

DESIGNWORKSHOP

Landscape Architecture

Planning

Urban Design

120 E. Main St.

Aspen, CO 81611

970-925-8354

970-920-1387 fax

www.designworkshop.com

MEMORANDUM

To: Tempe Project Management Team
From: Design Workshop
Project Name: Tempe Parks & Recreation Equity Study
Project #: 6938
Subject: Focus Group Key Takeaways
Meeting Date: November 17-21, 2022
Location: Virtual Meeting
Copy To: File

☐ Meeting ☐ Telephone ☐ Conference Call

The City of Tempe and the Design Workshop team conducted four focus group sessions Nov 17th-Nov 21st to discuss the City's park systems needs. The goals were to initiate the project with insight into diverse interests, gain a better understanding of a variety of concerns, opportunities and values and lastly, gather input about what is working and where to make improvements and close the gap in park access, program and accessibility. Approximately 18 participants attended one of the 1-hour session including invitees considered subject matter experts in their respective fields, City of Tempe staff, and the general public. The meeting invitations were sent to a mailing list of 400 park users. Translation, technology, and childcare services were offered to participants by City staff. Attendees were provided a \$20 gift card for participating.

The planning team gave a brief presentation describing the purpose of the project, what an equity-driven park study is, and outcomes of the study. This was followed by a series of questions via Mentimeter (both multiple-choice and open-ended) to listen to feedback on the following topics:

1. Outdoor Recreation & Park Activities
2. Indoor Recreation & Programming
3. Diversifying Sports & Athletic Facilities
4. Representation & Identity in Community Events / Supporting Positive Experiences in Park Spaces

The key overall takeaways and those from each focus group session are summarized below. When summarizing feedback, specific statements provided are used and are generally not edited. Complete results from the focus groups are available on the City's website.

OVERALL TAKEAWAYS

Best examples of Park Spaces that Engage Diverse Populations

The general sense is that the City has done a fair job of providing improvements across many parks across town. There are a number of sports complexes and program offerings at larger parks like the Tempe Sports Complex, but the community has seen successful use of smaller parks like Mitchell Park with improvements being made in recent years that allow patrons to use spaces in their own way. Recent renovations to Ehrhardt Park have been refreshing to see for children and many people wander the community gardens that have been installed. Regarding nature, desert parks in the north such as the Papago Preserve are considered natural assets and used by older generations. There are diverse park types ranging from gardens like those in Tempe Women's Club Park that provide wildlife and bird sanctuaries to nature parks that are less widely known or accessed, such as the Evelyn Hallman Preserve.

Events in parks are widespread, and parks are frequented by adults with young children making offerings like GAIN nights (Getting Arizona Involved in Neighborhoods) hosted every October and Play Mobile popular for families and kids.

Focus Areas for Equity and Diversity + Challenges

Though improvements are being made to parks across the City, concerns about challenges were voiced regarding desired amenities that serve a diversity of constituents. Interests of older generations are less served as their children grow older. Accessibility for wheelchair-bound patrons is particularly challenging. Nature preserves especially lack appeal and access due to many unmarked trails/ trailheads, lack of shade, trail conditions, and lack of programming or educational opportunities for young people. Unhoused citizens have been reported several years back at some of the preserves (ie: the Papago Preserves) putting residents off due to lack of maintenance, exposed trash, and perceptions of unsafety.

Other concerns of lack of activation and flexible programming across parks have come up. For example, there seems to be a need for art, volunteer clean-up programs, effective night-time lighting, educational campaigns and location or quality of restrooms that could help conquer the feeling of unsafety. When it comes to flexibility, sports courts could be less formal than those found at the Sports Complex and are multipurpose for year-round sports activities like skateboarding. Providing multi-purpose, diverse and event-driven spaces at neighborhood-scale parks and school parks (open for the public after school) across the City will allow greater access for people living within a 10-minute walk instead of one or central areas.

Big Ideas

Focus groups expressed big ideas for Tempe's park spaces that could be drivers for equitable access and programming. Below are examples of concepts that were shared:

1. Tempe as the most skateable city in the world.
2. Parks spaces for food generation and distribution – Food as the unifier.
3. Historical signage and branding for parks.
4. Interactive Museum for gardening experiences.
5. Green and sustainable practices around waste management and recycling.

