



**University of California**  
Agriculture and Natural Resources ■ Nutrition Policy Institute

*Research for healthy food, people and places*

## Active Parks, Healthy People Pilot Program Evaluation Report

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## Executive Summary

The local park system is a largely untapped resource in the effort to increase physical activity and combat health inequities in low-income communities across California.<sup>1</sup> The Active Parks, Healthy People Pilot Program was implemented in three California counties to explore whether offering a six-week structured physical activity opportunity in community parks would enhance park utilization in the short term and increase program participants' physical activity levels.

The intention was to conduct a cluster-randomized controlled evaluation with park observations and participant surveys to be administered at three separate time points over the study duration. Group interviews with program implementers were conducted at study completion to inform lessons learned from this pilot. Due to low participation rates, midpoint park observations were not conducted in two of the three counties, participant surveys were not completed at any time point in one of the counties, and the number surveyed at the other two counties was too low to support statistical analyses. Observational and survey data were therefore analyzed descriptively and emergent themes from the stakeholder interviews were summarized.

Despite the challenges, the study findings provide valuable information to inform future Local Health Department (LHD) program planning and design efforts for park interventions.

The study findings suggest that the following steps may be needed to improve use of underutilized parks through park programming:

1. Conduct a robust needs assessment that includes:
  - A *community engagement process* to engage residents in the park class planning and design process
  - A *trusted community organizer* in community engagement processes
  - Assessing the *largest barriers* to park program participation
  - Identifying key partners such as local park and recreation departments to support program implementation
2. Ensure that park programs are designed to fit well with the physical space and available amenities of the park and are culturally appropriate for the community.
3. Design programs to be long-term because building up support for programs may take time and require multiple attempts at engagement to increase awareness and participation.
4. Implement recruitment strategies that include a variety of methods such as social media outlets and health fairs to promote the physical activity classes offered in local parks.

5. Pursue funding and partnerships to support policy, systems and environment interventions that are needed to ensure parks are safe, attractive and clean with adequate facilities and amenities to attract residents and support physical activities that are of interest to residents.

## Introduction

Neighborhood parks offer affordable opportunities for individuals to engage in physical activity particularly in low-income communities, where residents face several health disparities as a result of inadequate access to opportunities for physical activity.<sup>1</sup> With over 14,000 parks, California has an opportunity to increase access and use of this public infrastructure to support health equity. Between 2006 and 2008, Cohen and colleagues studied a diverse sample of parks in a Southern California metropolitan area representing a variety of racial and ethnic communities of different socioeconomic strata and found most of the parks to be underutilized compared to the physical activity needs of the community.<sup>2</sup> Among the factors examined, their study found that having organized programming at the park, including sports competitions and other attractions, appeared to be the strongest correlate of park use and community-level physical activity.<sup>2</sup> They did not find perceptions of park safety to be significantly correlated with park usage though the larger body of evidence does consider safety to be an important barrier. <sup>2-6</sup>

In order to increase park utilization in low-income communities across California and support health equity, the California Department of Public Health identified three local health departments (LHDs) to conduct a pilot physical activity intervention in two of each county's parks. The intervention was intended to be a physical activity class or walking group offered once per week for six consecutive weeks in the fall of 2018. Two separate class series were offered during the same six-week period. Intervention participants were asked to participate in either one of the two classes offered once per week.

Local health departments in Los Angeles, Fresno, and Stanislaus counties partnered with local community-based organizations to lead physical activity classes in an underutilized park in each community. Classes were designed or chosen by each LHD and partner organization.

In Los Angeles County, the local health department partnered with Day One, a local organization that already had an existing partnership with the health department to implement SNAP-Ed. A walking club series and a yoga class series were both offered one day a week at a park in the city of Pomona.

In Fresno County, the local health department partnered with the National Association for Physical Activity, an organization with which they had previously partnered, to offer a walking club two days per week at a park in the city of Kerman – a small, rural community within Fresno County. The intervention park was located on school grounds and was determined to be underutilized during out of school time.

In Stanislaus County, the local health department partnered with the City of Patterson Parks and Recreation Department. These two organizations had not previously partnered. They decided to use the open stadium model (i.e., open access to mobile gym equipment) instead of an instructor-led physical activity class because the City of

Patterson Parks and Recreation Department had successfully used this model in the past to engage local youth in physical activity.

### *Evaluation Study*

With the support of the California Department of Public Health, the Nutrition Policy Institute (NPI) designed a cluster randomized-controlled evaluation study to test the hypothesis that:

*Offering a physical activity class for a six-week period at an underutilized, CalFresh Healthy Living eligible neighborhood park would increase subsequent park utilization and participants' physical activity.*

## **Methods**

### **Sampling and Recruitment**

LHD staff in each county were tasked with identifying two parks that were located within walking distance (0.5 miles) of a CalFresh Healthy Living (formerly known as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program- Education or SNAP-Ed) eligible, low-income community - defined as a community where 50% or more of households have a gross household income at or below 185 percent of the poverty line.<sup>7</sup> Parks were eligible sites for this evaluation if they were deemed 'underutilized' and did not have ongoing physical activity programming based on LHD knowledge of the parks in the community. Each county assigned one park as the intervention site – where physical activity programming was implemented - and one park as the comparison site – where no programming was implemented. The comparison parks were chosen based on their similar size and similar amenities (e.g. play equipment for kids, sports infrastructure types, walking trails, bathrooms etc.) to intervention parks.

Power calculations determined that the total sample size needed was 180 study participants over the age of 18 in order to detect a one-day increase in park usage at the individual level. With an anticipated 50% attrition rate in study participation over the duration of this evaluation, the recruitment goal was a total of 360 study participants or 120 per county (60 intervention and 60 comparison).

LHD staff were asked to develop and implement a recruitment strategy for their chosen community. Once recruited into the evaluation, participants were randomized to the intervention, a 6-week physical activity class offered in the selected intervention park, or the comparison group. Participants randomized to the comparison group were offered participation in the physical activity class at the intervention park following conclusion of the evaluation. All participants completed an informed consent.

## Data Collection

### Outcome Evaluation Data.

All evaluation study participants were asked to complete the *Active Parks, Healthy People Survey* (Appendix II) before the physical activity class began, approximately halfway through the physical activity class, and 2-3-weeks following the conclusion of the physical activity class. This survey assessed usual park visits and physical activity. Usual park visits were measured using a brief, validated questionnaire created and tested by Evenson et al 2013.<sup>8</sup> Physical activity was measured with the international physical activity questionnaire short form (IPAQ- SF).<sup>9</sup> Demographic data were collected at baseline from all study participants. Supplemental programmatic questions about the intervention were asked only of intervention group participants (whether or not they attended any classes) at midpoint and follow-up. Participants received a five-dollar gift card upon survey completion at each time point.

To objectively assess park utilization, LHDs conducted observations at the intervention and comparison parks using the modified *System for Observing Play and Recreation in Communities* (SOPARC) protocol (Appendix III). At each of the 3 time points (pre, mid and post intervention) SOPARC data were collected 4 times per day for 2 days. LHD staff and community partners received training by NPI staff to administer the *Active Parks, Healthy People Survey* (Appendix II), *Participant Rosters*, and the SOPARC observational tool (Appendix III).

### Process Evaluation Data.

Local community staff completed *Participant Rosters* to record the intervention dose each participant received (the number of total classes each intervention participant attended over the six-week intervention).

Following completion of the pilot study, *key stakeholder group interviews* were conducted by NPI staff in December of 2018. One group interview was conducted with LHD staff and their community partners from each county for a total of three group interviews. The *Active Parks, Healthy People Lessons Learned Interview Guide* (Appendix IV) was used to conduct these interviews. This guide was developed by NPI staff to capture information about facilitators and barriers to increasing park utilization in underutilized parks as well as other relevant information to inform future physical activity interventions in underutilized parks.

## Analysis

### Outcome Evaluation Data.

Frequencies and means were generated from survey and observation data for all three data collection periods and stratified by county. Due to sample size limitations and loss

to follow-up for mid-point and follow-up surveys, the data could not be analyzed for differences between intervention and comparison groups by county or change over time in park utilization or activity levels.

