justice, and public health. The park equity movement has achieved important victories

Revenues from these measures could set us on a path to eliminate the region's persistent and pervasive park inequities while reducing associated health inequities and gaps in life expectancy.

over the last two decades. These include the establishment of new or improved park spaces in high-need communities, efforts to build power and organizing capacity in disenfranchised communities, advocacy to increase funding for park systems, and recent public finance initiatives to prioritize investments in the most highly impacted communities.⁴

Encouraged by park equity proponents, voters have enacted two countywide parcel tax measures and a statewide bond since November 2016, generating hundreds of millions of dollars for parks, open space, and stormwater-related green infrastructure in Los Angeles County, California:

- **Los Angeles County's Safe, Clean Neighborhood Parks and Beaches Measure of 2016** (Measure A) is a parcel tax that generates approximately \$95 million per year to support local parks, beaches, open space, and water resources.
- **California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018** (Proposition 68) authorizes \$4.1 billion for state and local parks, natural resources protection, climate adaptation, water quality, and flood protection.
- **Los Angeles County's Safe, Clean Water Act of 2018** (Measure W) is a parcel tax that generates approximately \$300 million per year to capture, clean, and conserve stormwater—increasing local water supplies, improving water quality, and creating opportunities for new recreational green space and habitat.

These measures, now in their implementation phases, hold the potential to plan, build, revitalize, operate, and maintain parks and green space in the LA region's highest-need communities. If spent wisely and with a focus on high-need communities, revenues from these measures could set us on a path to eliminate the region's persistent and pervasive park inequities while reducing associated health inequities and gaps in life expectancy.

This policy brief explores how park and green space inequities have been produced in the US, with a focus on the Los Angeles region, long recognized as one of the most park-poor metropolitan areas in the United States. The inequities found here are not exceptional or unique. Rather, they exemplify the systematic production of park and green inequities through historical and current-day policies, practices, and procedures, and compound health inequities by race and place.⁵ These inequities will persist until jurisdictions prioritize investments in parks and green space in the communities that need these resources the most.



Photo credit: National Health Foundation – Genesis Productions

What do parks have to do with health and health equity?

Urban parks and green spaces are essential community infrastructure that protect public health by providing opportunities for physical activity, time in nature, social connection, and respite. Parks filter air, remove pollution, buffer noise, cool temperatures, filter stormwater, and replenish groundwater.^{6,7} Exposure to green spaces can confer improvements to mental health as well.⁸ Exposure to nature has been associated with mental and psychological wellbeing and social cohesion.⁹

Uneven and inequitable distribution of park space and programming limits opportunities for physical activity and increases the risk of developing type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease. These inequities reinforce poor health outcomes experienced by Blacks and Latinos.

A study by the LA County Department of Public Health found that, on average, LA County cities and unincorporated areas with less park space per capita have higher rates of premature mortality from cardiovascular disease and diabetes, higher prevalence of eating- and activity-related chronic illness among children, and greater economic hardship compared with cities and communities with more park space per capita. It also found that Blacks and Latinos are more likely than Asian Americans and whites to live in cities and communities with less park space.¹⁰



Selected Policies, Practices, and Procedures That Have Produced Inequities in Parks and Green Space. Adapted from: *Prevention Institute. Countering the Production of Health Inequities: An Emerging Systems Framework to Achieve an Equitable Culture of Health*

Discriminatory policies and practices interact and exacerbate one another to produce inequities at the community level.

Production of Park Inequities

Far from being accidental or coincidental, the factors that have contributed to park inequities in low-income communities of color have their origins in residential segregation, racially biased planning decisions, discriminatory post-WWII home loan practices, exclusionary zoning, racial covenants, and redlining, among others.¹¹ In the Jim Crow South, there were segregated park systems with different parks for whites and Blacks. Parks designated for communities of color were generally smaller, received far less funding, and had fewer facilities.¹² Discriminatory policies and practices interact and exacerbate one another to produce inequities at the community level. Park inequities like this persist today. A 2020 study found that parks serving communities of color are—on average—half the size of parks located in majority-white communities and five times as crowded.¹³