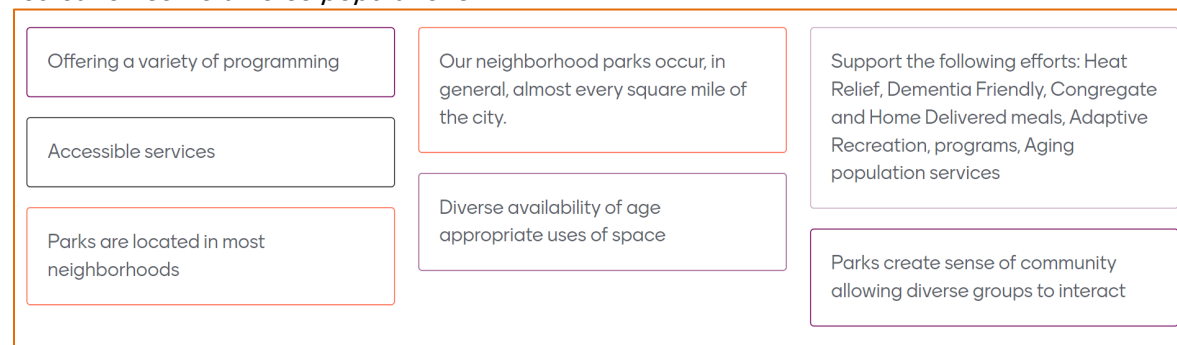
OUTDOOR RECREATION & PARK ACTIVITIES

Examples of How Tempe's parks and recreation serve diverse populations

There is a general consensus that parks are accessible to most neighborhoods and provide a variety of programs. Environmental and nature conservation and preservation education are important programs to consider to reach younger generations.

In addition, community garden partnerships have been self-sufficient and seen as positive (Ehrhardt Park). It will be good to look for educational activities to let people know the gardens are there.

Question and response from focus group: What are examples of how Tempe's parks and recreation serve diverse populations?



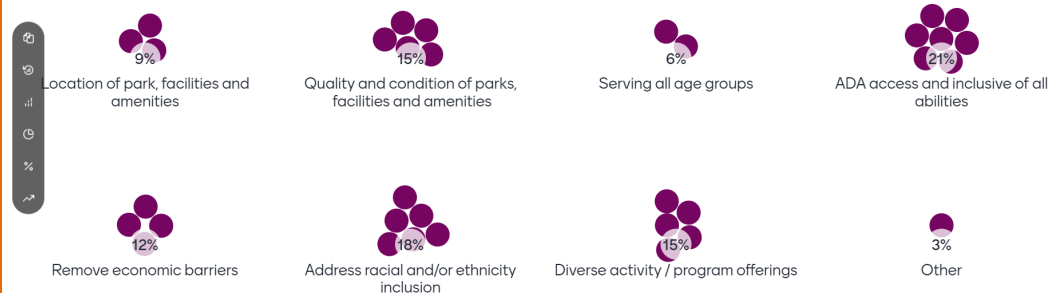
Focus Areas + Challenges

According to participants, the biggest challenges are as follows:

- ADA accessibility for patrons using assisting devices or wheelchairs.
- Public restrooms across the city require improvements.
- Desert parks [Tempe Butte/Hayden Butte, Papago, Evelyn Hallman] lack general wayfinding issues with unmarked trails. The conditions of the trails are not accessible for all.
- A need for Desert Management Plan
- There is a lack of educational campaigns and opportunities for youth to access gardens, nature, and the outdoors and to do so comfortably (shade).
- Arizona Heritage Center – Locations for hiking needed; North side of Tempe Town Lake is difficult to reach (muddy, encampments).
- Permitting issues are constraints and construction permits are lengthy.