### Process Evaluation Data.

The total number of weeks each intervention participant attended the 6-week park intervention was calculated using the *Participant Rosters*. Each intervention participant was invited to attend one physical activity class per week for the duration of the six-week long class. Therefore, in total each participant could have participated in the intervention for a maximum of six weeks.

Two NPI researchers with thorough understanding of the purpose of the *Key Stakeholder Group Interviews*, transcribed the three group interviews into abridged transcripts of the relevant and useful portions of the interviews. Transcripts were then independently coded by two NPI researchers for common themes in responses to each *Active Parks, Healthy People Lessons Learned Interview Guide* question. Upon completion of the independent coding process, researchers compared their analyses for convergent themes and decided how much weight or emphasis to give comments based on the frequency, specificity, emotion, and extensiveness of each emerging theme. Themes were compiled into a descriptive summary of how each county (Fresno - rural community, Los Angeles - urban community or Stanislaus - rural community) responded to the interview questions. Specific quotes were selected to capture the essence of what was said and to illustrate themes. From the qualitative analysis, recommendations for future interventions that aim to increase park use were developed.

## **Findings**

### **Recruitment and Retention**

Despite extensive recruitment efforts, the number of participants recruited did not meet the target study sample size. At baseline, Los Angeles County recruited 41 participants (25 randomly assigned to the intervention group, 16 to the comparison group), and Fresno County recruited 19 participants (10 randomly assigned to the intervention group, 9 to the comparison group).

Stanislaus County had recruited six participants before it was decided that the programming would not be offered in this community until after they had a chance to engage residents more extensively. They had tried numerous recruitment strategies to encourage residents to participate in the pilot program (e.g., increased the amount of the incentives to participate, promoted the program online, went door to door to promote the program), but were unsuccessful. In response, they planned two community meetings with the City of Patterson Parks and Recreation Department during the study period with the aim of improving their resident engagement and offering the physical activity program in the spring of 2019.



Local partners and LHDs reported that the randomization design of the evaluation study posed a challenge during initial recruitment into the evaluation as did lack of incentives for participation in the intervention classes themselves. According to stakeholder interviews several other factors such as the parks' environment, reputation and infrastructure presented challenges for recruitment (see "Key Stakeholder Interviews" below).

## **Descriptive Survey Findings (Total Sample, Intervention + Comparison)**

At baseline all 60 study participants completed a survey (41 from Los Angeles and 19 from Fresno); at midpoint 41 from Los Angeles and 5 from Fresno completed a survey; at follow-up 37 from Los Angeles and 5 from Fresno completed a survey. Given the small sample size in most cases data is presented only for the baseline combined sample; comparisons overtime or between intervention and comparison groups would not be meaningful in most cases.

### Demographics.

Study participants (n = 60) were a majority female and Hispanic/Latino (Table 1). Most participants had high school diplomas or additional education after high school. Nearly two-thirds of the Los Angeles study participants were younger than 35 years of age whereas 79% of Fresno participants were 35 or older. Most participants from both counties had never participated in a physical activity class at a park prior to the study. More participants from Los Angeles County lived within a half-mile of the selected intervention park. Participants in Fresno County were more evenly split between those who did and did not live within a half-mile of the selected intervention park.

### Baseline Physical Activity Levels (Table 2).

Study participants from Los Angeles County sat for a median of 330 minutes per week; walked (for more than 10 minutes at a time) for a median of 100 minutes per week; did moderate physical activity for 40 minutes per week; and did vigorous physical activity for a median of 15 minutes per week. Fresno study participants were more physically active with a median time spent sitting of 240 minutes per week; and median time spent walking, in moderate physical activity, and in vigorous physical activity of 120 minutes per week for each activity. There were too few survey respondents to report median and quartiles for physical activity at either midpoint or follow-up.

### Usual Park Visits at Baseline.

In both Los Angeles and Fresno Counties, about half of the study participants reported they had not visited the intervention park at all in the past four weeks (Table 3). Of those participants who did report going to the intervention park in the past four weeks, time spent at the park varied widely from less than 15 minutes to 2-3 hours (Table 4). Lack of time was the most frequent reason participants from Los Angeles County did not visit

the intervention park. In Fresno County the most frequently reported reason for not visiting intervention the park was that it was not easy to get to (Table 5).

### Types of Physical Activities Participants Engage in at the Park Over Time

Among the participants from Los Angeles County, at baseline, the most frequently listed activities by those who went to the intervention park were sedentary, (i.e. talked with others; sat or stood; and watched others play) (Table 6). At mid-point and follow-up there was a decrease in the proportion that reported sedentary activities in Los Angeles. At midpoint and follow-up, the most frequently listed activities were walking more than 10 minutes at a time; jogging or running; and talking with others. At baseline, among study participants from Fresno County: watching others play; talking with others; sitting or standing; and walking more than 10 minutes at a time were most frequently reported. Only 5 participants completed follow-up surveys in Fresno and only 3 of them reported any activities at the park. Although the increases in physical activity at the last park visit by survey respondents in Los Angeles is encouraging, numbers were too small to make meaningful comparisons between intervention and comparison groups over time. Numbers were even smaller in Fresno thereby precluding any inferences regarding park activity in that county.

### **Intervention Participation and Participant Perceptions**

In Los Angeles County, all study participants assigned to the intervention (n=25) attended at least one physical activity class and participated for a median of 4 weeks with the majority attending more than 3 classes (Table 7). In Fresno, 4 of the 10 individuals in the intervention group attended at least one class and none of these participants attended more than 3 weeks.

Among intervention group participants from Los Angeles County, most reported liking the intervention “a lot” (Table 8). Offering childcare during the class and offering the class at a park that feels safer were the most frequently reported ways to improve the park intervention (Table 9). In Fresno the majority of survey respondents at midpoint and follow-up had not actually participated in the activity and therefore could not answer these questions.

In Los Angeles County, at all three time points, participants listed walking or running classes/clubs and aerobic or workout classes among the top three activities they preferred be offered at a park. (Table 10). Fresno County study participants, at all three timepoints, listed Zumba or other dance classes and aerobic or workout classes among the top three preferred classes.

### **SOPARC Observations**

In Los Angeles County, an average of 11 to 12 people per observation visited the intervention park during each time period (Table 11). More park users (26-48) were

observed at the comparison site and change over time was variable. Although sedentary behavior was the most common at all three time points, the proportion of park users observed engaging in sedentary activity decreased over time somewhat more among park users at the intervention park (from 64 to 50%) than at the comparison park (from 73 to 65%). Correspondingly vigorous physical activity increased more (from 9% to 29% at the intervention park and 8% to 13% at the comparison park). However, the small numbers preclude a definitive conclusion regarding impact of the intervention on physical activity at the parks.

The top three observed activities at the intervention and comparison parks were standing, sitting or walking (Table 12). Biking was among the top 3 at the intervention park at follow-up (in addition to sitting and walking) whereas playing was among the top 3 at follow-up in the comparison park at follow-up (in addition to standing and sitting).

In Fresno, the intervention park had a higher average number of park users per observation than the comparison park at both observation time points with a marked decrease over time at both parks (Table 11). At the intervention park 45% of park users were sedentary at baseline and 43% were sedentary at follow-up; the proportion engaged in vigorous physical activity decreased over time and walking increased. At the comparison park, moderate physical activity was the most common at baseline and only 2 people were observed at follow-up. At baseline and follow-up, top observed activities at the intervention park were standing, walking, and running (baseline only) or playing soccer (follow-up only). At the comparison park walking, running, sitting and standing were most frequently observed at baseline and basketball was the only activity observed at follow-up (Table 12).

In Stanislaus County, the average number of park users was lower in the intervention park than in the comparison park at both time points with marked decreases in park use observed over time at both parks (Table 11). At the intervention park over 90% of users were sedentary or walking and only an average of 2.5 people were observed at follow-up precluding any comparison over time. At the comparison park users observed were more evenly split among those who were sedentary, walking, or engaged in vigorous physical activity; too few were observed at follow-up for a meaningful comparison over time. The most commonly observed activities across time points and parks were walking, sitting, and running. Football was among the top three at baseline at the comparison park whereas baseball was among the top three at the intervention park at follow-up. More variety of activities were observed at baseline at both parks as might be expected given the greater number of users (Table 12).

