CITY PARKS ALLIANCE

STRATEGIC PLAN

2023–2028



OUR MISSION

The mission of City Parks Alliance is to educate and elevate a diverse constituency to leverage the power of parks in shaping equitable, resilient, and thriving cities.

OUR VISION

Our vision is that everyone in urban America will have access to high quality parks and green spaces that are clean, safe, and vibrant.





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are excited to share with you our Strategic Plan for City Parks Alliance's operations over the next five years (2023–2028). This summary outlines key insights gleaned from research and deliberation, CPA's overarching strategy going forward, including its framework for change, and key goals and strategic objectives over the planning horizon.

The plan is informed by CPA's annual member survey, interviews with external stakeholders, and guidance from the CPA board and staff. The plan was approved by CPA's Board of Directors on January 25, 2023.

City Parks Alliance is grateful to the Strategic Planning Committee members Christopher Williams (Chair), Jesse Brackenbury, Fran Gershwin, Maura Lout, Sedrick Mitchell, Bobbi Nance, Maria Nardi, and Mike Shull, who worked with Arshad Merchant and Emma Farrell at Boost Consulting. Support for this project was provided by The Speedwell Foundation, Hyde Family Foundation, and the Crawford Taylor Foundation.

Guided by the central premise that excellent urban park systems are critical infrastructure in equitable, resilient, and thriving cities, City Parks Alliance will continue to be a national voice and a trusted convenor of our diverse network of city leaders, practitioners, and advocates. We invite you to join us in our work by becoming a member, supporting our programs, and advocating locally for greater investment in our city parks. Together we will leverage the power of parks so that everyone has access to parks that are clean, safe, and vibrant.



MARIA NARDI
Board Co-chair



MITCHELL SILVER
Board Co-chair



CATHERINE NAGEL
Executive Director

URBAN PARKS MOVEMENT

Urban parks and recreation has historically been a low-priority sector for local governments and philanthropy despite the multiple benefits they provide to help make cities healthier, more resilient, and more vibrant. Many park systems in low-income communities have seen decades of public disinvestment and urban parks have received limited broad-based philanthropic support, likely due to the local nature of the work and to philanthropy's interest in other pressing issues.

This disinvestment and disinterest has exacerbated inequities among communities, often within the same metropolitan area.

Over the past couple of decades, however, calls to action and the development of public-private partnerships have helped increase support for parks and led to the development of a field of organizations supporting these local efforts.

As part of this movement, City Parks Alliance (CPA) was founded in 2000 as a nationwide alliance of urban parks professionals. Since then, it has grown steadily and established itself as a thought leader and a collective voice in the urban parks space with 400 organizational members. CPA serves as a valuable resource for public and private parks professionals working in cities across the U.S. and North America. It also champions a multi-sector, partnership-based approach to the challenges and opportunities facing cities and their park and recreation systems.





THE NEED FOR CITY PARKS ALLIANCE

With the start of the pandemic, heightened attention to the consequences of global warming, and the coinciding national reckoning with equity, urban parks have been thrown into the national spotlight, both as safe havens and critical infrastructure, and as manifestations of inequity.

As such, urban parks advocates believe that this is an opportune time to escalate the narrative and sustainable investment in plentiful, accessible, thriving parks and public spaces–especially as the nature of partnerships in urban parks work become more complex.

The field is clear about what it needs to succeed in this endeavor:

- Proper allocation of funding
- A revised narrative around urban parks and their role in the public realm
- Coordinated action with a seat at the table for parks professionals
- An intentional equity lens to the work

City Parks Alliance is well-positioned to facilitate dialogue, thought leadership, and advocacy by creating more opportunities to network, share ideas, and showcase successful strategies. And there is a need to take this conversation beyond traditional stakeholders, engaging philanthropy and other sectors for whom a thriving park system offers a readily available pathway to success.

CITY PARKS ALLIANCE STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2023–2028

GUIDED BY THE CENTRAL PREMISE THAT...

Excellent urban park systems are critical infrastructure in equitable, resilient, and thriving cities

AND BUILDING ON ITS KEY STRENGTHS AND ASSETS...