Series of questions and answers for Focus Groups (conversation summarized above)

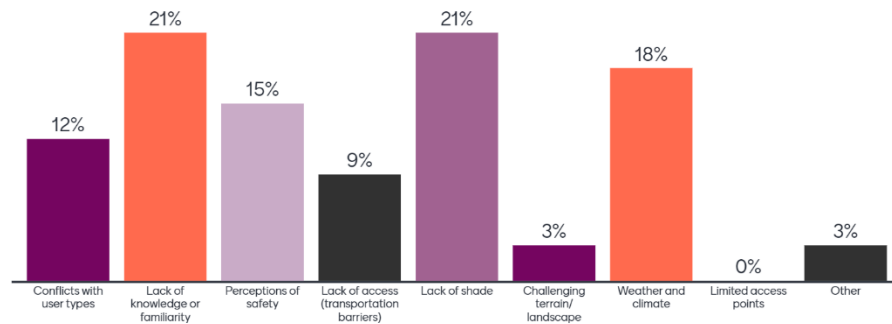
2. What focus is most needed for Tempe's parks and recreation to better address equity and diversity? (select up to three responses)



3. Are there any outdoor recreation interests or trends that are NOT being supported within the City? How can Tempe help advance outdoor recreation?

Dementia friendly place spaces for older adults	We have some gaps related to environmental and nature-based programs	I know that horse back riding used to be available in the desert preserve.
We are just beginning to build our preserves management approach	Folks really got outside during covid and the city should continue to offer and invest in programming outside and that can be done individually	Education around history of Tempe and ties to Indigenous history of the land
none	Environmental education (for children, as well as adults)	Volunteer opportunities (park clean-up events, pollinator garden planting, etc.)
Guided birdwatching		

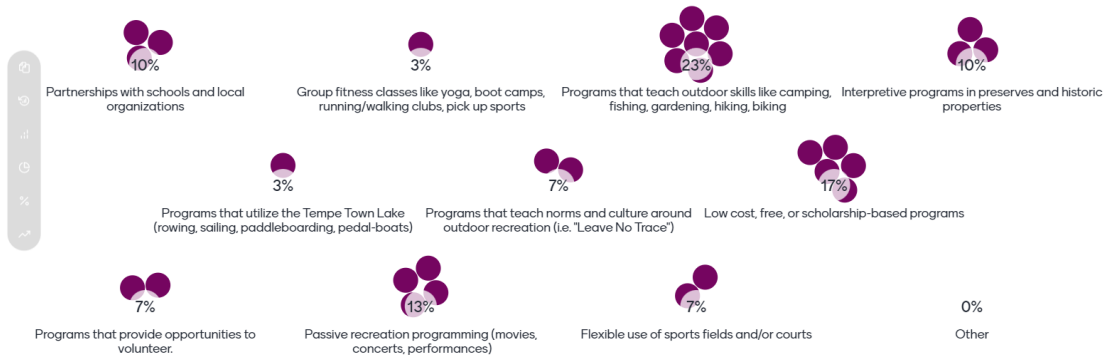
5. What challenges do you see regarding public use of park preserves? (select all that apply)



Opportunity Programs and Strategies to Improve Diversity & inclusion

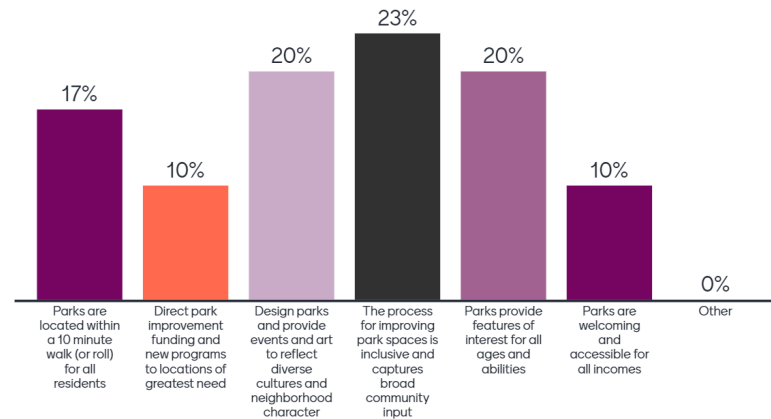
A number of suggested programs and strategies have been identified to ensure there is greater diversity and inclusion across park programs and amenities especially as it relates to nature and outdoor recreation and education. The most selected idea was programs that teach outdoor skills like camping, hiking, gardening, fishing, and biking.