## **Key Stakeholder Interviews**

Eleven local health department staff and their respective community-based partners participated in one of three group interviews (one group interview per county)

Perception of Community Members' Value of Parks in Their Communities.

In the two rural communities, interviewees reported that community members value the parks in their communities. They reported community members keep the parks clean and take pride in their clean parks. However, in the urban community, interviewees reported community members value certain parks more than others. According to interviewees, the parks that are more frequently used in all three communities tend to be located in more affluent parts of the communities.

### Factors That Prevent Community Members From Using the Park.

The reputation of the park was reported as being the primary factor preventing community members from using the parks, across all three counties (rural and urban counties alike). *The reputation of a park can play a big role (in park usage) – Fresno County stakeholder.* The reputation is based on negative behaviors that have happened at the park. These include drug use, alcohol consumption, gang activity, and crime.

In one of the rural communities, a shooting had happened at a local park several years ago, and more recently there was a large fight in front of that same park.

*I think sometimes you feel you're not safe there, so you don't want to be at the park. – Fresno County stakeholder*

In the urban community, the negative confrontations were reported to have a more significant impact on preventing park use.

*I think the overall perception...folks don't want to leave their house. – Los Angeles Stakeholder*

Lighting was reported by all three communities to be a factor that prevented community members from using the park. Two communities, one urban (Los Angeles County) and one rural (Stanislaus County), also reported that there are policies in place that prevent community members from using the park at night. *There is a city ordinance that people can't be out at parks at night. – Stanislaus County stakeholder.* In that community, there are lights that are kept on only if the city is running a special program.

Other factors that were reported to prevent park usage were: a lack of programming – *It's sort of a vicious cycle because folks don't go to the park because there's no programming and ... there's no programming because folks don't go to the park. – Los Angeles County stakeholder.* Lack of playground equipment, homeless encampments (in the urban community), winter month conditions cause parks to be unusable, and no hours posted were also frequently cited as factors that prevented residents from visiting the parks. Coupled with comments about the hours not being posted was an overall concern about community members not knowing a park located next to a school was a community space during non-school hours.

Counties frequently mentioned that active programming and improved lighting at parks were fundamental to improving the reputation of parks deemed unsafe. Fresno County stakeholders stated that *when the park is more abandoned and it feels lonelier... you feel like you're not safe there, so you don't want to be at that park.*

### Factors Contributing to Park Use

All three communities reported programming or sporting events would bring community members to the park. Several park amenities were also reported to likely increase park use; these included lighting – *Some other parks are well-lit parks and they will go to those parks because they feel safe.* – Fresno County stakeholder, walking trails, play equipment for kids (e.g., slides, swings), basketball courts, restrooms, trash cans, and water fountains. The location of the park – being in a more affluent area – was also reported to contribute to park usage. Finally, the urban community reported that an individual's *sense of social connectivity* is a factor that contributes to park use.

When asked about factors that attract residents to existing parks, park amenities, such as walking trails, restrooms, picnic areas, and nicer playgrounds was the primary factor stated. Parks with these amenities were reported to be safe due, in part, to their increased use.

### Potential Efforts to Increase Park Use

All three communities reported that getting community members out to the park for a program or activity is a good idea for increasing park use.

*It's just getting programming at the park and getting people to see that it's being used and being used for positive things. You know like leagues for kids or even for adults. It's just getting rid of that stigma that the park is abandoned, and it's only used for crime.* – Stanislaus County stakeholder

Lighting was also discussed as a component that would increase park usage. Having clear signage with park hours posted was noted from one of the rural communities as being a potentially successful structural change to increase park usage. In the urban community, it was reported that addressing homelessness would be an effective effort to increase park usage. (Note: the city had recently passed a law restricting camping at parks in this community.)

### Things Enjoyed Most About the Physical Activity Class

Two of the counties held six-week physical activity classes; therefore, these findings include Fresno (rural community) and Los Angeles (urban community) Counties' experiences.

In Fresno County, stakeholders reported that the participants really enjoyed the walking coaches. They found them warm, friendly and motivating. In Los Angeles County,

stakeholders also reported that the physical activity staff were motivating and reported that the attention and focus on their community was what the participants were perceived to like the most. Also, the social connection was important to the participants. *They got to know each other... They became friends and I think after the exercise class ended, they kept in touch and they kept exercising.* – Los Angeles County stakeholder

### Factors That Prevented Class Participation

In Fresno County, stakeholders reported that not having a walkable trail prevented community members from participating. *The older residents are like, 'I'm not going to do it anymore because I have bad knees, and I don't want to be walking on unpaved ground'.* – Fresno County stakeholder. They also reported participants being confused because they thought the intervention park was just for school use. Football practice was going on at the same time the class was being offered. Some participants did not feel comfortable exercising with groups of kids around.

Fresno County stakeholders also reported there was a Zumba class going on at the local community center during the same time the class was being offered at the park and Zumba is very popular among community members.

In Los Angeles County, they perceived participants not feeling safe at the park. *There's a lot of folks who at this point in time are not comfortable coming out to parks for either personal or community safety reasons. The second week in (the class), we were doing yoga and this man just came and started watching. It was uncomfortable...* - Los Angeles County stakeholder

### Importance of Class Design

Both counties reported that the type of physical activity class being offered was important. In Fresno County, they reported observing many adults walking in parks in the participating community and that is what led them to implement a walking club there. However, after implementing the walking club and having poor attendance, they think they should have tried another physical activity class, like Zumba or another dance class, which is very popular among their residents. In Los Angeles County, they implemented two types of physical activity classes – a walking club and a yoga class. The yoga class was much more popular, and its classes were better attended. However, the Los Angeles County stakeholders noted that the participants were going to try to continue the walking club at another park.

Other class design issues that were reported included: the challenges of the time change (it got dark during class time) and the short duration of the class – stakeholders noted six weeks might not be long enough to get more participants to come out to join the class. They felt residents needed more time to observe a program – *Like a grace period or whatever to figure things out.* – Los Angeles County stakeholder. Stakeholders thought if the class had been offered for a longer period of time, more residents would

have joined along the way. They might have seen the classes or heard about the program through word of mouth, but six weeks was not enough time for this.

Another important factor reported was the importance of considering the culture of the community in selecting the types of classes to offer in the park. *I think sometimes participation in physical activity classes has a lot to do with culture.* – Fresno County stakeholder

### Importance of Physical Space.

Stakeholders also noted the impact of the physical space where the physical activity class was offered. Lighting was discussed as being very important as well as having the right infrastructure for the program being offered. For instance, walking paths are needed where a walking program is being implemented.

### Other Feedback About the Physical Activity Class.

Fresno County stakeholders shared that if they were able to offer a physical activity class in the park again, they would build off of an existing model and use resources already in the community, such as partnering with the local Parks and Recreation Department to combine efforts and capitalize on what the local Parks and Recreation Department is already doing successfully. They also discussed plans that they have in the works to partner with an organization, Every Neighborhood Partnership, to engage neighborhoods and schools in physical activity.

Los Angeles County stakeholders reiterated the importance of allowing adequate time for residents to observe or hear about the class for more participation. Their Walking Group was planning to continue after the six-week class at another park with more participants. They also felt that the ability to make changes to the program's design after gathering community feedback would be instrumental to the creation of a program in which community members would participate.

### Factors that Promoted Class Participation, Strategies to Get Residents to Participate & Successful Recruitment Strategies Previously Implemented

All three county stakeholders suggested that engaging community members through public forums or community meetings to gather information about their interests would increase success in recruiting community members to participate in future physical activity classes and increase park use. Los Angeles County stakeholders suggested using focus groups to gather this information from community members. Stanislaus County stakeholders discussed finding a way to bring law enforcement into these discussions without discouraging community residents from participating. They face an additional challenge with community members not trusting law enforcement, but the stakeholders feel involving law enforcement is part of the solution to increase park visits at underutilized parks that have a reputation as being unsafe.