Segregation of recreational facilities was not confined to the South, however, and segregated beaches, pools, skating rinks, golf courses, and amusement parks were common throughout the US until the 1960s.¹⁴ For example, in the 1920s, all City of Los Angeles pools were segregated despite protests by Black activists. Undeterred by State Supreme Court decrees, the city did not fully integrate its pools until the 1940s and 1950s. During the civil rights era, on Memorial Day in 1961, Los Angeles was the site of civil unrest as police acted to prevent Black youth from riding the whites-only Merry-Go-Round at Griffith Park.¹⁵

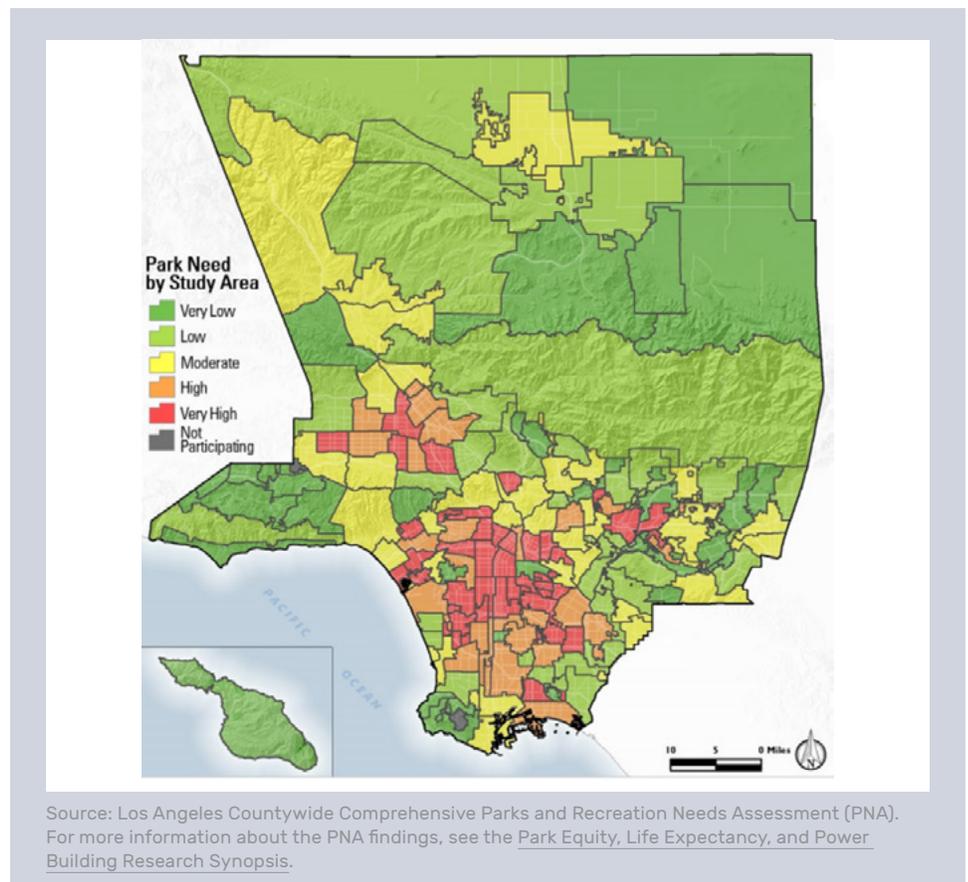
As racial covenants were outlawed and federal civil rights legislation passed, white flight took hold, the racial and ethnic geography of US cities began to change, and white civic concern for parks declined. Municipal tax revenue began to decline—with park expenditures among the first public services to be cut, while new parks in expanding

suburban cities were underwritten by financial subsidies, such as California's 1965 Quimby Act, which allowed local fees to be placed on new residential developments for park infrastructure.¹⁶ Many parks in the urban core were sacrificed for construction, urban renewal, and freeway projects, while others were neglected and left derelict.¹⁷

