Community Capacity Building Toolkit

Trust for Public Land

The Alliance partnered with more than a dozen community-centered local organizations to create the **Equitable Development Principles & Scorecard**, which helps communities ensure that the principles and practices of equitable development, environmental justice, and affordability are available to all residents. Intended to be a living document and adapted by communities to meet their needs, this case study series shares the many ways the scorecard is being leveraged and the lessons learned from the communities putting it to use.

Trust for Public Land and the Community Capacity Building Toolkit for Parks

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) works to protect the natural places people care about and to create close-to-home parks —particularly in and near cities. From helping raise funds for conservation; to protecting and restoring natural spaces; to collaborating with communities to plan, design, and create parks, playgrounds, gardens, and trails; TPL works with communities to ensure that development happens for them, and not to them. **In the Twin Cities,** the Equitable Development Principles & Scorecard galvanized a process to create a tool specific to parks development that could build intention and aspiration around not only engaging neighbors about park design but actively cultivating new community leaders and building capacity.

Why the scorecard?

In our nation's urban areas, TPL aims to ensure that all residents are within a 10-minute walk to a park. Seema Kairam, a TPL program manager in the Twin Cities and Enterprise Rose Fellow working on improving TPL's understanding of parks and gentrification and developing best practices to ensure investment without displacement, saw an opportunity to leverage the scorecard to more deeply consider the full range of issues surrounding those green spaces, and engaging the residents in the neighborhoods.

Parks are often seen as an asset with exclusively positive impacts: good for public health, the environment and social interaction. But, in some neighborhoods, such amenities can spur rising land prices, increased rents and potential displacement of longtime residents. "Recently those negative consequences have accelerated," Kairam says. "I've been learning through my research that to resist development pressure, communities need to be better organized and parks development projects must push for more collaborative models."

So when she was introduced to the scorecard, she resonated with the way it builds community power and cultivates a shared vision around the full range of issues that radiate from development. She recognized that, while parks don't have a direct impact on housing or transportation, the issues are deeply intertwined. That got her thinking about a scorecard-inspired tool for the work of TPL: "How can we work to be more intersectional and engaged with the broader community needs, rather than just thinking, 'How do we get this park built?'"

Adapting the scorecard to address park development

Over the course of a year, Kairam worked to adapt the scorecard to specifically address the issues and processes of parks and green space development. In addition to discussion with local stakeholders in health equity and community development, she received input and feedback on what became the Community Capacity Building Toolkit from a diversity of staff at the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board, as well as more than two dozen urban parks leaders from across the United States.

Defining Scope

For Kairam, being intentional about the parameters of the scorecard was important to gain buy-in from the community and parks stakeholders. That started with a realistic assessment of what's within the realm of influence or jurisdiction for those engaged with the tool. For instance, unlike private development, parks don't create revenue that can be shared and, while housing might be a central community concern, park developers and administrators may have little leverage to intervene in the private market. "If you want to have any semblance of trust with community, you need to be able to produce results," she says. "I didn't want to develop a scorecard that makes claims without any influence or authority to make an impact in those areas."

Setting Goals

At TPL and other organizations, participatory design has become a common principle in park development. But Kairam aspired for the toolkit to get stakeholders to think beyond just the park design and to focus on collective decision-making and community power. "A park is a public space where people can come together, and developing a park is a fun and exciting way to engage with neighbors and government," she says. "There are a lot of strategies to deal with issues like gentrification but, for the most part, they're policy strategies. So if a community is going to deal with those issues and have influence, it's about building capacity and political power, leadership and civic engagement. That's something a park can influence."

Shifting Power

While it's critical for parks to reflect the culture and include the type of amenities that benefit that specific community, participatory design is just the first step. "If we stick to asking 'Do you want a red bench or blue bench,' we can't expect that to cultivate the next leader in the community," she says. "When you've connected a resident to city processes and other neighbors, then you've helped to resource a new leader." To build that capacity, those doing park development need to be intentional about shifting institutional power and resources. While financial resources should be spent in neighborhoods, residents must also be viewed as the experts in their communities and financially resourced as such — through contracts, stipends, or other forms of compensation.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
from the toolkit

Engagement Strategy
Project process and outcomes should be centered around the community.

Capacity Building:
New investments are ripe with opportunity to build capacity within the community and to inspire new leaders.

Inclusive Design
Design is relevant to the cultural, social and economic make-up of the community.

Neighborhood Impacts
New investments into neighborhoods create economic and social impacts in the community and provide opportunities for residents.

Stewardship & Activation
The ongoing safety, vitality, and health of a project must be integrated into the planning the from the very first conversation.

Displacement Avoidance
Park investments can have significant impact on creating more livable and desirable neighborhoods, which can lead to rising land values.

