



2024 *Greater & Greener* Conference Tracks and Cross-Cutting Themes

CONFERENCE TRACKS

Parks and a Changing Climate—How are cities and communities using parks and recreation assets, green infrastructure, and the natural environment to respond to a changing climate? Examples of challenges range from extreme weather events (e.g., flooding, fires) to intensifying seasonal conditions (e.g., heat, droughts, cold) that are impacting parks, their users, and the plants and animals that make it their habitat, to critical new roles and responsibilities for parks and their stewards in climate-driven disasters. What challenges have you overcome, what barriers remain, and what are the next steps towards improving, advancing, or replicating your efforts? How are you measuring impact and evaluating success? How do you balance resources and support communities that are more severely impacted by a changing climate?

Equitable and Sustainable Park Funding—How we can more sustainably and more equitably fund the development, maintenance, operations and programming of our park systems. What challenges have you overcome, what barriers remain, and what are the next steps towards improving, advancing, or replicating your efforts? How are you measuring impact and evaluating success?

Inclusive Parks and Public Spaces—How are parks and public spaces being used to make our cities more equitable places, including acknowledging inequality and accessing our diverse histories and cultures? What challenges have you overcome, what barriers remain, and what are the next steps towards improving, advancing, or replicating your efforts? How are you measuring impact and evaluating success?

Parks, Recreation, Health and Wellbeing—How are cities and communities using parks and recreation spaces to promote physical and emotional health, support overall wellbeing and social cohesion, and opportunities for play to support the physical, cognitive and emotional development of children, their families, and our communities? What challenges have you overcome, what barriers remain, and what are the next steps towards improving, advancing, or replicating your efforts? How are you measuring impact and evaluating success?

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

We will prioritize proposals that address any of the following five cross-cutting themes, as relevant to each track, but they are not a required focus for your proposal.

Resilience–How the 4 Rs of Resilience (Robustness–the ability to withstand a shock, Redundancy–functional diversity, Resourcefulness–the ability to mobilize when threatened, and Rapidity–the ability to recover in a timely manner) apply. For example, how parks and recreation agencies and their partners are:

- Working to become more resilient in the face of a changing climate in terms of managing park land, or using parks and recreation facilities to help communities become more resilient in response to these challenges?
- Becoming more resilient when it comes to funding sources, to avoid short-term closures and deferred maintenance?
- Helping the communities they serve become more resilient from a health perspective?

Data & Technology–How parks and recreation agencies and their partners are using data and technology, for example, to:

- measure and address climate-based challenges
- address funding needs to inform equitable investment strategies
- better understand who is using their facilities, how they are using them, and which constituencies may be underserved or not being served at all
- measure and address impacts to community health

Design Solutions–How parks and recreation agencies and their partners are using innovative design solutions, for example, to:

- respond to the numerous challenges of a changing climate, especially relating to water
- make parks and public spaces more inclusive, including to people with disabilities
- respond to community health needs

Community Engagement–How parks and recreation agencies and their partners are engaging with their communities and stakeholders, for example, to:

- build awareness about emerging threats and the need to both retrofit and change operations due to the changing climate, and work with stakeholders to implement solutions
- make partners and stakeholders aware of new funding opportunities, such as matching funds and grants for community partners, and using innovative approaches such as participatory budgeting
- make parks and public spaces more welcoming and inviting to all community members, especially in places experiencing demographic change

- understand what kind of recreational and wellness-related programming users want, and raise awareness about how they can use these facilities

The Year 2020—The structural changes parks and recreation agencies and their partners have undergone in response to the pandemic and racial justice awakening. For example:

- Changes to staffing structure and focus areas to respond to community priorities
- Permanent changes to the way parks and programming are funded
- How to make parks and public space feel inclusive
- How parks are used in response to public health needs, including how children in your community have been impacted and how parks and recreation departments and their partners are responding?

APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL IDEAS FOR PROPOSERS

Neither an exhaustive nor prescriptive list, these ideas are intended to inspire ideas but proposers are encouraged to go beyond what's here to share their work with our audience.

Parks and a Changing Climate

- What are the changing roles of parks and recreation facilities in stormwater management and other natural ecological functions such as serving as green infrastructure?
- How are parks and recreation facilities serving as cooling centers and providing shelter and emergency services in times of need?
- How can park land be more sustainably managed in a changing climate and also provide habitat to support biodiversity? For example, how are parks departments thinking about or planning for integrated, connected landscapes that can serve as important corridors for the movement and migration of wildlife?
- What are the implementation challenges (e.g., access to sustainable materials and equipment, community resistance to changes to landscapes and maintenance, training and education of maintenance staff, etc.) that parks and recreation agencies are facing in making these changes?
- How are parks and recreation agencies shifting operations to respond to decarbonize facilities and operations or reach net-zero performance?
- How are parks agencies collaborating with their governmental peers (and external partners) on urban sustainability, green infrastructure, and climate action more generally? If they are not collaborating, what is challenging about these partnerships?

