

Proposition 68:

Continuing the Legacy of Creating New Parks & Opportunities in Underserved Areas in California

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REC 437: Equity and Access to Recreation

Laurel Richmond

November 22nd, 2020

Proposition 68: A Means to Equity in Recreation and Leisure

Traditionally there have been many instances of lack of equity and access to recreation and leisure opportunities concerning factors of socioeconomic status. These inequities have become more apparent over time and issues surrounding equity and access to parks and recreation in California have gained much attention. There is overdevelopment in urban areas and a lack of resources available for improvements in recreation and leisure opportunities in underserved/rural areas. Over the years, the State of California has implemented a grant system to fund parks and park improvements in critically underserved areas. “To promote equal access, in 2006, California voters passed Proposition 84, a bond measure authorizing \$5.4 billion in public investments to improve parks, water, coastal protection, and natural resources” (Garcia, 2016). Assembly Bill 31 allocated \$400 million of those funds to be used in park and income poor communities. Park acreage needed to be less than three acres per thousand residents and income less than 80 percent of the median household income for a location to be eligible for funding. The goal of these initiatives was to create funding that might reduce the disproportionate disparity of access to parks, recreation, and leisure opportunities for people of color and low-income communities. In proposition 84 the distribution of funds to diverse communities with the greatest need only received 46 percent of the total grant funds and only 27 percent of the number of grants. That means that communities that are disproportionately non-Hispanic White received 54 percent of the money and 73 percent of the number of grants (Garcia, 2016). Legislative leaders led the way to place proposition 68 on the ballot. These leaders included Sen. De Leon, Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon, and Assembly Members Eduardo Garcia and Cristina Garcia. These leaders included the provisions on diversity and equal justice in Proposition 68. “This is a human and civil rights issue,” Sen. de Leon emphasized, “Some folks have to struggle and fight for access”

(Garcia, 2018). Proposition 68 has addressed some of the inequities in the distribution of funds and created a stricter criterion to ensure that those with the most need come first. With proposition 68, there is \$395 million available to create new parks and new recreation opportunities in underserved communities in California (California State Parks, 2020). These are key topics of importance because as recreation professionals we should be aware of all forms of inequity and lack of access so we can make sure we are doing our best to provide solutions to combat these issues. We will discuss further what disparities exist and how proposition 68 funding aims to reduce them to increase equity and access to parks, recreation, and leisure opportunities for disadvantaged communities.

Public parks belong to everyone, but access to parks is often not equal. Many households with low income and communities of color have limited green space, poorly maintained parks, and often the parks are understaffed, unwelcoming, or unsafe (Yañez, 2019). Some of the benefits of green space and well-maintained accessible parks are opportunities for social interaction, improved physical fitness, and emotional health. Senator de Leon describes the benefits of parks eloquently, “Parks make life better. You can feel the grass below your feet. You can see butterflies. You can hear birds. Playing fields for soccer, not just passive parks, but active parks make life better” (Garcia, 2018). Studies have shown that people who live within walking distance to parks are more likely to be physically active than those that do not have nearby park access. Parks can prevent youth crime and violence (Yañez, 2019). Park poor communities have limited access to these benefits. California’s park-poor, low-income communities of color suffer disproportionately poor health outcomes. The obesity rate for Latinos is over 10% higher and African Americans than for Whites. Hispanic men and women and non-Hispanic black women are 10% more likely to develop type 2 diabetes than the general

United States population. Equitable park access is crucial for addressing serious racial and economic disparities in health outcomes and overall quality of life (Goldstein, Tibet, Mata, de la Rosa, & Perez, 2020).

Proposition 68 is one strategy to help promote and implement park equity. The use of the Community Fact Finder Tool, which is required for grant funding, shows each community clearly where the greatest needs are. The FactFinder is found on the [parks.ca.gov/spp](https://www.parks.ca.gov/spp) website. By inputting the location of an area within a city, a report can be generated with information within a half-mile radius of a potential park location. The tool provides demographic information on median household income, acres per thousand people, the number of people living in poverty, the number of people without transportation, and other useful information. (See Figure 1.) This assists grantors to use the most recent demographic statistics to award funding in the areas it is most crucial. Once an area is identified as critically disadvantaged and park-poor other maps can be generated using Arc Gis software to identify vacant space for parks. (see figure 2.) Through the criteria set forth for proposition 68 funding, a community must be a critically disadvantaged community with a median household income lower than \$56,982 (80% of the statewide average) which defines it as a disadvantaged community. The location of the project must have a ratio of fewer than 3 acres of park space per 1,000 residents. Only one of these conditions must be met for funding, either low park acreage or low income. It is important to implement other strategies as well such as ensuring that parks are safe for people to socialize and be active and to pay close attention to those special needs of the low income, people of color, non-English speakers, older adults, and people with disabilities. Community-Based planning is another strategy to engage stakeholders and a broad range of residents to share their ideas on park designs, the park uses, safety, and other elements. Involving residents in this process results in a sense of ownership

reduces inequities, and ensures parks that better serve all users. Interactive group discussions can lead to an increased understanding of what the residents in each unique community need.