Challenges and lessons learned

Defining Audience

While some adaptations of the scorecard have been targeted to community members, Kairam focused on a specific audience. She recognized a detailed, eight-page document isn't accessible to the average neighborhood resident. "The audience is really the group of engaged, committed partners who are leading the engagement and development process: non-profits, government agencies, community based organizations and resident leaders," she says. "It's really for discussing what are some best practices we can try — and then brainstorm how to achieve them."

Scoring and Evaluating Progress

Given the audience for the tool, Kairam understood that getting institutions excited about a "scorecard" might be challenging. After meeting with several stakeholders, it became clear that, especially for government agencies that are bound by public processes that are guided by transparent standards, scoring can raise a host of questions around who has the power to set and evaluate the metrics. And, even if there is a clear process, some entities may be wary of what could be construed as a punitive approach. "I want it to be very aspirational," she says. "I wanted to convey: If you get a low score in an area, now you understand that's an area you can do better." So, while the tool still includes scoring it's not just for a single point in time. Instead it includes assessments for pre-development, concept, implementation and operations. Kairam hopes that will help users see that there's room for growth and progress — and a reason to return to the scorecard to gauge their own improvement.
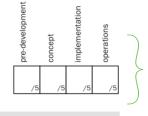
Outcomes & opportunities

Articulating Intention

Like many sectors, integrating equity into parks development isn't a novel concept or new conversation. But creating mechanisms to guide real action and accountability are still rare — especially when it comes to building true community power and leadership capacity. For Kairam, that's the power of the toolkit. "We have a lot of language that participatory design is empowering and can lead to a sense of ownership," she explains. "Yes, that's true, but can we be intentional about achieving those goals rather than assuming those nebulous outcomes will happen? This is a way to say there are some very concrete things we can do around building capacity. Let's name them so we can start working toward engagement that has those outcomes."

Establishing Group Values

Kairam hopes that intention can set the baseline for collaboration, as well. As community stakeholders come together around a project, the toolkit can act as a set of agreements that ensure a commitment to equity among all actors. "When we're meeting new partners we can say, 'Here's how we view community engagement," she says. "We don't want to just check the box and do outreach. We're really trying to meet this higher standard that gets to co-creation and collaborative decision-making and paying people when we can. We can lay that out on the table and say, 'These are our values; can we work on these together?'"

b4. Support Leadership Development:
Elevate community leaders throughout the process and provide opportunities for residents to take a leadership role. Projects supports community capacity building by organizing workshops and technical/community/advisory committees. Compensation or stipends are provided where appropriate.

pre-development	concept	implementation	operations
/5	/5	/5	/5

The tool provides an opportunity to benchmark progress at different stages of development

Who is a current or potential community leader?:_____

Next steps

Given the number of parks the organization is working on nationwide, Kairam hopes TPL can pilot the use of the toolkit in one of its projects in the near future. She also hopes that, given TPL's influence as a thought leader in the sector, the toolkit will gain traction with a wide audience.

Beyond parks, she encourages stakeholders in other areas to leverage the scorecard for their issues. "I wanted to make an aspirational and valuable tool to build consensus around," she says. "I've been really happy with how adaptable the scorecard has been in that way."

To learn more or collaborate, contact Kairam at seema.kairam@tpl.org

Excerpt from the toolkit

"Close-to-home access to high quality parks are essential to residents' health, prosperity and quality of life. Therefore, we must prioritize underserved communities, making sure they have equitable access to quality green spaces and the broad array of social, physical and economic benefits that come with them.

However, just providing park access is not enough. We must design new parks that community members feel engaged in and attached to. The amenities provided within the park should respond to the cultural and social customs of the community. Park features should serve all populations, from young to old, active to passive.

By engaging residents around a large scale investment in their community and listening to their voice we can empower them to speak up and maybe even become leaders within their communities.

If we want to achieve successful outcomes, we need to engage residents as whole people, not just future park users. We must listen to the stories and experiences of residents and understand their successes and hardships. We must challenge ourselves to not just focus on a physical infrastructure improvement but to think broader about how the investment can improve the lives of individuals both through the process and with the end result.

This tool is meant to bring developers, city agencies, local non-profits and community members together around a common set of goals. All stakeholders should fill out the scorecard at various stages during the development process. You might score low in some categories at first or other criteria might not be applicable to your project. Nevertheless, challenge yourself to think outside the box each time you work through the scorecard. How can you leverage an investment, a relationship, a project component to engage a resident, empower a local leader, or address a community need?"

The Alliance
ADVANCING REGIONAL EQUITY

Download the Equitable Development Principles & Scorecard, along with videos and case studies at thealliancetc.org/our-work/equitable-development-scorecard