Having a connection with a trusted person was reported as key for community engagement. Stakeholders from each county shared that community members need to have a connection with someone they trust from the local organization.

*I think I found the right person...he actually knows Spanish and he's one of those who can build relationships and not so much of an authoritarian power. – Stanislaus County stakeholder*

*...having time to get to know these very dedicated folks and they build trust they will become your advocates and you don't need to invest that much time to do outreach, because they'll do it for you. – Los Angeles County stakeholder*

*She really engages with the parents and invites them, and I think because they trust her and have a good relationship with her that they come out. – Fresno County stakeholder*

Both Fresno and Los Angeles County stakeholders expressed the importance of the community members' sense of ownership of the program for program sustainability. Los Angeles County stakeholders described, [Community members] *actually wanting [the program] to grow. They're like, 'Oh, how can we get more people to come'.*

Additionally, Fresno described a previous successful dance program in their community where:

*One of the moms ... just started teaching herself and then taught other parents. They really just took ownership of it and they started inviting a lot of people. They even got some of their kids to do it. They were really invested and they started even buying dresses and it just became a bigger thing and [they] even dance at community events, they get invited by the community.*

Another theme discussed by the Fresno County stakeholders and the Los Angeles County stakeholders was the importance of finding the right class – dance or yoga – to get residents to come out and participate in a physical activity class.

Finally, Fresno and Los Angeles County expressed that promoting the class with pictures of the class and testimony from participants on Facebook and other social media outlets and at local health fairs should be part of the recruitment strategy.

### Challenges Recruiting Participants.

During group interviews, participants were asked to reflect on challenges to recruiting participants that were not directly associated to the structure of the evaluation design itself.

Both Stanislaus and Los Angeles Counties reported that community members not having a trusted relationship with anyone from the organization running the programming hindered recruitment efforts. They all agreed that trust needs to be built



before any program can run successfully in these communities. The Los Angeles County stakeholders also identified community members not feeling safe as a challenge for recruiting participants to these classes.

Another challenge identified was the time of year the programming was offered. Having this program in December meant it overlapped with the holiday season, shorter days, cooler temperatures and families planning trips and other events during the holidays.

## **Conclusions**

The original goal of this study was to determine if a 6-week physical activity class in an underutilized park increased subsequent park visits in general and physical activity among program participants in a low-income community. All three study communities had challenges enrolling local community members into the study. While Los Angeles County enrolled the largest number of study participants, they were only able to enroll 35% of the target sample size. The main challenges to recruitment reported by LHDs and their local partners included the randomization component of the evaluation study design, lack of incentives for participation in the intervention classes, need for community gatekeepers to build trust between community and program implementers, and time of year in which the intervention was implemented. Due to these challenges, the study sample size was not sufficient to conduct longitudinal analysis to assess change and therefore the data were assessed descriptively and group interviews with LHD staff and their local partners were conducted to provide additional insights to inform future park programming efforts.

Baseline findings indicate that many of the study participants were active at baseline. Los Angeles County participants were active (combined walking, moderate and vigorous PA) for a total median of 165 minutes per week and Fresno participants were active for a median of 360 minutes per week. The US Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) recommends a minimum of 30 minutes per day (210 minutes per week) suggesting the many Fresno participants were exceeding this recommendation whereas most Los Angeles residents were not. USDHHS counts only brisk walking in their recommendation whereas the study survey did not distinguish the pace of the walking therefore the study totals for weekly PA may be an overestimate for comparison with DHHS recommendations. Frequency of parks visits however were low; half had not visited the park in the past 4 weeks and only about one quarter had visited the park more than once. Sedentary activities, such as lying down, standing, or sitting at the parks were common.

Although sample sizes were too small to arrive at firm conclusions, especially in Fresno County, in Los Angeles County there were promising changes observed over time. There were steep reductions in sedentary activities at the park and increases in walking for more than 10 minutes at a time (Table 6). Park observations in Los Angeles revealed greater increases in vigorous physical activity in the intervention park than was observed at the comparison park (Table 11). Class participants that completed the

survey overwhelmingly liked the classes, however study participants had many suggestions for improving the classes and increasing park utilization.

These findings are not conclusive in suggesting that PA classes may be effective at increasing physical activity among the class participants and park visitors. Additional studies with sufficient sample sizes are needed. If this type of intervention is to be effective in increasing PA at a population level, numbers of participants would need to be increased substantially. Participant suggestions indicate that both changes in classes offered such as provision of childcare and timing as well as changes to the park such as safety, cleanliness and access are needed. This double-pronged approach to both improve classes and improve the park itself in terms facilities, cleanliness, safety and reputation should be considered if future park interventions are planned. Interviews and participant surveys revealed that park reputation is a strong factor in park usage. To improve park reputation, it is recommended that more long-term programming be implemented in underutilized parks in conjunction with strong policy, systems and environment (PSE) change. Offer programming over a longer- term would allow for more exposure and engagement of community members gradually overtime.

To develop a long-term park program that fits community need, investment in program planning and design is key. Prior to implementing any new programming, a community engagement process is needed to engage residents in the program design and planning. A trusted community organizer is necessary to engage all residents in this process. Only programs that fit the physical space and available amenities should be considered. Findings from Los Angeles County indicate that the provision of childcare during the PA classes and offering options such Zumba or aerobics could improve attendance. As intervention activities continue to develop, participant satisfaction surveys or focus groups could help tailor the program better to community needs. Implementing a well-designed program in an underutilized park may first require improvement or the addition of facilities and amenities in order to attract participation and provide appropriate activities.

To support long-term program investments, a strong focus on, policy, systems and environment (PSE) interventions could improve park safety and encourage park use. Findings suggest that PSE changes such as increased lighting, signage with park hours, and use policies, such as policies that ease restrictions on park use after dark and promote park accessibility during all seasons, could facilitate park use outside of programming hours. All three counties reported that the most utilized parks in their communities were the parks that were clean and offered a variety of amenities such as walking trails, play equipment for kids, sports infrastructure, bathrooms, water faucets, and community gathering spaces. These parks also tended to be in more affluent areas of the community. Efforts should be made to advocate for structural investment in parks located in low-income neighborhoods through engagement of local businesses, elected officials, and other community decision makers.

Furthermore, during program development, a thorough community needs assessment should be conducted to identify the largest overall barriers to participation in park

programming. In this evaluation, most survey respondents in LA reported that time was their largest barrier to visiting the intervention park despite most living within walking distance of that park. Since an individual's time constraints cannot be addressed by improvements in park reputation or improvements in park amenities, solely focusing on those barriers may not impact participation rates as expected.

Due to low participant retention rates in Fresno County, it is difficult to draw strong conclusions from participant surveys; however, Zumba and aerobics workout classes were mentioned as programs of interest by survey respondents. According to the SOPARC data, the most common activities at the parks were walking and playing a sport. Focus groups with community members in Fresno County could help identify barriers to program participation, retention, and types of programming of most interest to community members.

In Stanislaus County, participating in sports was a common activity for community members at parks. Key stakeholders reported that well-utilized parks with good reputations in their community had ongoing sports-based programming, suggesting that similar programming could bring positive change particularly if paired with long term investments by cities and/or counties to build, repair, and upgrade underutilized parks. In order to determine this, Stanislaus County should explore community interest in a sport-based park program and obtain other feedback to improve future programming efforts during their community engagement process. Stanislaus should also continue their current efforts to improve park amenities.

Recruitment for community member participation can be a lengthy process therefore funding is needed for a long-term approach. Community member participation will likely increase over the duration of time that programming is offered.

## **Recommendations:**

The findings from this study suggest that:

1. To improve park programming
  - Conduct a robust needs assessment that includes:
    - i. A *community engagement process* in order to engage residents in the park class planning and design process
    - ii. A *trusted community organizer* in community engagement processes
    - iii. Assessing the *largest barriers* to park program participation
    - iv. Identifying key partners such as local park and recreation departments to support program implementation.
  - Design park programs that fit well with the physical space and available amenities of the park and are culturally appropriate for the community.