4. Which recreation programs and strategies do you think might be most beneficial for improving diversity and inclusion? (select up to three)



Equity Goals identified as most important for outdoor recreation and parks are as follows:

8. Which of these equity goals do you think are most important for Tempe's outdoor recreation and parks? (select up to three)



Stewardship/ Partnerships Opportunities + Engaging the Public

Lastly, participants voiced opportunities for partnerships that have been successful so far in other neighborhoods including, but not limited to, grants in the North Tempe Association and Keep Tempe Beautiful.

To ensure that the project engages a wide range of stakeholders, community leaders and residents/ park visitors, the focus group mentioned that a successful outreach effort should include going out to schools, visiting parks on the weekends, and promoting the project through informational collateral like physical postcards.

9. What community stewardship and volunteer opportunities have been successful in the past that might be built upon in the future?

Non-profit partnership for for helping with conservation and preservation efforts. Green built nature center.

Tempe Cares, Tempe Leadership, Keep Tempe Beautiful,,

Volunteer activities that are well defined and specific attract more people

Community gardens

Water bill. Postcards for neighborhood meetings.

Tempe Leadership & Tempe Youth Leadership

Papago Park clean-up events

Pollinator gardens

BioBlitz/iNaturalist (Tempe's Papago Park Preserve)

11. How might you help support engaging residents to get their input on this plan? What is needed for communication?

Compensating POC for their time, knowing, and experiences

Multiple convenient ways for folks to provide input - mail email text etc

Social media accounts of Councilmembers

For Skateboarders who sometimes don't hear about projects until they are built we (cowtown skateboards) could help spread the word through social media and email

more social media

Mailers, emails, and signage in neighborhoods and parks

INDOOR RECREATION & PARK ACTIVITIES

Examples of How Tempe's parks and recreation serve diverse populations

One participant joined the meeting and is involved with Cowtown Skateboards, a non-profit organization working with the City of Phoenix to get skate parks in parks across the community for the well-being of kids and adults engaging in public spaces. The goal of the organization is to have skateboarding access for everyone. He expressed that Mitchell Park is a small community park and it gets used in its own way. He emphasized that while the Tempe Sports Complex is great it does not reach everyone and that sports activities can exist in smaller-scale parks that are accessible by local residents in front of their door. There should also be multi-flex ways to build programs and facilities to release some of the liabilities when it comes to skateboarding with the business communities. The participant also mentioned that the "Ghetto Park" stage was used for music in the south Phoenix area – it was abandoned at one point but skaters adopted it as their own. Years later it's nicer again but ramps were taken out to withstand skateboarding.

Focus Areas + Challenges

The participant advocated for diverse activities and program offerings. At the very least, the economic and transportation barrier of not having a park within a 10-minute walk should be addressed. Most people do not have parks in a 10-block area – you have to drive in most cases. Having programs or pieces of programs like tennis, basketball, pickleball, and fishing in every park is important.

In addition, he expressed that there are arts grants available to not only make repairs but also do something creative to make spaces in parks multi-use and "skate-resilient". Cookie-cutter equipment or court for playgrounds or skateparks could be more creative and flexible throughout the day, month or year; if sporting opportunities are available at the very least in all parks, that will be great, but it is important to use a more creative lens to rethink programming. See [Perry Park plaza](#).

When it comes to park preserves in the City, there were a lot of encampments, but they were kicked out of the preserves. Some of the unhoused populations have lived in the area for several years and the preserves could be an ideal location to support the vulnerable population should there be volunteer campaigns for upkeep, maintenance, and hygiene. There is also a lack of shade. It was suggested that solar-powered canopies like the ones found at the Arizona State University (ASU) campus could be implemented and have them be present in skateparks or other courts to power park lighting, etc.

Focus Areas for Equity

According to the participant, the Guadalupe residents use a lot of Tempe programming, and that area should be considered a focus area.

Opportunity Programs and Strategies to Improve Diversity & inclusion

A number of suggested programs and strategies have been offered including partnerships with schools and local businesses that have fundraising opportunities as well as incentives for supporting businesses in neighborhood parks (ie: movie night with partnering theaters). The participant also mentioned low-cost and scholarship-based programs to promote events and community-based activities in parks.

Stewardship/ Partnerships Opportunities + Engaging the Public

The participant suggested that the partnership model used for Mitchell Park could be one that is explored for other parks in the City. Art engagement in parks is also a key consideration (ie: Maple Ash area's use of mosaics reflecting people's backgrounds for [flood irrigation systems](#)).