Starting in the 1970s, the federal government devolved responsibility for funding many public services to state and local governments, resulting in further cuts to park funding.¹⁸ Jurisdictions with limited tax-bases and large low-income populations struggled to respond to local needs and balance competing demands, reducing their ability to provide parks and recreation services.¹⁹

The rising anti-tax movement exacerbated these conditions. In 1978, California voters passed Proposition 13, which restricted local property tax increases and devastated the budgets of local park agencies. In the City of Los Angeles, for example, the Department of Recreation and Parks' 1979-1980 budget shrank by 12% and its staff was cut in half, from 4,000 to 2,000 employees. By the early 1980s, the City was forced to shut down 24 recreation centers, reduce funding for the

The Los Angeles Countywide Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment found that 52.6% of the region's more than 10 million residents live in 'high park need' or 'very high park need' areas (see map).



Low-income municipalities and small community-based organizations are often at a disadvantage when forced to compete with more affluent jurisdictions and well-resourced nonprofits for limited funds.

remaining 154 centers, and cut operating hours for many facilities.²⁰ These cuts hit poor neighborhoods the hardest. Residents of low-income urban communities—who are less likely to have yards or access to fee-based recreational facilities—rely on public recreation services. While other urban areas added parks, Prop 13 left Los Angeles unable to acquire and maintain park lands and the city steadily fell behind, resulting in some of the most severe park deficits among large US cities.²¹

During the 1980s, in response to these challenges, many jurisdictions turned to state bond measures and local sales or parcel taxes to raise supplemental revenue for parks and other natural resources.²² While generating much needed revenue, these finance measures also exacerbated inequities.²³ For many years, these public finance measures did not include equity-focused provisions, safeguards, or funding criteria for competitive grantmaking programs. Low-income municipalities and small community-based organizations are often at a disadvantage when forced to compete with more affluent jurisdictions and well-resourced nonprofits for limited funds.²⁴ This was the case for both the City of Los Angeles' Measure K (1996), as well as LA County's Proposition A (1992 and 1996).^{25,26}

While public finance measures provide essential infusions of revenue for acquisition of new park land or improvements to existing park infrastructure, most funding for urban parks and green space comes from city or county general fund dollars generated locally and supplemented by program fees, concessions, and other revenue sources. Local fiscal capacity—which can vary widely from one community to the next—also drives park inequities by race and class. A study of park funding across cities in the Los Angeles region found that well-resourced municipalities allocate more funds to parks and open space uses.²⁷

The Trust for Public Land's ParkScore data finds that wealthier cities spend more on their park systems than their cash-strapped counterparts.²⁸ Inner-ring suburbs with large minority populations, and low-income cities and towns beyond the urban core are most likely to suffer from low government expenditures on parks and green spaces, as well as fewer non-profit groups to help fill in gaps.²⁹

Reversing these inequities is critically important, not only to eliminate the park and green space gap between the haves and have-nots in Los Angeles County, but because these inequities

Preventing Green Displacement

Anti-displacement advocates, academics, and government agencies are pursuing a wide range of strategies to prevent green displacement. Prevention Institute's Healthy Development without Displacement paper (2018) presents a public health analysis that identifies a spectrum of opportunities, strategies, and policy options to address the tension between health-promoting interventions in the built environment and displacement.³⁰ Wolch (2014) proposes a "just green enough" approach that involves working-class residents, planners, and developers collaborating to "design green space projects that are explicitly shaped by community concerns, needs, and desires rather than either conventional urban design formulae or ecological restoration approaches."³¹ Rigolon and Christensen (2017) identify a set of anti-displacement strategies undertaken as part of large park development projects across the US, including approaches

designed to limit green gentrification near specific projects, as well as citywide policies and initiatives that benefit an entire jurisdiction, such as inclusionary zoning policies, rent control, and land trusts.³²

In Los Angeles—where park inequities and an affordable housing/homelessness crisis meet grassroots anti-displacement activism—strategies to address green gentrification are evolving and range from the establishment of an innovative multi-sector partnership to create a new model of development that incorporates green spaces as part of affordable housing projects,³³ making displacement-avoidance resources available as part of competitive grants for park development,³⁴ and the ongoing development of a County-wide displacement-avoidance policy to guide investments made with revenue from recently enacted public finance measures for parks, stormwater, and transportation infrastructure.³⁵

negatively impact the entire region. Reversing park inequities could, for example, help eliminate economic losses associated with excess healthcare expenditures and support regional climate change adaptation. Achieving park equity requires a new playbook, presented here as a park equity framework.