Equitable and Sustainable Park Funding

- Large new sources of federal funding have been made available with the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (Bipartisan Infrastructure Law). Communities are eager to utilize these funds as they address heavy park use during the pandemic and the ongoing need to improve access and quality in BIPOC neighborhoods. How can leaders access those funds and what can they be used for?
- Regions and cities continue to seek support for ballot measures to provide capital for new projects and renovations. How can those campaigns be successful? What is the role of advocacy in helping them succeed?
- Citywide park nonprofits, both established and new, are growing to help partner with governmental parks and recreation agencies on attracting additional sources of funding and supporting programming and community engagement. How do these partnerships work, how can they be improved, and how can they address social/racial equity goals?
- National and regional philanthropy has also been growing its support of parks, recreation and public space. How do these relationships function and how can they be replicated in other communities?

- How does your parks and recreation department engage with local companies and the private sector more generally as funding partners or for other means of support?
- Alternative finance, such as social impact bonds, gets a lot of buzz these days. What communities have used these financial instruments, have they been effective, and can they be scaled for broader use?
- Operations and maintenance budgets are the most challenging to sustain and hardest for which to find additional sources of funding. How are governmental agencies addressing O&M challenges in innovative ways that also address equity and historical patterns of neglect?
- How are parks and recreation agencies partnering with real estate developers to fund and maintain facilities related to new development? Do these approaches and partnerships include specific connections to affordable housing?

Inclusive Parks and Public Spaces

- How do the identity(ies) of parks and their adjacent neighborhoods influence each other, and what is the role of art and culture in telling those stories?
- What is the role of programming in making parks relevant to community members, and how are parks and recreation agencies partnering with nonprofits, community organizations or cultural institutions to create new programming?
- How are park leaders working with indigenous, civil rights, and advocacy organizations to tell the hidden (often intentionally) histories of park spaces and the people who once lived on and used these sites and how that history connects to us today? How is this collaboration changing the ways public agencies approach their work, such as creating new cultural facilities?
- How are parks and recreation agencies engaged with broader policy efforts to ensure the benefits of new green investment accrue to existing neighborhood residents and they are not displaced if value creation occurs as a result of public investment?
- How are parks and recreation agencies working with their economic development peers to harness the attraction power of parks (through programming and events or just their regular use) to foster community and economic development opportunities? How are they supporting entrepreneurship and small business development in these communities?
- How are parks and recreation agencies using workforce development programs to address community needs and diversify their own workforces? Are they partnering with other workforce development entities to broaden their impact and create access to other career ladders with the skills they are imparting through their own programs?
- What are the challenges park leaders face in allocating space and programming in popular sites, and how do they go about balancing (sometimes conflicting) community needs?
- With the continuing impact of working from home in the pandemic, downtown parks and public spaces have struggled to maintain their pre-pandemic vibrancy. How are parks and recreation agencies working with partners like business improvement districts to activate and maintain sites in their business districts as vibrant, safe public spaces?

- The ownership pattern of public space in cities is a complex web of various public agencies, school districts, private landowners, and management companies and business districts with a vast array of stakeholders ranging from workers to residents to commuters to tourists and visitors to the unhoused. How are parks and recreation agencies working with their peer public agencies, external partners in the private sector, cultural institutions, and community organizations to envision unified public realm management, as it is experienced by the public who use these spaces regardless of who owns or maintains them? How are parks and recreation departments collaborating to access green space regardless of ownership, such as schoolyards, vacant lots, etc.?

Parks, Recreation and Community Health

- Numerous studies have shown the relationships between access to green space and nature and many aspects of physical and emotional health. What are the community health challenges that parks and recreation facilities are best positioned to address in an equitable way and how are they doing this?
- In the pandemic, the use of parks and outdoor recreation sites surged as people sought safer environments to socialize and stay healthy. How are parks and recreation facilities serving public health needs as they function increasingly as community wellness hubs to deliver needed services in times of stress?
- What are the roles of parks in helping to heal communities that have been psychologically or physically scarred by interventions such as urban highways, urban renewal, and large-scale housing redevelopment? How are park leaders working to undo these harms in communities?
- What are the roles of playgrounds and play in childhood development, and how can parks and recreation departments better support children's needs in their communities by offering different opportunities for play?