

spaces + programs for all



Why are Spaces and Programs for All needed?

Parks and recreation spaces shape our community. How parks, trails and recreation amenities service the community and where they are located has a profound impact on the health of community members. Parks and recreation spaces provide physical places that are open to the public, providing opportunities to address other community needs, such as youth development and education, places for art, voice and expression, and a place to seek safe harbor.

In Tempe, parks and recreation spaces lay at the heart of most neighborhoods, providing opportunities to access nature, social connections, a sense of ownership, play, and active mobility. Parks and recreation spaces promote opportunities to create meaning and a sense of belonging. In order to make parks and recreation spaces places look, feel, and function for all community members, the spaces must be accessible, inclusive, and welcoming.

- Accessible parks and recreation spaces can be reached and enjoyed by all transportation modes and by all levels of physical ability.
- Inclusive parks and recreation spaces are those with a presence and interaction of diverse users.
- Welcoming parks and recreation spaces are those that build a culture of belonging. These parks and recreation spaces actively invite the contribution and participation of all people.

The percentage of Tempe's population living with a disability has increased from 7.7 percent in 2012 to 10.1 percent in 2021. Today, Tempe has 27 playgrounds that are designed for inclusivity; 100 percent of Tempe's parks are ADA accessible

in terms of parking and entrances and many of the parks offer accessible trails. The Parks and Recreation Division offers Adaptive Recreation that tailors programs to those with limiting abilities. The City's approach to park design is based on universal design principles¹, however, recent investments in park spaces have focused on updating existing spaces without a full re-design, which limits spaces to historic layouts and uses. There are opportunities to create spaces that are fully functional for universal access. Creating spaces that are universal in design means that anyone can access and enjoy them, regardless of age or physical or mental ability. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) characterizes universal design using the following seven principles: equitable use; flexibility in use; simple and intuitive use; perceptible information; tolerance for error; low physical effort; and size and space for approach and use. These principles create spaces that can be used by all people without the need for adaptation or specialized design. A 2016 study by the Journal of Preventative Medicine found that older adults make up 20 percent of the country's population but represent only four percent of park users ². Universal design helps make public spaces available to all, especially members who are reliant on accommodations such as those who are very young and old.

In the United States, many studies have pointed to the significant health disparities that afflict communities

¹ Principles of Inclusive Playground Design. Cheri Ruane, FASLA. 2022. https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2022/september/principles-of-inclusive-playground-design/

² The First National Study of Neighborhood Parks, Deborah Cohen, et al. 2016. https://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP66493.html

of color. Systemic policies, stigmas, and prejudices have purposefully disenfranchised and discriminated against certain populations, often on account of race and ethnicity, creating disparities in access to aspects of community services that support health and wellbeing³⁴. Data show that people of color in the U.S. are more likely to have higher rates of illness and chronic diseases, such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, and poor mental health⁵. People of color are also more likely to live in neighborhoods affected by crime, violence, and incarceration⁶. In Tempe, it is estimated that 36 percent of the population today identifies as nonwhite, a percentage that has increased significantly in the past decade. Efforts to address systemic policies that have resulted in worse outcomes for communities of color are fundamental to Tempe's future.

This study's Equity Priority Zone map integrates datasets like age, race, income, health indicators (e.g., those living with a disability or with poor mental health), environmental risk factors, and concentrations of informal encampments to provide a deeper understanding of neighborhoods that populations have greater socioeconomic inequity. This map is a tool to understand where there are overlaps between inequities and park access gaps, parks and recreation spaces that are rated poorly using the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Assessment Workbook, and those in poor condition.

Essential for success is the need for the City to work in conjunction with partners, particularly historically underrepresented communities. Meaningful community engagement encompasses community members from historically marginalized communities who are viewed, both by themselves and by others, as full partners in the decision-making, programplanning, and policy-making processes that impact their lives in significant and sustained ways. The City's outreach is guided by the recent Equity in Action Plan, which set forth goals to create equitable engagement tools for the City's public involvement plans and then to develop a framework to achieve equity in the City's decision-making process. This plan identified historically underrecognized community members of which the City would like to focus engagement efforts; the City's engagement efforts identify community partners that serve these populations. One strategy contained in this plan is to strengthen the relationships with community partners that serve historically underrecognized community members by creating innovative programming with such partners, that both serve and involve Tempe's broader population, including those who have been historically disenfranchised.

As Tempe strives to create parks and recreation spaces as places for all, the community requires new strategies and approaches for reaching people and creating an inclusive and welcoming environment that celebrates diversity. Strategies focus on communication, design, and participatory planning to creatively co-create programming and use of parks and recreation spaces.

³ Causes and Consequences of Separate and Unequal Neighborhoods. Margery Austin Turner and Solomon Greene. https://www.urban.org/racial-equity-analytics-lab/structural-racism-explainer-collection/causes-and-consequences-separate-and-unequal-neighborhoods

⁴ Architectural Exclusion: Discrimination and Segregation through Physical Design of the Built Environment. Sarah Schindler, Yale Law Journal. 2015. https://www.yalelawjournal.org/article/architectural-exclusion

⁵ Racism and Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2021. https://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/racism-disparities/index.html#:~:text=The%20data%20show%20that%20racial,compared%20to%20their%20White%20counterparts

⁶ Causes and Consequences of Separate and Unequal Neighborhoods. Margery Austin Turner and Solomon Greene. https://www.urban.org/racial-equity-analytics-lab/structural-racism-explainer-collection/causes-and-consequences-separate-and-unequal-neighborhoods