Go-to resource

Trusted convenor

National voice

High quality programming

Diverse membership

Track record of success

CPA WILL

STAY THE COURSE
on strategic positioning

SHARPEN TOPICAL FOCUS AREAS
and dig deep on public-private partnerships, equitable investments, and climate resiliency

INCREASE PROGRAMMATIC INTENTIONALITY
in design and execution

ELEVATE ITS PROMINENCE
as an essential partner among peers

ENGAGE NONTRADITIONAL ALLIES
from outside the field

GALVANIZE RESOURCE-HOLDERS
– including funders and elected officials – around the view of urban park systems as critical infrastructure

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE

PROBLEM STATEMENT

City parks and recreation facilities are underutilized as places for personal and community wellbeing and as levers for positive societal change

NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Effective, collaborative engagement among public and private stakeholders

An understanding of the connection between parks and their role in addressing key societal issues, including climate change, public health, and community prosperity

Equity-based analysis of park and recreation resources and usage that show opportunities for equitable investment

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

Creative solutions are identified to enable greater engagement and utilization of parks

Investment in urban park provision, development, upkeep, and programming is prioritized by the public sector, with support from the private sector

LONG-TERM IMPACT

People are regularly engaging with their city parks

Civic leaders look to parks as places to help address societal challenges

ULTIMATE IMPACT

The potential of parks and recreation to improve urban society is fully realized

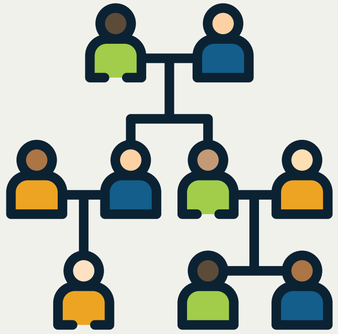
CPA'S CENTRAL PREMISE: Excellent urban park systems are critical infrastructure in equitable, resilient, and thriving cities

CITY PARKS ALLIANCE'S STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

CPA will solidify its role as the "go-to" organization for cutting-edge research that demonstrates the relevance of city parks to urban climate resiliency, the importance of collaborative efforts to support these spaces, and the kinds of investment strategies that lead to more equitable communities.



FIELD ENHANCEMENT

CPA will leverage its role as the field's "trusted convenor" to organize critical information, knowledge and tools, and endeavor to make these resources accessible to park and recreation professionals in every major city in the United States.



NATIONAL VOICE

CPA and its constituency will capitalize on the renewed interest around urban parks to further galvanize resource-holders and engage new allies around the view of urban parks as critical infrastructure.

KEY GOALS TO ELEVATE PROMINENCE AND IMPACT + STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

1. Championing and espousing a cohesive vision around public-private partnerships in the city parks space
2. Positioning CPA's curation of cutting-edge research as a cornerstone of its activity, and limiting the scope of new research based on available funding
3. Doubling down on the intersection of parks and climate resiliency as a core area of inquiry



FIELD ENHANCEMENT

4. Fostering regular opportunities for peer-to-peer networking and information sharing among city parks and recreation professionals
5. Curating and offering targeted programming and information resources for city park systems and their partners
6. Pursuing deeper, symbiotic relationships with national and international peer organizations

KEY GOALS TO ELEVATE PROMINENCE AND IMPACT + STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



NATIONAL VOICE

7. Increase visibility of and further leverage CPA's advocacy expertise to inform and solidify its base of park advocates
8. Elicit more active engagement and support from elected officials at all levels to increase equitable park investment
9. Cultivate robust, informed networks of philanthropic and corporate organizations that are committed to equitably funding city parks



ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH

10. Broadening the base of CPA members and allies within North America
11. Taking advantage of opportunities to increase the revenue CPA draws from its program audience, funders, and corporate connections
12. Enhancing CPA's frequency and depth of communications, especially to members, supporters, and peers
13. Building up CPA's technological and staff capacity commensurate with its strategic priorities

CITY PARKS ALLIANCE

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2023–2028

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