When it comes to engaging the public, small businesses like basketball stores and sporting goods locations are good outreach resources to get the project information out to communities. Examples also include reaching out to bike shops to promote demos at parks.

DIVERSIFYING SPORTS & ATHLETIC FACILITIES

Challenges and Gaps in the Current Systems for Sports

Various thoughts were mentioned when it comes to gaps in the park system for sports facilities and courts. Below is a list of challenges:

- A need for better ADA and handicap accessibility at sports fields in Allegra; handicap parking is also needed on 8th Street.
- Escalante Park has seen some improvements with its restroom facilities, but ADA access is a problem for pedestrians with the rock walkaround; programming for dogs would be ideal.
- Estrada Park could see additional improvements for its public restroom facilities since the space is used a lot for soccer.
- Field lighting is needed for parks with sports facilities in addition to clean public restrooms.
- Baseball fields do not have regulation-sized pitching mounds.
- Parents complain about the lack of lighting at Tempe Diablo Park.

Gaps in Youth Sports Programs

- There is a difference in participation between north and south Tempe. North does not participate at the same level; reduced fees would help in gaining more traction. Tempe residents are not entirely prioritized for the utilization of parks and fields.
- Patrons typically migrate elsewhere for soccer programming likely due to the development of super-complexes throughout the region that better serve soccer interests. If more soccer is desired in Tempe, it would serve the greater valley due to its central location. Derek Yan could help brainstorm how to support this.

Gaps in Adult Sports Programs

- Partnerships with the State and different organizations need to be explored in order to identify necessities and solutions. Solutions are disjointed between schools and cities. The City could help be this conduit to reach out to schools and community groups to have a

1. What athletic facilities and sports complexes are most utilized and engage diverse interests and needs?

Benedict sports complex, Tempe Sports complex.

Escalante field

Tempe sports complex

shared space to speak on needs.

2. What are some youth sports and athletic program gaps?

skateboarding programming, lessons, quality loaner equipment provided by the city.

Space for pick up leagues and neighborhood team practices

Lights. There are plenty of neighborhood parks that could benefit and host practices if they had lights that would free up the larger facilities for tournaments etc.

teaming up with schools to engage and identify kids that can't afford to be involved in certain sports

ADA access to fields and facilities

Adaptive Sports and Athletic Program Gaps

According to some participants, there are a few gaps when it comes to adaptive sports programs.

- City could help advertise non-profit recreation offerings (City of Chandler).
- Adaptive sports are advertised through programming offerings and advertisements. Adaptive skateboarding programming is launching in January.
- Information-sharing and wayfinding: QR codes could be placed in parks (gates, picnic tables, etc.) to direct folks to program offerings.

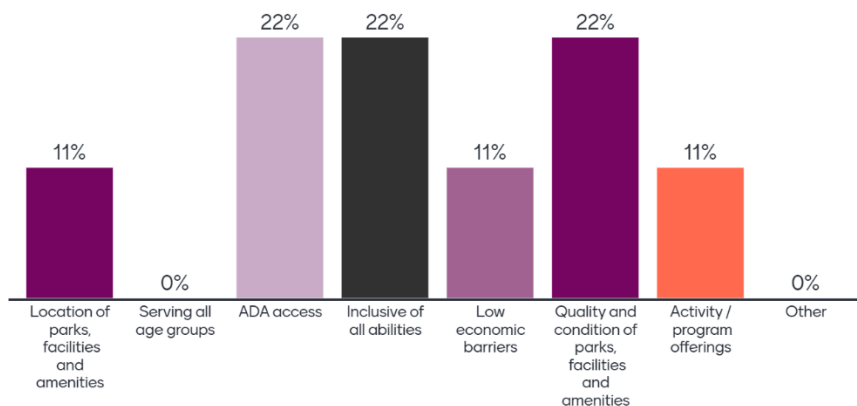
Factors of Safety

Participants expressed factors that contribute to the feelings of unsafety in parks. It was mentioned that some parks become enclaves for the unhoused population. There are, for example, places where patrons are not able to sit (Hudson Park) or where water features have to be shut off due to bathing. Perceptions of unsafety were not necessarily a concern but it was mentioned that there were feelings of discomfort when with children. As a result, parks tend to develop a reputation, which factors into low park user rates and, often, the need for the City to initiate a redesign for the park space.