Reversing Inequities: A Framework for Park Equity

The park equity framework presented here draws from an equity model advanced by scholars and practitioners.^{36,37} Organized around three key equity objectives, this framework encourages us to look beyond the outcomes we see today to intentionally address systemic barriers with roots in historical policies and practices, to change processes that reproduce present-day outcomes, and to hold systems—and decision-makers within those systems—accountable to closing gaps. It provides language that goes beyond the moral

argument for equity to provide park practitioners, advocates, and other stakeholders actionable guidance on advancing park equity.^{38,39}

Procedural Equity: Procedural equity involves decision-making processes—related to all aspects of parks and green space from placement to design, construction, and programming—that are transparent, equitable, and inclusive with regard to who participates, how they are engaged, and how input is valued. It also covers processes inherent in the equitable and just provision of parks and green spaces services. Procedural equity can be assessed in relation to the following core functions, including but not limited to:

- Decision-making about all aspects of park and green space functions
- Community engagement to secure input at each stage of park development
- Condition and quality of park and green space infrastructure, amenities, and features
- Staffing and services related to operations, maintenance, and programming
- Perceived and actual safety in and around parks and green spaces
- Policy and programmatic approaches to preventing and mitigating the risks associated with park and green space development

Distributional Equity: Distributional equity is often the first thing people think about when they consider park and green space equity because it is the most readily quantifiable. Distributional equity primarily covers:

- Distribution and accessibility of parks and green spaces in communities
- Distribution of facilities, amenities, and features placed within a park or green space
- Fiscal allocation formulas for park and green space development or improvements, including general funds, expenditure plans for public finance measures, competitive grant-making processes, etc.
- Allocation of funding and staff to conduct inclusive and relevant recreational programming and ensure maintenance of facilities
- Prioritize strategic planning and innovation-focused on achieving park equity

This framework for park equity is organized around three key objectives: procedural equity, distributional equity, and structural equity.

- Job training and workforce development programs for low-income residents of park-poor communities

Structural Equity: Structural equity addresses underlying structural factors and policies that give rise to parks and green space inequities in the first place. It makes a commitment to correct past harms and prevent future unintended consequences. While less quantifiable than the other dimensions of equity, structural equity related to parks and green spaces can include:

- Improving staff representation at all agency levels among people of color and other marginalized groups
- Internalizing and operationalizing equity and racial justice across agency staff and leadership, including local knowledge of historical and present-day injustices and accountability metrics to redress spatial and operational disparities
- Designing and programming park facilities and green space to function as sites of healing and resilience, and to address a holistic range of neighborhood needs, threats, assets and opportunities
- Developing protections to ensure that green development doesn't lead to displacement of long-term residents and businesses

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic placed parks and open space in the national spotlight in unexpected and surprising ways. As people around the country were ordered to shelter in place and stop gathering in restaurants, gyms, and cafes, parks quickly became more visible for the critical roles they play in our daily lives. Park users wanted to get out and get active—many park users observed guidance to maintain physical distancing. But some parks and open spaces experienced overcrowding. Soon, governors, mayors, and public health directors moved to limit or block access to park facilities,

even taking down basketball hoops and rolling up tennis nets. Meanwhile, park agencies provided emergency meals and other essential services, and scrambled to respond to quickly changing directives amidst uncertainty about how best to provide essential health-promoting services and infrastructure in neighborhoods. Though we can learn a lot about the critical role of parks from the coronavirus pandemic, the underlying strategies to address inequities in parks and green space remain critical to achieving equity in the LA region.