- Design programs over the long-term because building up support for programs may take time and require multiple attempts at engagement to increase awareness and participation.
    - i. Sufficient funding will be necessary to support any long-term program.
  - Design recruitment efforts that include a variety of methods such as social media outlets and health fairs to promote the physical activity classes offered in local parks.
2. Pursue funding and partnerships to support ***policy, systems and environment interventions*** that are needed to ensure parks are safe, attractive, and clean with adequate facilities and amenities to attract residents and support physical activities that are of interest to residents. These PSEs may include:
- Increased park lighting,
  - Partnerships with law enforcement and community-based groups concerned with safety
  - Other park design features that discourage crime
  - Adequate on-going park maintenance
  - Facilities that support physical activities of interest to residents (ball courts and fields, play structures, water features, etc.
  - Park beautification
  - Improved signage with park hours
  - Supportive park use policies such as policies that ease restrictions on park use after dark and promote park accessibility during all seasons

## Appendix I: Tables

**Table 1: Baseline Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants, Stratified by County**

Demographic Characteristics	Baseline	
	LA County (n= 41) <sup>a</sup>	Fresno County (n= 19) <sup>a</sup>
<b>Age (n, %)<sup>b</sup></b>		
18 to 34	25 (63.4)	4 (21.1)
35 or older	15 (36.6)	15 (79.0)
<b>Sex (n, %)<sup>b</sup></b>		
Female	32 (78.1)	17 (89.5)
<b>Race/Ethnicity (n)<sup>c</sup></b>		
White Non-Hispanic	1	2
Hispanic/Latino	38	17
Other	2	0
<b>Highest level of education (n)<sup>c</sup></b>		
Some high school or less	5	5
High school graduate	15	2
More than high school (e.g some college credit, trade, technical, vocational, Associates degree or higher)	20	10
<b>Residence within a half-mile of the intervention park (n)<sup>c,d</sup></b>		
Yes	25	9
No	13	10
<b>Past participation in a park physical activity class <sup>e</sup></b>		
Yes	5	2
No or does not know	34	16

<sup>a</sup> Total combined sample size of participants in intervention and comparison groups who completed baseline survey, analytical sample for each demographic measure may be smaller

<sup>b</sup> Count and percentage reported

<sup>c</sup> Counts only

<sup>d</sup> Total counts for response category, responses derived from question 15 on baseline survey

<sup>e</sup> Derived from question 17 on baseline survey

**Table 2: Baseline Physical Activity Levels, 1<sup>st</sup> Quartile (Q1), Median (Md) and 3<sup>rd</sup> Quartile (Q3)<sup>a</sup> Minutes Per Week , Stratified by County<sup>b</sup>**

Baseline Minutes per week of:	Baseline	
	LA County (n=41) <sup>c</sup>	Fresno County (n=19) <sup>c</sup>
Vigorous Physical Activity <sup>e</sup> (Q1, Md, Q3) <sup>a</sup>	n = 37 <sup>d</sup>	n = 14 <sup>d</sup>
	0, 15, 120	90, 120, 240
Moderate Physical Activity <sup>f</sup> (Q1, Md, Q3) <sup>a</sup>	n = 34 <sup>d</sup>	n = 13 <sup>d</sup>
	0, 40, 120	60, 120, 240
Walking more than ten minutes at a time (Q1, Md, Q3) <sup>a</sup>	n = 39 <sup>d</sup>	n = 13 <sup>d</sup>
	30, 100, 300	40, 120, 210
Sitting (Q1, Md, Q3) <sup>a</sup>	n = 32 <sup>d</sup>	n = 14 <sup>d</sup>
	240, 330, 720	180, 240, 480

<sup>a</sup> First quartile, median, and third quartile were reported due to the small analytical sample sizes and non-normal distribution of the data

<sup>b</sup> Derived from questions four through ten on baseline survey

<sup>c</sup> Total sample including missings

<sup>d</sup> Analytical sample sizes (number of respondents for a given set of questions) used to calculate first quartile, median and third quartile for each physical activity type.

<sup>e</sup> Vigorous physical activity=activities that you do for at least 10 minutes at a time that make you breathe much harder than normal and may include heavy lifting, digging, aerobics, or fast bicycling

<sup>f</sup> Moderate physical activity= activities that you do for at least 10 minutes at a time that make you breathe somewhat harder than normal and may include carrying light loads, bicycling at a regular pace, or doubles tennis. Does not include walking.

**Table 3: Baseline Number of Visits to Intervention Park in the Past 4 Weeks, by County <sup>a</sup>**

Number of park visits in past 4 weeks (n) <sup>b</sup>	Baseline	
	LA County (n = 41) <sup>c</sup>	Fresno County (n =19) <sup>c</sup>
0 times	21	9
1 time	12	2
2 times	2	1
3 or more times <sup>d</sup>	5	3
Missing	1	4

<sup>a</sup> Results derived from question one on baseline survey

<sup>b</sup> Represents the counts of respondents who selected this response.

<sup>d</sup> Combined category. Created from combining responses from the 3 times;, 4 times; 2-3 times; 4-6 times; and Everyday response options

**Table 4: Baseline Usual Length of Stay at Intervention Park During Past Four Weeks, by County <sup>a</sup>**

Length of stay at park: (n) <sup>b</sup>	Baseline	
	LA County (n = 41)	Fresno County (n = 19)
<b>I do not come to this park</b>	21	9
<b>Less than 15 minutes</b>	5	1
<b>15-30 minutes</b>	4	2
<b>31-60 minutes</b>	7	1
<b>More than 1 hours but less than 2 hours</b>	2	2
<b>2 or more hours <sup>d</sup></b>	0	2
<b>Missing</b>	2	2

<sup>a</sup> Results derived from Question two on baseline survey

<sup>b</sup> Represents the counts of respondents who selected this response.

<sup>d</sup> Combined category. Created from combining responses from the 2-3 hours; More than 3 hours, but less than 5 hours; and 5 or more hours response options

**Table 5: Baseline Main Reason Participants Reported Not Going to the Intervention Park More Often, by County <sup>a</sup>**

Main reason for not visiting park (n) <sup>b</sup>	Baseline	
	LA County (n= 41)	Fresno County (n = 19)
<b>No time</b>	11	3
<b>Don't feel safe</b>	4	1
<b>Park is not clean</b>	3	0
<b>It is not easy to get to the park</b>	4	5
<b>There is nothing for me to do at this park</b>	4	3
<b>There are other parks I like better</b>	5	2
<b>No reason, I do come to this park often</b>	5	5
<b>Missing</b>	5	0

<sup>a</sup> Derived from question 16 on baseline survey

<sup>b</sup> Refers to number of study participants who did not answer this question

**Table 6: Count of Activities Reported During Last Visit to the Intervention Park, by County <sup>c</sup>**

Park activities: n <sup>a</sup> (%)	LA County (n=41)			Fresno County (n=19)		
	Baseline	Mid-Point	Follow-Up	Baseline	Mid-Point	Follow-Up
<b>I do not come to this park</b>	18 (44%)	13(32%)	14(34%)	7(37%)	2(11%)	2(11%)
<b>Sat or stood</b>	27(66%)	11(27%)	8(20%)	17(90%)	2(11%)	2(11%)
<b>Picnicked or had meal or snack</b>	3(7%)	0	0	2(11%)	1(5%)	1(5%)
<b>Walked more than 10 minutes at a time</b>	4(10%)	19(46%)	19(46%)	4(22%)	0	0
<b>Jogged or ran</b>	0	13(32%)	13(32%)	1(5%)	0	0
<b>Biked, skateboarded, rollerbladed or scootered</b>	0	4(10%)	4(10%)	0	0	0
<b>Participated in a sports related activity</b>	2(5%)	4(10%)	0	2(11%)	2(11%)	2(11%)
<b>Yoga</b>	2(5%)	5(20%)	0	0	0	0
<b>Other Physical Activity – unspecified</b>	0	1(2%)	1(2%)	0	0	0
<b>Other activity – unspecified</b>	0	0	0	1(5%)	0	0
<b>Missing</b>	0	0	4	0	14	14

<sup>a</sup> Count of respondents who selected an activity, each respondent could select more than one activity to capture everything they participated in during their last park visit.