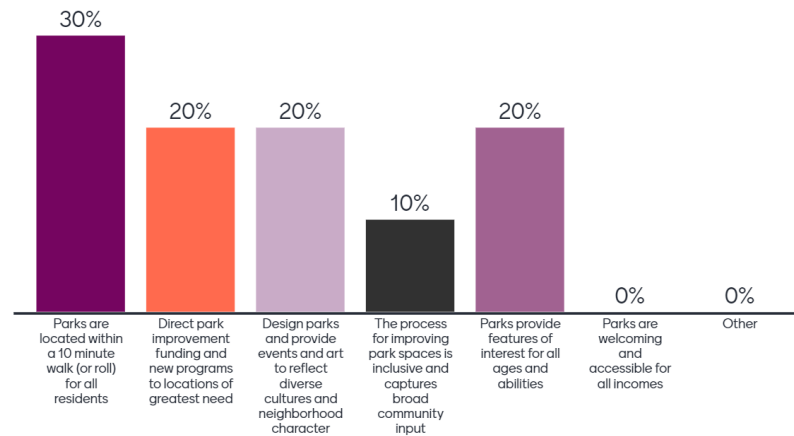
Areas of Focus to address Equity and Diversity in Parks

There was a general agreement that ADA access, quality of parks, and inclusivity of all abilities are major concerns.

8. What focus is most needed for parks and recreation to address equity and diversity?

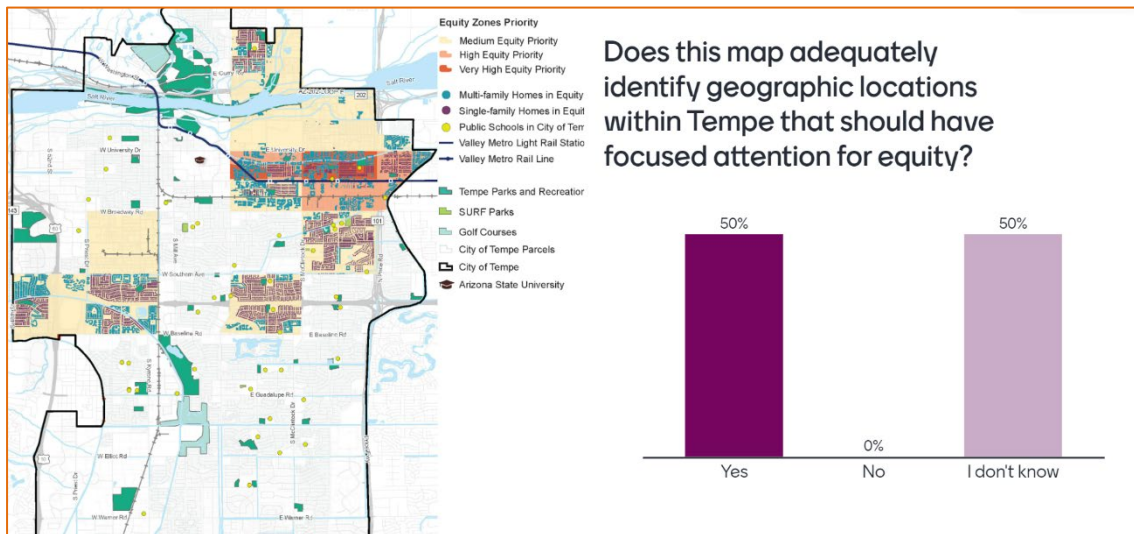


9. Which of these equity goals do you think are most important for Tempe's parks and recreation? (select up to three)



Strategies to Effectively Engage the Public

Participants suggested the distribution of physical and virtual informational postcards as well as the combination of in-person and virtual meetings to engage Tempe residents and visitors.



SUPPORTING POSITIVE EXPERIENCES IN PARK SPACES

Participants in this group highlighted that they appreciated the diversity of park types. For example, the Tempe Women's Club Park has gardens for wildlife habitat. El Paso Park has also recently installed new signage and wayfinding.