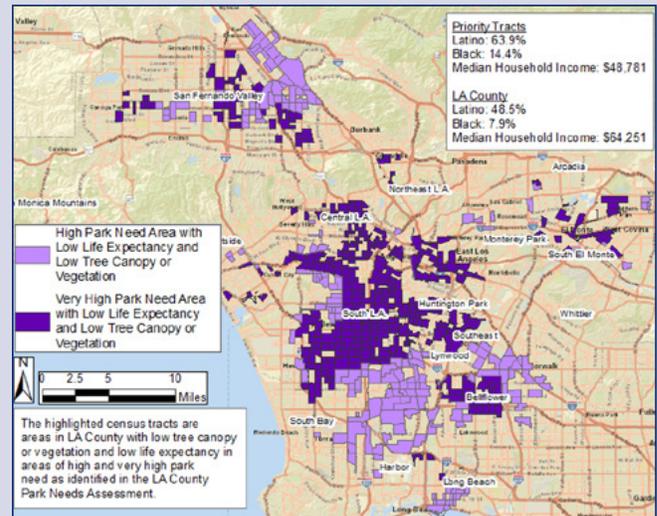
Park equity, life expectancy, and power building

Prevention Institute, UCLA, seven base-building LA nonprofits, and a representative of the LA County Department of Public Health recently partnered to conduct research and develop advocacy tools to build upon the PNA's findings to better understand the relationship between access to parkland, existing tree cover and vegetation, and life expectancy. Life expectancy is the average number of years a person can expect to live calculated by averaging across the population and serves as one indicator of overall community health.

Findings from novel research show that increasing park acreage in areas of LA County that face park deficits and low levels of tree canopy has the potential to considerably increase life expectancy in those areas. This is especially important in communities like South Los Angeles, where the median life expectancy is 77 years, well below the upper bound for the county as a whole.^{40,41} Less than 15 miles away in the community of Beverly Hills, the life expectancy is as high as 90 years—13 years higher.⁴²

According to this research, if all of the census tracts in LA County with park deficits and low tree canopy levels had an increase in park acreage up to the median for LA County tracts (about 54 acres within a two-mile radius of each census tract), LA County would likely see an average gain of two-thirds of a month of life expectancy for each resident living in those tracts.^{i,ii,43} When examining vegetation, there are similar life expectancy benefits, providing further evidence

Reduced Life Expectancy in High and Very High Park Need Areas with Low Tree Canopy or Vegetation



Data sources: Los Angeles Countywide Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment (2016), USALEEP Life Expectancy 2010–2015 Estimates (2018), TreePeople and Loyola Marymount Center for Urban Resilience 2016 Tree Canopy Coverage (2019), National Agriculture Imagery Program (NAIP) Aerial Imagery (2016), United States Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018)

that in areas that lack tree cover, increasing park access could extend life expectancy.ⁱⁱⁱ

Approximately 164,700 years in life expectancy could be gained across the population of all people living in census tracts in LA County with park deficits and low tree canopy levels.^{iv} Targeted investments in park infrastructure would significantly benefit the health of Latino and Black residents. Calculating gains specifically for these two groups, targeted investments would result in an increase of almost 118,000 years of life expectancy.

For more information, see [Park Equity, Life Expectancy, and Power-Building: Research Synopsis](#).

- i Low tree canopy refers to below the median level - in this case, half of the Census tracts in LA County have tree canopy coverage above 15.7%, and half have below 15.7%. (TreePeople and Loyola Marymount Center for Urban Resilience 2016 Tree Canopy Coverage [2019]).
- ii Park deficit refers to below the median level of available park acres- so in this case, half of the census tracts in LA County have above 53.8 available park acres on average throughout the tract, and half below 53.8 available acres. The available park acres metric used here was derived from the Los Angeles Countywide Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment. This variable estimates the number of park acres that individuals living within a certain area have access to, based on the buffers of how much people are willing to travel for parks—with a 2 mile maximum distance- of different sizes (the assumption being that people will travel further for a larger park). This data was one factor used to determine the final park need for the assessment.
- iii When the predictive model used normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) as the green space metric in our analysis, which looks at vegetation, the results were similar.
- iv These values represent years of life expectancy added for individuals living in tracts with both low park acreage and low tree canopy. An average of two-thirds of one month for each person, multiplied by the total population in these specific tracts, equates to a total gain of 164,700 years.