Proposition 68 requires that agencies applying for grant funds hold at least 5 community meetings with significant community input and to have three community partners to help with this process, one of the partners is required to be a Health Service Organization.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, people of all levels of society are beginning to truly realize how lack of access and opportunity to recreation and leisure affects us physically and emotionally today. It is important not only to maintain but to increase the health and wellness of our community, especially for those most in need. We must make sure not to be complacent with the lack of equity and access that has come to light with recent events. In the recreation profession, it is the organization's responsibility to monitor and evaluate programs and services routinely to identify and address any inequities present. City leaders make many decisions that affect the direction of city projects and the livelihood of its members, so they must be in tune with the diverse needs of the residents when making these decisions. Having park needs assessments with relevant data as well as GIS methods to document park inequities and evaluate potential sites to increase park space along with the acquisition of parcels in poor areas such as vacant lots, public utility right of ways and transforming them into park space are all good strategies that can be targeted. (see figure 2.) Inequities in park access are the result of past practices, policies, laws, poor planning, some deliberate and some not. Through legislation, funding, planning, and designing we can find solutions to these inequities as we have through the proposition 68 statewide park improvement program.

References

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Figures

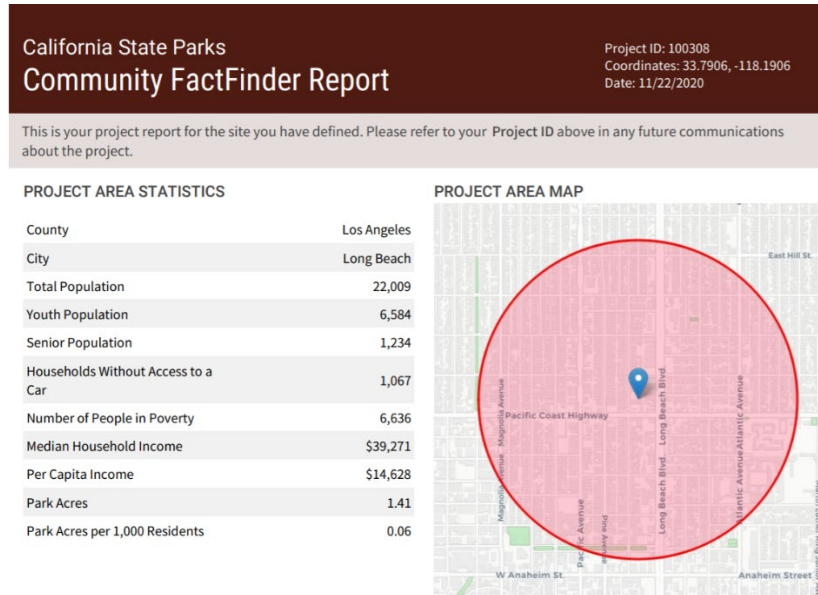


Figure 1. An example of the demographic data that can be derived utilizing the community factfinder tool and can be used to identify areas of greatest need.

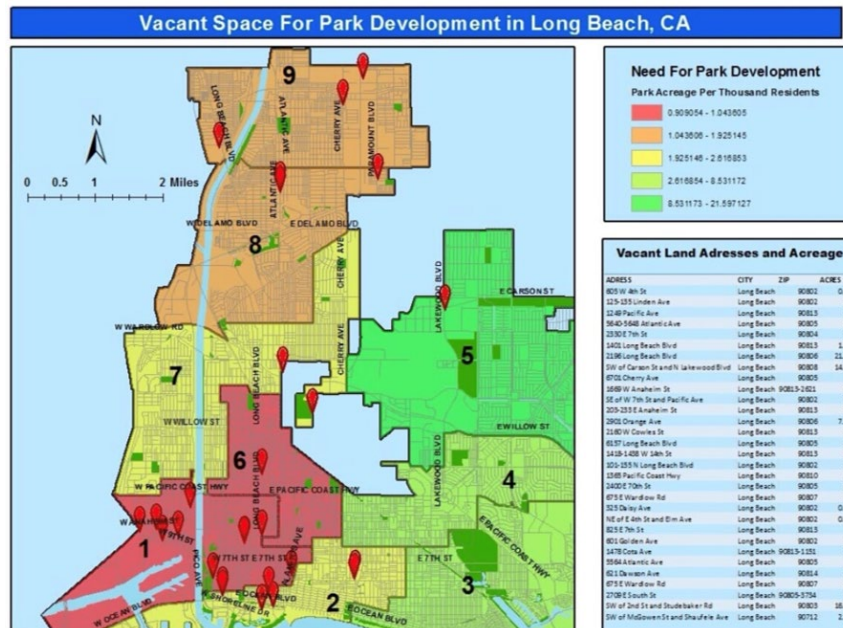


Figure 2. An example of a Gis Map that can be generated to identify suitable vacant space that may be acquired for parks in Long Beach, Ca. (Created by Joshua Fitzpatrick, 2015)