1. What are your favorite park spaces in Tempe? Why? What amenities do you use most?

Daumler Park is the closest to my house, within a nice walking distance. There's a new playground there and it's fun to watch the kids play.

El Paso walking path

Tempe women's Club Park

Love Selleh Park because of the pond and wildlife. Very accessible, even for wheelchairs, bikers, etc.

Tempe sports complex, mountain preserve areas, tempe town lake

Kiwanis Park. The multi- usage. Walking, trails, sports fields, lake and Ramadas.

3. What are the best examples of how Tempe parks and recreation serves diverse populations/needs?

Open to all

Accessible walking trails.

The parks in my area are good at serving small children and their families.

Free Orbit bus takes most to parks.

Youth basketball, swimming,

Adaptive Recreation programs

skateboarding parks

Popular City-sponsored events in Parks

Participants expressed that events are sometimes not well advertised or known to residents. However, with events that do take place, parks become popular for adults with young children. Events mentioned include:

- GAIN night is “Getting Arizona Involved in Neighborhoods” – It is hosted every October. Chairs of neighborhood associations are contacted to see if they want to have any sort of event in their neighborhood. This year the police, firefighters, horses, and artwork were present.
- Play Mobile is very well attended and is sponsored by City sponsors for after-school activities. The target audience is middle school children. This has been a great window for programming, with kids being in parks after school by themselves.

Other parks that have held events (but may not be City-sponsored) include ones at Optimist Park where there is a large playground for children. Other amenities, however, are not present. McClintock Association has been successful in providing indoor spaces for neighborhood meetings. There is also a grant application that pays for neighborhood amenities up to \$20,000.

4. Have you attended any City-sponsored events in park spaces? (Arts in the Parks, Tempe Jam, Movies in the Park, park openings, pop-up meetings)

Yes, an art in then park event at Optimist Park. I'm guessing that most of those present were from the immediate neighborhood.

We like hiking at Papago Park - Hole in the Wall

Families of all types show up to Arts in the Parks! love seeing the community come together and the kids running into their classmates at the park.

GAIN Night at Selleh Park this year had a very diverse age group young and old. There was a Pot Luck, and lots of activities for the kids. I have also attended Arts in the Parks, more youth oriented.

Feelings of Safety

Participants expressed several issues related to perceptions of safety. The following is an account of the feedback received:

- Clark Park feels unsafe, particularly as a single user. Accessing restrooms across the park feels unsafe. Lighting, activation and spatially segmenting the park so that it does not feel empty would make a big difference.
- One participant highlights that as a skateboarder and person of the artist community, the primary approach to making a park space feel safe is to activate it. Activities such as skateboarding and programs like art help bring people into a place that might feel scary.
- Unsheltered populations gravitate toward parks, especially those with restrooms.

- A question related to the use of public facilities was brought up: Is there a way to make shower spaces at the Tempe Town Lake to alleviate the pressure of bathrooms at neighborhood parks?

Are there parks in Tempe that make you and your community feel unsafe? What factors contribute to unsafe feelings?

Seems like there are ALWAYS rough-looking characters in every park I pass.

The only issue I've ever had is people that walk their dogs off leash. Ellie

using the restroom at parks

Inquiry for Solutions regarding Conflicts or Perceived Threats in Parks

Feedback was provided for the study to address conflicts with people experiencing homelessness including inviting people experiencing homelessness to participate in the project process. A successful outcome of the study and community engagement process will illustrate a model to have on-going conversations around feelings of conflict and co-existence.

6. What would be useful for this study to address regarding conflicts or perceived threats regarding people experiencing homelessness in parks?

Monitoring done by folks other than police...?

Trying to work more with people experiencing homelessness, ask their opinion, continue to try and provide options or solutions.

Equity-driven Geographic Focus Areas

The focus group was asked about identifying locations in Tempe that should have focused attention on equity. It was highlighted that:

- The area around ASU does have a need but it feels like there are other areas of Tempe not being reflected.
- Participants are generally supportive of putting a fair share of resources into areas that lack investment; at the same time, the southeast quadrant does not have any recreational centers or programs. The group will be interested in seeing if there is merit to having investment in that location if other areas are served equitably as well.