These policy recommendations are based on data and context in the Los Angeles region, but they can also be adapted by advocates elsewhere in the US who are facing similar park inequities and underlying factors.

Roadmap to Equity: Recommendations for Reversing Park Inequities

Based on the evidence demonstrating park inequities and related health inequities, novel research linking park access to longevity and the framework for achieving park equity, we provide 12 policy recommendations for the evolving movement for park equity in Los Angeles. While these policy recommendations are based on data and context in the Los Angeles region, we encourage advocates facing similar park inequities and underlying factors elsewhere to consider and adapt these recommendations.

- 1. Agencies responsible for implementing Measure A, Measure W, and Prop 68 should expend the revenue they generate to reverse park and green space deficits, prioritizing Black and Latino communities burdened with significant park need and low life expectancy.**
 - This kind of targeted intervention is consistent with recent equity-focused advances in public financing in Los Angeles and elsewhere.
- 2. Park agencies, elected officials, non-profit park developers, and advocates should utilize data-informed maps and tools to identify priority neighborhoods and engage local residents and organizations to plan new parks or improve existing parks.**
 - Prioritizing project development in high-need areas identified through GIS mapping is a best practice in equitable park development.
- 3. Elected officials in LA County's park-poor jurisdictions should act to increase general fund allocations for their park agencies and establish initiatives to address this primary driver of built environment inequities and reverse park and green space deficits.**
 - Elected representatives have the authority to take steps to initiate increases in general fund allocations to ensure health equity and racial justice in their jurisdictions.
- 4. Future public finance measures for parks and green space should involve groups representing low-income Black and Latino communities from the outset to craft needs-based and evidence-informed expenditure plans that explicitly address park and green space deficits.**
 - Participation in efforts to craft park and green space public finance measures is often contingent on financial

commitments to the political campaigns required to enact them, in effect excluding participation by groups representing low-income Black and Latino constituencies.

- Blacks and Latino representation here would provide these measures multiple benefits given that these groups form a core base of support for environmental ballot initiatives.
- Lack of representative participation in planning public finance measures or running associated campaigns has perpetuated park and green space inequities.

Money alone will not eliminate park and green space inequities. The systems, policies, practices, and norms that produced park and green space inequities in the first place must be identified, analyzed, and authentically reformed.

5. Elected and appointed officials in park-poor jurisdictions should allocate resources for independent equity analyses of park systems to investigate local drivers of distributional, procedural, and structural park inequities.

- Money alone will not eliminate park and green space inequities. Equity analyses can uncover the historical and cultural contexts of park provision within a jurisdiction, as well as the impact of structural racism and discriminatory planning on institutional practices and norms within an agency.
- An equity analysis can provide the evidence and rationale required to build support for intentional, strategic actions necessary to reverse the policies and procedures that reinforce pervasive park and green space inequities.⁴⁴

6. Funders should support community-based organizations to advocate for increased public investments in parks and green space in areas with significant park need and low life expectancy to reverse inequities.

- Given the complexity of reversing park inequities in disinvested communities, community-based organizations require adequate, consistent funding for capacity-building, dedicated staff, and policy advocacy programming.
- To ensure a community-driven, equity focus of this work, emphasis should be placed on recruiting community-based organizations from a broad range of sectors, including social and environmental justice, public health, community development, etc. Specifically, there is a need to support Black and Latino-led organizations in this work.

7. Funders should support community-based organizations to conduct independent community oversight of revenue allocations and expenditures for transparency and accountability in management of public funds.

- Experience demonstrates that creation of equity-focused programs and set asides in finance measures does not guarantee that revenue allocations end up where they should.
- Community oversight of these programs is essential to ensure that implementation is carried out with transparency and accountability. Community-based organizations need resources to engage over the long term.

Formal evaluations conducted by independent academic or research bodies, complemented by grassroots “groundtruthing,” can help agencies monitor the effectiveness of programs designed to close gaps in park inequities.

