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EBOOK

# Equitable Parks: Empowering Communities, Transforming Lives





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# Introduction

Park and recreations spaces play vital roles in enhancing the quality of life for all residents. Not only do they provide mental and physical health benefits, but they also give people the opportunity to come together and forge relationships.

**That's why it's so important for park and recreations spaces to be accessible, inclusive, and safe.** If programming and amenities are accommodating and reflective of the community's diverse needs and interests, and spaces are strategically located and protected within neighborhoods, you can cultivate a sense of belonging among residents — and increase community engagement.

However, systemic inequities have spawned disparities in access to, and the quality of, park and recreations spaces across different neighborhoods. Creating equitable parks is not just a matter of social justice — it's fundamental to building thriving, healthy, and connected communities.

**In this eBook, we'll explore the critical importance of equitable park access for residents, communities, and local government agencies.**





# Understanding the Barriers to Equitable Parks

When you think about park and recreations spaces, you might think about how they benefit individuals — and they do. However, they also can have a profound impact on society at large. For example, research shows that communities with equitable park access experience [reduced crime rates](#) and enjoy increased social cohesion.

Unfortunately, right now, this isn't the reality for many.

The [Trust for Public Land's ParkScore® index](#) consistently reveals inequities in park access and quality across neighborhoods and demographics, and its 2024 report described a “fraying social fabric,” as residents seem to be more divided than ever.

In addition, challenges remain in implementing changes relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Although more than 90% of park and recreation leaders [agreed](#) it was important, according to the [National Recreation and Park Association](#), factors like historical racism, funding disparities, and a lack of awareness have made it difficult to enact lasting change.



CivicPlus® recognizes the crucial role of equitable parks in fostering thriving communities. Our [resources](#) empower communities to identify and dismantle barriers, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of parks and recreation spaces.



# How Residents Benefit From Equitable Parks

Have you noticed that you feel better, mentally and physically, when you're able to spend time outdoors? You're not alone. In fact, [research](#) shows that mental health is "significantly related" to residential distance from parks, with the highest scores among residents who live within a short walking distance from one.

Experts have suggested that this could be due to a few reasons:

01

Mental and physical health are linked, and even small amounts of physical activity (e.g., 20 minutes per week) can have a noticeable impact on your mental health.

02

Exercising outside may provide benefits that you can't get from a gym.

03

Parks and other public green spaces can become gathering places, and increased social interactions can also affect your mental and physical health. In addition, this can strengthen community bonds.

These reasons underscore the importance of providing everyone — especially those from marginalized communities — with safe, accessible, outdoor public spaces for their health and well-being.



A [Trust for Public Land research report](#) showed that local park and recreation agencies in the United States generate more than \$201 billion and support more than one million jobs.

## Inside the Economic Benefits of Equitable Parks

Prioritizing equitable parks makes financial sense, too. A [Trust for Public Land research report](#) showed that local park and recreation agencies in the United States generate more than \$201 billion and support more than one million jobs. In addition, well-maintained parks can increase property values, attract businesses, and boost tourism, contributing to a vibrant local economy.

They also make cities appealing places to live — and with the rise of remote work, it's more important than ever for cities to invest in spaces that can retain a diverse workforce.