<sup>b</sup> Total sample size of respondents who completed a baseline, midpoint or follow-up survey

<sup>c</sup> Derived from question three on baseline, mid-point and follow-up surveys

<sup>d</sup> At all timepoints and in both counties, no respondent selected response option: Participated in Water Related Sport

**Table 7: Park Intervention Attendance (Number of Weeks)<sup>a</sup>, by County:**

Number of weeks attended classes (max of 6) <sup>b</sup>	LA county (n= 25)	Fresno county <sup>c</sup> (n= 10)
<b>Median number of weeks</b>	4	0.7
<b>0 weeks</b>	0	6
<b>1 week</b>	0	2
<b>2 weeks</b>	2	1
<b>3 weeks</b>	5	1
<b>4 weeks</b>	11	0
<b>5 weeks</b>	6	0
<b>6 weeks</b>	1	0

<sup>a</sup> 6-week series of 1 class per week

<sup>b</sup> Frequency counts based on participant rosters maintained by program implementers over the duration of the six-week intervention

<sup>c</sup> Two intervention participants excluded from analytical sample due to loss to follow-up.



**Table 8: Intervention Participants' Rating of Physical Activity Class Offered at Intervention Park at Mid-point and Follow-up, Stratified by County**

Rating of physical activity class offered: <sup>a</sup>	LA County n=25		Fresno (n=10)	
	Baseline	Follow-up	Baseline	Follow-up
Like a lot	21	17	0	0
Like a little	2	2	0	0
No feelings	2	1	0	0
Do not like	0	0	0	0
Did not participate	0	0	1	2
Missing	0	5	9	8

<sup>a</sup> Derived from question 11 on Midpoint and Follow-up intervention survey

**Table 9: Intervention Participants' Top Suggestion for Improving the Physical Activity Class, by County<sup>a</sup>**

Participants' top suggestion for improvement to physical activity class: <sup>c</sup> (n)	LA County		Fresno County	
	Mid-Point (n = 25) <sup>b</sup>	Follow-up (n = 21) <sup>b</sup>	Mid-Point (n = 1) <sup>b</sup>	Follow-up (n = 3) <sup>b</sup>
Not participating in class	0	0	1	2
Would not change class	0	0	0	0
Would like class				
with childcare provided	11	11	0	0
at a park that feels safer	8	6	0	0
at a different time of day	3	2	0	0
at a cleaner park	2	2	0	0
with different PA activity	1	0	0	0
at a park closer home or work	0	0	0	1
with different instructor	0	0	0	0
Missing	0	4	9	7

<sup>a</sup> participants were asked for a single main suggestion

<sup>b</sup> Counts only reported due to small sample size

<sup>c</sup> Derived from question 11 on Midpoint and Follow-up intervention survey

**Table 10: Top Three Types Physical Activity Classes That Baseline, Midpoint and Follow-up Survey Respondents Reported Interest in Participating in If Offered at a Park, by County.**

	LA County (baseline n=41, midpt & f/u n=25) <sup>a</sup>			Fresno County (baseline n=19; midpt & f/u n=10) <sup>a</sup>		
	Baseline (n = 39) <sup>b</sup>	Mid-Point (n = 25) <sup>b</sup>	Follow-Up (n = 21) <sup>b</sup>	Baseline (n = 17) <sup>b</sup>	Mid-Point (n = 1) <sup>b</sup>	Follow-Up (n= 3) <sup>b</sup>
<b>Top Physical Activity Classes<sup>c</sup></b>	1. Yoga 2. Walking/ running 3. Aerobics or workout	1. Zumba or other dance 2. Aerobics or workout 3. Walking/ running 4. Martial arts	1. Aerobics or workout 2. Zumba or other dance 3. Walking/ running	1. Zumba or other dance 2. Walking/ running 3. Aerobics/ workout	1. Aerobics or workout 2. Zumba or other dance 3. Yoga or stretching	1. Aerobics or workout 2. Zumba or other dance 3. Yoga or stretching

<sup>a</sup> At baseline the question (#18) was asked of all study participants (intervention + comparison); at midpoint and follow up the question (#13) was asked only of intervention group participants whether or not they attended any classes.

<sup>b</sup> Analytical sample based on the total number of respondents to a given survey question; does not include missing

<sup>c</sup> Based on frequency of physical activity class selection, each respondent could select multiple class types. Top three most frequently selected class types are reported in the table. A fourth class is reported when a tie for third occurred.

**Table 11: Average Number of People Participating in Physical Activity by Level ( $\mu$ ) at the Park Per Observation by Time Point**

Los Angeles						
Physical activity level ( $\mu$ ) <sup>a</sup>	Intervention Park			Comparison Park		
	Baseline	Midpoint <sup>b</sup>	Follow-up	Baseline	Midpoint	Follow-up
Vigorous <sup>c</sup>	1 (9%)	1.5(14%)	3.5(29%)	2.5(8%)	3.5(14%)	6(13%)
Walking <sup>d</sup>	3(27%)	3.5(32%)	2.5(21%)	6(19%)	5(19%)	11(23%)
Sedentary <sup>e</sup>	7(64%)	6(55%)	6(50%)	23(73%)	17.5(67%)	31(65%)
Total observed	11	11	12	31.5	26	48
Fresno						
Vigorous <sup>c</sup>	19.5 (33%)	--	2.5(18%)	2.5(20%)	--	0 <sup>f</sup>
Walking <sup>d</sup>	12.5(21%)	--	5.5(39%)	7.5(60%)	--	1
Sedentary <sup>e</sup>	26.5(45%)	--	6(43%)	2.5(20%)	--	0
Total observed	58.5		14	12.5		1
Stanislaus						
Vigorous <sup>c</sup>	0.5(7%)	--	1 <sup>f</sup>	7(28%)	--	2(36%)
Walking <sup>d</sup>	3.5(50%)	--	1	7(28%)	--	1.5(27%)
Sedentary <sup>e</sup>	3(43%)	--	0.5	11.5(4%)	--	2(36%)
Total observed (	7		2.5	25.5		5.5

<sup>a</sup> Average number of people observed per day based on 8 observations (4 per day x 2 days) per park at each of the 3 time points

<sup>b</sup> Due to low participation in the intervention no observations were conducted at midpoint in Fresno and Stanislaus

<sup>c</sup> Vigorous = Individuals are currently engaged in an activity more vigorous than an ordinary walk (e.g., increasing heart rate causing them to sweat, such as jogging, swinging, doing cart wheels).

<sup>d</sup> Walking = Individuals are walking at a casual pace.

<sup>e</sup> Sedentary = Individuals are lying down, sitting, or standing in place.

<sup>f</sup> Numbers too low for percentages to be meaningful

**Table 12: Top Three Observed Activities at Intervention and Comparison Parks During Each Observation Period <sup>a</sup>**

<b>Los Angeles County</b>			
<b>Top three observed activities by park</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Mid-Point</b>	<b>Follow-up</b>
Intervention Park <sup>b</sup>	1. Standing 2. Walking 3. Sitting	1. Sitting 2. Walking 3. Standing	1. Sitting 2. Walking 3. Biking
Comparison Park <sup>c</sup>	1. Sitting 2. Standing 3. walking	1. Sitting 2. Standing 3. Walking	1. Sitting 2. Standing 3. Playing
<b>Fresno County</b>			
<b>Top three observed activities by park</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Mid-Point <sup>d</sup></b>	<b>Follow-up</b>
Intervention Park <sup>b</sup>	1. Standing 2. Running 3. Walking	--	1. Standing 2. Walking 3. Playing Soccer
Comparison Park <sup>c</sup>	1. Walking 2. Running 3. Sitting 4. Standing	--	1. Playing Basketball
<b>Stanislaus County</b>			
<b>Top three observed activities by park</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Mid-Point <sup>d</sup></b>	<b>Follow-up</b>
Intervention Park <sup>b</sup>	1. Walking 2. Sitting 3. Running 4. Playing on jungle gym 5. Kicking a ball 6. Standing 7. Gardening	--	1. Playing Baseball 2. Sitting 3. Walking
Comparison Park <sup>c</sup>	1. Sitting 2. Playing Football 3. Walking	--	1. Running 2. Sitting 3. Walking

<sup>a</sup> Top three observed activities during each observation time period (Baseline, Mid-Point, Follow-Up). Two days of observation occurred during each time period. Activities were ranked by reported frequency of observation. If activities were for tied third, all activities in tie are reported.