8. Funders should support community-based organizations to participate in future park and green space public finance measures using unrestricted grant resources.

- Public finance is highly specialized, exclusive, and generally lacks connection to low-income communities of color and the organizations that represent their interests.
- Having the ability to contribute financial resources to the campaigns associated with these will ensure a seat at the table and the ability to advocate for health equity and racial justice in the expenditure of public dollars for parks and green space.

9. Park agencies and/or funders should contract with independent researchers or academic institutions to conduct periodic, formal evaluations of public finance measures for parks and green space to assess their effectiveness in meeting stated goals and objectives.

- Formal evaluations conducted by independent academic or research bodies, complemented by grassroots “groundtruthing,” can help agencies monitor overall effectiveness of the funding program; document progress (or lack thereof) in reversing park and green space deficits and eliminating racial injustice; and provide advocates and decision-makers with necessary data to guide oversight and advocacy.
- Evaluation findings provide evidence and rationale for programmatic course corrections, as needed, to strengthen the funding program and close gaps in park inequities.

10. Park agencies should develop and maintain a publicly accessible data dashboard that integrates all relevant revenue allocation information to facilitate expenditure monitoring and evaluation of efforts to close equity gaps.

- Effective interagency collaboration is a pre-requisite for developing the kind of data tool that would allow agencies and the public to monitor and evaluate where public dollars are being expended, which entities are developing park infrastructure and details about community engagement, technical assistance, and other program activities associated with a project, among other relevant indicators.

11. Park developers should require contractors who build or retrofit parks in high-need areas to engage in local, targeted hiring practices and work with non-traditional employment agencies to employ disadvantaged residents.

- Local, targeted hiring ideally supplements a broader workforce training program that systematically enlists and promotes people and provides secure, well-paying jobs.
- Local hiring in high park need communities fosters a sense of community pride and stewardship for local projects.

12. Park agencies and/or funders should support the formation of a task force comprised of researchers, housing and park policy specialists, and representatives of community-based organizations to examine evidence of green displacement, understand causes and solutions, and develop a model displacement-avoidance policy that can be adapted to jurisdictions in Los Angeles County and elsewhere.

- The massive investment in parks and green spaces in Los Angeles County in the foreseeable future necessitates a codified, regional policy approach to prevent displacement of long-term residents of high need communities.

Conclusion

Today, the park equity movement in Los Angeles is grappling with another crisis that threatens the gains it has made in the recent past: the COVID-19 pandemic. We can learn a lot about the critical role of parks from efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus. However, the shutdowns and physical-distancing requirements do not inherently change the underlying inequities or dynamics of ensuring park equity in the LA region. The pandemic's economic fallout, however, creates a major fiscal setback for park agencies that will disproportionately impact communities most impacted by the COVID-19 virus and park inequities. Unprecedented and massive cuts to recreation divisions of park agencies and consolidation of these agencies with other city departments are taking place across LA County in real time.

Correcting inequities demands our utmost attention, urgency, and action. Park inequities will persist as long as local jurisdictions do not prioritize investments in park and green space infrastructure and programs proven to increase health, social, and environmental benefits in the communities that need them the most.⁴⁵ Money alone is insufficient to fully reverse these inequities. The systems, policies, practices, and norms that produced park and green space inequities in the first place must be identified, analyzed, and authentically reformed to ensure that new, prioritized resources achieve their intended results. A key element of this reversal involves transparency and accountability for change within agencies responsible for parks and green space infrastructure.

People living in communities that have been historically excluded from park-related decision-making must be included and heard. History and more recent events demonstrate that practices governing the status quo won't change without pressure. Intentional and strategic power-building among an expanded network of base-building organizations is the key to reversing biased policies, procedures, practices, and norms. Trained, mobilized, and supported by capable base-building organizations, residents can unlock transformation and demand a new era of fairness and justice in all aspects of creating and maintaining urban parks and green space, first and foremost for Black and Latino communities. Their work is urgently needed in Los Angeles and throughout the United States.

People living in communities that have been historically excluded from park-related decision-making must be included and heard.

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