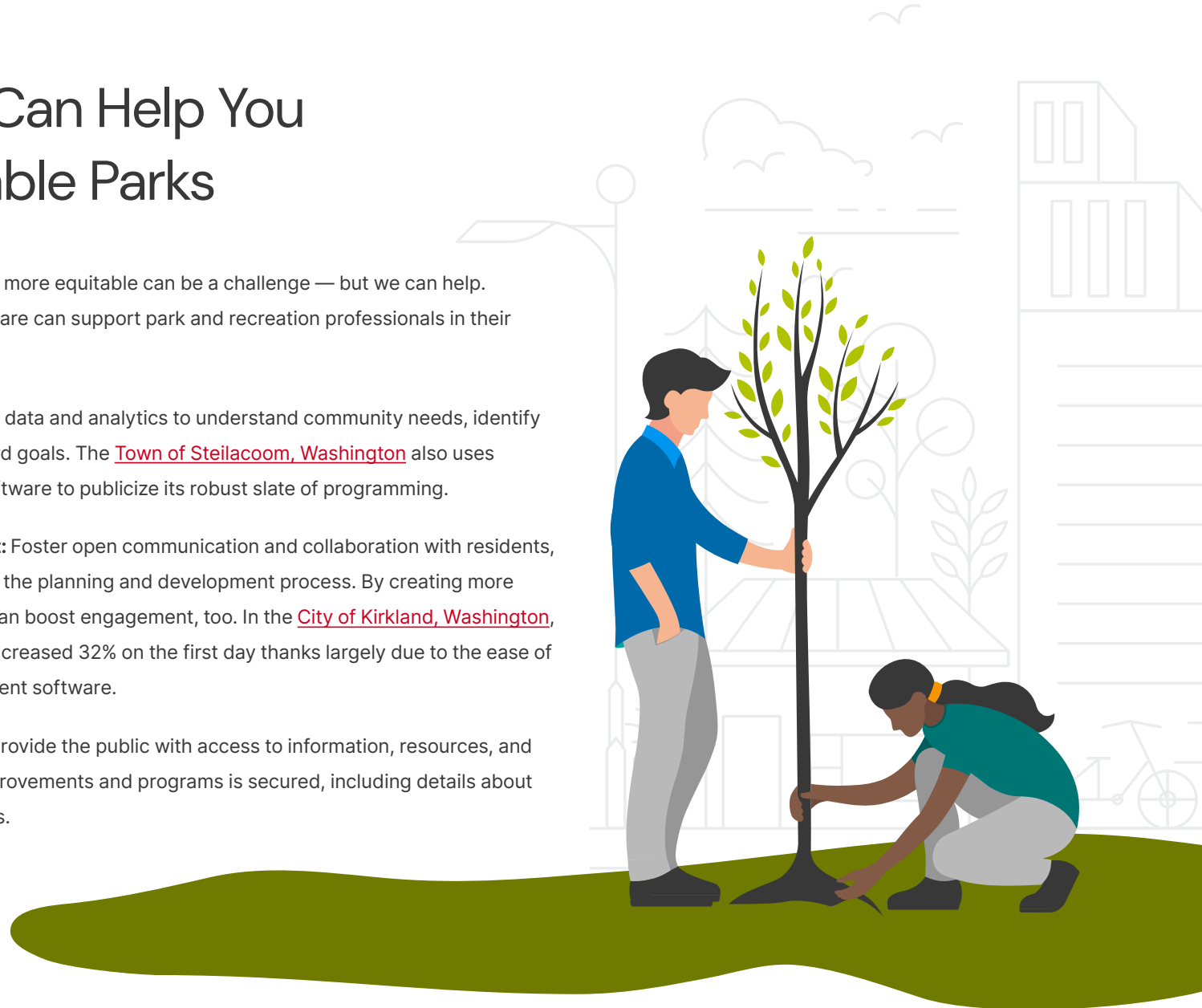
There's also a [cost savings](#) in energy and resource conservation, and parks play a crucial role in protecting natural resources, providing habitat for wildlife, and mitigating the effects of climate change.



# How CivicPlus® Can Help You Establish Equitable Parks

Making your park and recreations spaces more equitable can be a challenge — but we can help. CivicPlus® Recreation Management software can support park and recreation professionals in their pursuit of equitable parks by enabling:

- **Data-driven decision-making:** Utilize data and analytics to understand community needs, identify equity gaps, and track progress toward goals. The [Town of Steilacoom, Washington](#) also uses CivicPlus Recreation Management software to publicize its robust slate of programming.
- **Frictionless community engagement:** Foster open communication and collaboration with residents, ensuring that their voices are heard in the planning and development process. By creating more streamlined digital experiences, you can boost engagement, too. In the [City of Kirkland, Washington](#), immediate programming enrollment increased 32% on the first day thanks largely due to the ease of use of CivicPlus Recreation Management software.
- **Greater government transparency:** Provide the public with access to information, resources, and guidance on how funding for park improvements and programs is secured, including details about grants and public-private partnerships.





## Conclusion

Equitable parks aren't just a luxury — they're a necessity for building healthy, thriving, and connected communities. By prioritizing equity in park planning, design, and programming, we can create spaces that benefit everyone, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities. CivicPlus is dedicated to empowering park and recreation professionals with the tools and resources they need to achieve this vision. Together, we can build a future where equitable parks are the standard, not the exception.

### About the Author CivicPlus

Thousands of high-performing civic leaders rely on CivicPlus as their trusted partner for Impact-Led Government. With CivicPlus, leaders can finally overcome the perpetual tradeoff between the demand for better services and the realities of operational resources, leveraging the unique Civic Impact Platform to deliver both unmatched end-to-end automated efficiency and truly unified, delightful residence experiences.

Backed by over 25 years of experience and leveraging the insights of more than 900 team members, our solutions are chosen by over 10,000 organizations and are used daily by over 340 million people in the U.S. and Canada. For more information, please visit [civicplus.com](https://civicplus.com).



### About CivicPlus Recreation Management Software

CivicPlus Recreation Management software is purpose-built by former park and recreation leaders to help local governments connect with residents, increase memberships, and boost community engagement.

With an intuitive interface and robust tools for managing activities, facilities, and point-of-sale transactions, CivicPlus Recreation Management software includes integrated functionality to manage memberships, instructors, sports leagues, and ticketing online.

The software's self-service capability gives residents the ability to easily register for activities, reserve facilities, and pay for classes, any time, anywhere. With fewer phone calls and in-office visits, local government agency staff members have more time to focus on other priorities.

The result? Better experiences for your residents and increased productivity for your agency. It's a win-win. To learn more, visit [civicplus.com/recreation-management-software](https://civicplus.com/recreation-management-software).