<sup>b</sup> Intervention Park

<sup>c</sup> Comparison Park

<sup>d</sup> No observations conducted at this timepoint

## Appendix II: Active Parks, Healthy People Survey

Dear Participant,

Your answers on this questionnaire will help us to better understand how local parks are used by community members and what you did for exercise over the last seven days. That's why we're asking you to complete this short survey. Please answer all the questions as best you can. You can skip questions you don't want to answer, but we hope that you will answer all of them. You may choose not to complete the survey. Choosing not to complete the survey, will **NOT** hurt your option to participate in the Active Parks Program Exercise Class.

Please do not write your name on this survey. You have been given an identification code to ensure your answers are confidential. No one will know that these are your answers and we will not share your name or information with anyone.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!

PARTICIPANT STUDY ID: \_\_\_\_\_  
SITE ID: \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

# Park Use

1. How many times did you visit \_\_\_[insert name of specific park]\_\_\_\_\_ Park in the past 4 weeks?

*Mark one*

- 0 times, I do not go to this park
- 1 time in the past 4 weeks
- 2 times in the past 4 weeks
- 3 times in the past 4 weeks
- 4 times in the past 4 weeks
- 2-3 times per week
- 4-6 times per week
- Every day

2. During the past 4 weeks, when you came to this park how long did you usually stay?

*Mark one*

- I do not go to this park
- Less than 15 minutes
- 15-30 minutes
- 31-60 minutes
- More than 1 hour, but less than 2 hours
- 2 to 3 hours
- More than 3 hours, but less than 5 hours
- 5 or more hours

**3. The last time you came to this park, what did you do while there?**

*Please mark ALL responses that are true.*

- I do not go to this park
- Watched others play
- Talked with others
- Sat or stood
- Picnicked or had a meal or snack
- Participated in a water-related activity
- Walked more than 10 minutes at a time
- Jogged or ran
- Biked, skateboarded, rollerbladed or scootered
- Participated in a sports-related activity (e.g., played with a ball: catch, basketball, soccer, etc.)
- Other physical activity:  

---
- Other:  

---

## Time Spent Being Physically Active

The next few questions are about the **time you spent being physically active in the last 7 days**. Please answer each question even if you do not consider yourself to be an active person. Think about the activities you do at work, as part of your house and yard work, to get from place to place, and in your spare time for recreation, exercise or sport.

**Vigorous activities** make you breathe much harder than normal and may include heavy lifting, digging, aerobics, or fast bicycling. Think only about those physical activities that you did for at least 10 minutes at a time.

**4. During the last 7 days, on how many days did you do vigorous physical activities?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Days per week

**5. How much time did you usually spend doing vigorous physical activities on one of those days?**

\_\_ \_\_ Hours per day

OR

\_\_ \_\_ \_\_ Minutes per day



Now think about activities which take moderate physical effort that you did in the last 7 days. **Moderate physical activities** make you breathe somewhat harder than normal and may include carrying light loads, bicycling at a regular pace, or doubles tennis. Do not include walking. Again, think about only those physical activities that you did for at least 10 minutes at a time.

**6. During the last 7 days, on how many days did you do moderate physical activities?**

\_\_\_ Days per week

**7. How much time did you usually spend doing moderate physical activities on one of those days?**

\_\_\_ Hours per day

OR

\_\_\_ Minutes per day

Now think about the **time you spent walking** in the last 7 days. This includes at work and at home, walking to travel from place to place, and any other walking that you have done solely for recreation, sport, exercise, or leisure. Think only about the walking that you do for at least 10 minutes at a time.

**8. During the last 7 days, on how many days did you walk for at least 10 minutes at a time?**

\_\_\_ Days per week

**9. How much time did you usually spend walking on one of those days?**

\_\_\_ Hours per day

OR

\_\_\_ Minutes per day

Now think about the **time you spent sitting on weekdays** during the last 7 days. Include time spent at work, at home, while doing school or course work, and during leisure time. This may include time spent sitting at a desk, visiting friends, reading or sitting or lying down to watch television.

**10. During the last 7 days, how much time did you usually spend sitting on a weekday?**

\_\_ \_\_ Hours per weekday

OR

\_\_ \_\_ \_\_ Minutes per weekday

## Information about you

**11. What is your gender?**

*Mark one*

Male     Female     Other \_\_\_\_\_

**12. How old are you?**

*Mark one*

18-24 years old

25-34 years old

35-44 years old

45-54 years old

55-64 years old

65-74 years old

75 years or older

**13. Please specify your ethnicity.**

*Please mark ALL responses that are true.*

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**14. What is the highest level of education you completed?**

*Mark one*

- No formal education
- 8<sup>th</sup> grade or less
- Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma or equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college credit, no degree
- Trade, technical or vocational training
- Associates degree or higher

**15. Do you live within a 1/2 mile or up to a 10-minute walk to \_\_\_\_\_ Park?**

*Mark one*

- Yes
- No

**16. What is the main reason you do not come to this park more often?**

*Please mark ONLY ONE response.*

- I do not have time to come to the park
- I do not feel safe at the park
- I do not think the park is clean
- It is not easy for me to get to this park
- There is nothing for me to do at this park
- There are other parks I like better
- No reason, I do come to this park often

**17. Have you ever participated in a physical activity class at the park?**

*Mark one*

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

**18. What are some physical activity classes you might participate in if they were offered at the park?**

*Please mark ALL responses that are true.*

- Aerobics or work-out class
- Walking, jogging or running class/club
- Sport-related class/club
- Zumba or other types of dance class
- Martial arts (e.g., Tae Kwon Do, Karate) class
- Yoga or stretching class
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY!**

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact (insert contact name) (insert contact information i.e. institution, phone number, email),

**Official Use Only**

Comments:

## Midpoint and Follow-up Intervention Group Supplemental Survey Questions

Additional questions added to Active Parks, Healthy People survey for the intervention group participants:

### Park Program

**11. How do you feel about the physical activity class you are participating in at the park?**

*Mark one*

- I like it a lot
- I like it a little
- I do not have any feelings about it
- I do not like it
- I am not participating in a physical activity class at the park

**12. What is one thing that you feel would make the class better?**

*Please mark ONLY ONE response.*

- I am not participating in a physical activity class at the park
- I like the class the way it is; I would not change anything
- I would like the physical activity to be another activity
- I would like another instructor to teach the class
- I would like it to be offered at another time or day
- I would like it to be offered at another park that is cleaner

- I would like it to be offered at another park that feels safer
- I would like it to be offered at a park closer to my home or work
- I would like there to be childcare
- Other way to make the class better \_\_\_\_\_

**13. What are some physical activity classes you might participate in if they were offered at the park?**

*Please mark ALL responses that are true.*

- Aerobics or work-out class
- Walking, jogging or running class/club
- Sport-related class/club
- Zumba or other types of dance class
- Martial arts (e.g., Tae Kwon Do, Karate) class
- Yoga or stretching class
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix III: Modified SOPARC Protocol

### Modified SOPARC Data Collection Protocol: Active Parks, Healthy People Pilot Program

*Modified from: McKenzie TL and Cohen DA. SOPARC (System for Observing Play and Recreation in Communities) Description and Procedures Manual, 2006.*

#### PURPOSE

The System for Observing Play and Recreation in Communities (SOPARC) was designed to obtain direct information on community park use, including relevant concurrent characteristics of parks and their users. It provides an assessment of park users' physical activity levels, sex, activity types, and estimated age and ethnicity groupings. Additionally, it provides information on individual park activity areas, such as their levels of accessibility, usability, supervision, and organization. This modified SOPARC tool is being used to assess park use and user characteristics in parks in 6 parks across 3 counties in California between May and August of 2018.

#### OBSERVATION DAYS AND PERIODS

All target areas at each park should be scanned once per period, per observation day during each data collection window (i.e. summer, winter, fall, spring).

*Days (2 per data collection window, ideally within the same week):*

1. One weekday (Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday)
2. One weekend (Saturday)

*Periods (4 per day):*

1. Morning: 7:30-8:30am
2. Lunchtime: 12:00-1:00pm
3. Afternoon: 3:30-4:30
4. Evening: 6:00-7:00

#### OBSERVATION (TARGET) AREAS

Direct observations are made in designated target areas that represent all standard locations likely to provide opportunities for park users to be physically active. These areas will be predetermined and identified for observations prior to baseline assessments. A map should be created and then provided to identify areas and a standard observation order for each park. Additional target areas may be added by observers on site and then documented.

During occasions of high user density, target areas are subdivided into smaller subtarget areas (scan spaces) so that accurate measures can be obtained. Data from these smaller spaces are summed to



provide an overall measure for each Target Area. NOTE: A decision to subdivide a Target Area depends upon the (1) number of park users in the area and (2) the type of user activity. Fast moving activities with people clustered together and moving in diverse directions (e.g., during soccer) require smaller scan spaces.

## OBSERVATION PREPARATION

1. Prior to leaving for the park, prepare observation materials including: comfortable shoes/clothing, sunscreen/hat/sunglasses, clipboard, sufficient SOPARC recording forms, target area map, and pencils.
2. Arrive at the park site 10-20 minutes prior to the official start of coding. Review the sequence for observing Target Areas. Visit each Target Area in order and plan how to sub-divided it into Subtarget Areas if necessary. Mentally rehearse by scanning each area a few times.

## PROCEDURES

1. Arrive at the park and go to the first pre-chosen target area.
  - a. If there are too many people to easily count in the target area, divide it into separate Subtarget Areas and follow the below procedures for each Subtarget Area separately. Use letters to distinguish the Subtarget Areas (i.e., A, B, C).
  - b. When people move to a different Subtarget Area while you are scanning, count only those who are present at the time you are scanning. In rare cases you may count people twice or miss them as they change Subtarget Areas. Make sure that all space in each main target area is included within the Subtarget Areas.
2. Fill out all information for the target area at the top of the recording form (“Park” through “Empty”)
3. Stand in a location where you can easily see all activity occurring in that target area. Then, begin scanning from left to right and fill in information in table (“Sex” through “Intensity”) for each person present in the target area.
4. Once you have completed a scan of the target area, write in any notes pertinent to data analysis and interpretation.
5. Move on to the next target area and repeat procedures until all target areas have been recorded.

## RECORDING FORM

**Park:** Write in the name of the park you are observing.

**Date:** Write in the date of the observation.

**Temperature and weather:** Write in the temperature at the time of your observation and circle the appropriate picture for the type of weather (sun if it’s sunny; clouds if it’s cloudy; cloud with rain if it’s rainy); circle multiple pictures if needed.

**Observer:** Write in your name or initials.

**Target Area:** Write in the name or pre-assigned number for the target area you are observing.

**Obs Start Time:** Write in the time the observation begins.

**End Time:** Write in the time the observation ends.

**Accessible:** Code “YES” if area is accessible to the public (e.g., area is not locked or rented to a private party).

**Usable:** Code “YES” if area is usable for physical activity (e.g., is not excessively wet or roped off for repair). For example, code “YES” when the space is usable, even though it may be locked. Code “NO” when there is insufficient lighting to use the space (e.g., no outdoor lights permitting play after sunset).

**Equipped:** Code “YES” if equipment (e.g., balls, jump ropes) provided by the park is present during the scan. Code “NO” if the only equipment available is permanent (e.g., basketball hoops and climbing apparatus) or owned by park users themselves (e.g., frisbee, ball, or bicycle brought by a family).

**Activity Organized:** Code “YES” if an organized physical activity is occurring in the scan area (e.g., a scheduled sporting event or exercise class is being lead by park staff or adjunct personnel).

**Dark:** Code “YES” to indicate the area has insufficient lighting to permit active play. Observers should not enter a target area unless there is sufficient lighting.

**Empty:** Code “YES” when there are no individuals present during the scan. Also, code “YES” when the area is dark.

**Person #:** Include data from any person who is present in the target area. Person # is pre-populated and corresponds with the order in which you observe people as you scan from left to right.

**Sex:** Write an M for Male, F for Female, or O for Other/Unknown

**Age:** Determine age according to the following criteria:

Child = Children from infancy to 12 years of age as children.

Teen = Code adolescents from 13 to 20 years of age as teenagers.

Adult = Code people from 21 to 59 years of age as adults.

Senior = Code people 60 years of age and older as seniors.

**Race/Ethnicity:** This measure is completely subjective. Code whether the primary ethnicity for each individual is Latino (L), Black (B), Asian(A), White (W), or Other (O).

**Activity:** Write in the primary activity the person is engaged in (e.g. Walking, Biking, Running, Climbing, Sliding, Skating, Sitting, Reading, Playing catch with Baseball, Picnic, Tennis, Basketball, etc.)

**Intensity:** Code activity intensity according to the following criteria:

Sedentary (S) = Individuals are lying down, sitting, or standing in place.

Walking (W) = Individuals are walking at a casual pace.

Vigorous (V) = Individuals are currently engaged in an activity more vigorous than an ordinary walk (e.g., increasing heart rate causing them to sweat, such as jogging, swinging, doing cart wheels).

**Notes:** Write in any information pertinent to the observation that would be helpful in analyzing and interpreting the data collected.

## Appendix IV: Active Park, Healthy People Lessons Learned Interview Guide

### Active Parks, Healthy People Lessons Learned Interview Guide

**Please refer to this document during our scheduled conference call. We hope having it as a reference will allow you to provide as much feedback as possible.**

A couple of things to consider before our conference call:

1. Your community participated in the both the Active Parks, Healthy People Evaluation Study (which included: the Participant Survey, SOPARC observations and Participant Roster) AND the Physical Activity Class offered for 6-weeks at a local park. We want to focus only on the Physical Activity Class offered at the park during our conference call, **NOT the evaluation study.**
2. The goal of this call is to better understand the **barriers to and facilitators of participation in a physical activity class in an underutilized park and the lessons learned for future programming.**
3. Our goal is to collect this information in order to generate a set of **recommendations for potential organizational-level and built environment changes that may promote participation in a physical activity class at an underutilized park.**

### Park Use in Your Community

1. How do you think community members value parks in your community?
2. In your community, what factors contribute to park use?
3. In your community, what factors do you feel prevent park use?
4. Is there a park in your community that is well used/visited by community members? *If so, what do you think the attraction to that park is?*
5. How do you think the following efforts would impact park usage in your community?  
  
A park clean-up.  
  
Increased signage.  
  
Lighting for the park.  
  
Doing other things to make the park more welcoming (Provide examples).
6. What other thoughts do you have about increasing overall park utilization in your community?

## Participation in the Physical Activity Class Offered at Your Local Park

7. Of the community members that participated in the physical activity class at your local park, what do you think they enjoyed most about the physical activity class?
8. Please describe factors that you feel promoted participation in the physical activity class offered at your local park.
9. Please describe factors that you feel prevented participation in the physical activity class offered at your local park?
10. In your community, how important was the physical park space (e.g. its location – proximity to where the community members live and work, its condition – trash and/or graffiti, its safety or its features and amenities) to participant's participation in the physical activity class offered. *This can be either a positive or negative.*
11. In your community, how did the design of the physical activity class itself (e.g. the activity offered or the day/time it was offered) affect participation in the physical activity class?

Is there anything you would have changed about the design?

*If there is nothing you would change about the physical activity class design,*  
What about your physical activity class design do you feel promoted participation?

12. What strategies will you use to get community members to participate in future park classes?
13. When you consider other physical activity programming that has been offered in your community, are there strategies that you used that led to successfully recruiting participants?  
Please provide examples of these physical activity programs and the strategies you used to successfully recruit participants.
14. When you consider other physical activity programming that has been offered in your community, have you experienced any challenges recruiting participants?

Please provide examples of physical activity programs offered where challenges existed?

What were some tactics your team used to overcome the challenges you experienced?

15. Is there anything else you would like to share related to the physical activity class offered at your local park?

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