



# **Parks for Health**

**Diversity and Inclusion Guide**



Islington and Camden Parks for Health (PfH) project is one of eight Future Parks Accelerator (FPA) projects chosen across the UK that are finding new ways to manage and fund parks and open spaces across entire towns and cities.



Camden [shared assets]

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following contributors - Catherine Graham (Castlehaven Community Centre), Kim Segel (Wilmington Square Community Gardening Club) and Miriam Ashwell (Friends of Caledonian Park). Together, they have utilised their experiences as practitioners in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector to contribute to this guide.

## How to use this guide?

- Use as a resource providing ideas, tools and guidance to assist in the diversification and inclusivity of governance structures and services.
- For further research and learning resources, using the website links provided.

## Who is the guide for?

This guide is for anyone who organises or delivers activities in parks, such as Friends Of groups, park rangers, or sports coaches, including anyone who leads arts and crafts, cultural activities, meditation or other activities in parks.



# Introduction

**“Public parks are for everyone” states the New Economic Foundation; everyone should be able to use their local park or green open space for recreational purposes, to enjoy nature and increase their wellbeing.**

Many studies in the past few years have demonstrated that sunlight, fresh air, exercise, and access to green spaces all have a positive effect on our physical health and emotional wellbeing.

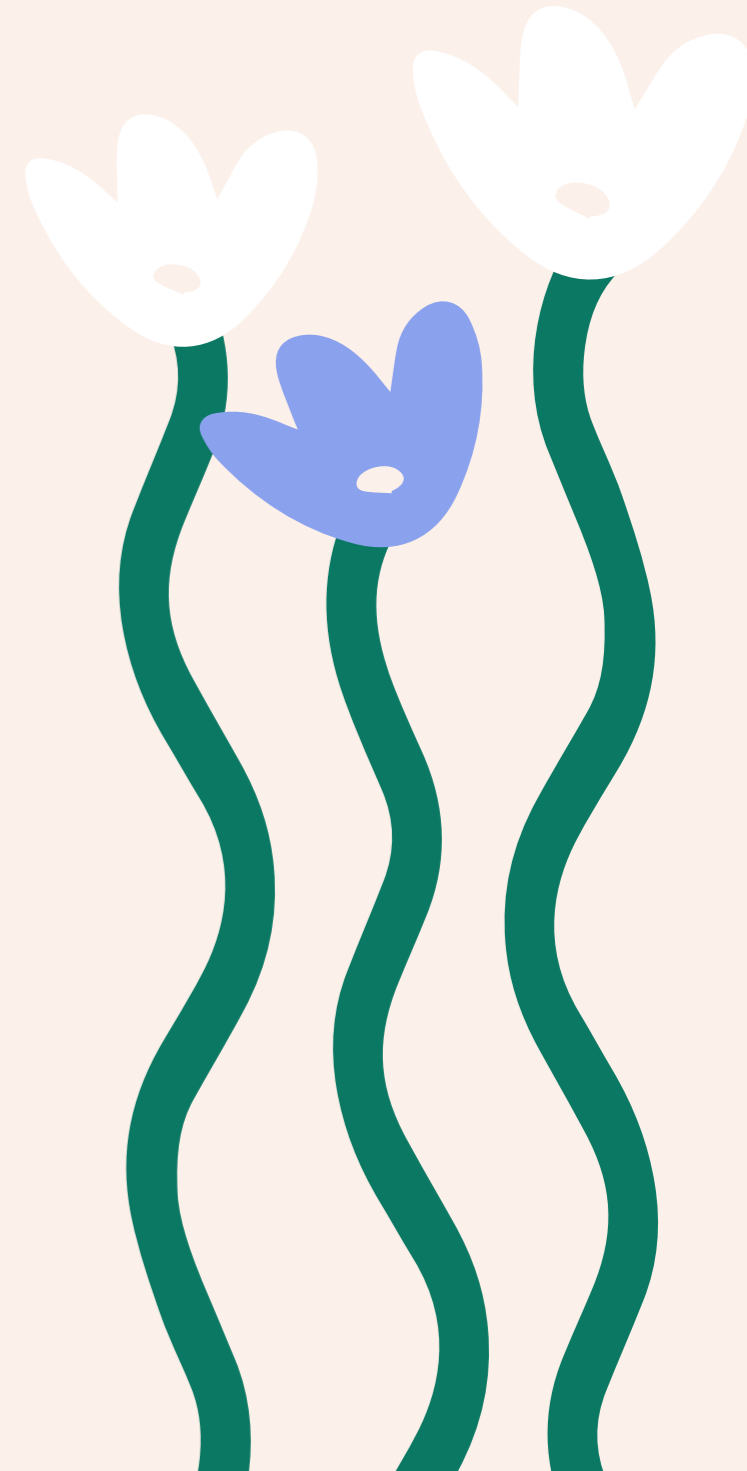
A report by Public Health England called “Improving access to green space: 2020 review” recognises that greenspace is linked to health and wellbeing in a number of ways:

Greenspace can improve social contacts and give people a sense of familiarity and belonging – cleaner, greener communities are places where people wish to live and work: they can promote social contact and connectivity, foster a sense of belonging, reduce isolation and loneliness and encourage a connection to nature.

Parks also mediate potential harms posed by the local environment. They can help to reduce exposure to air pollution, reduce the urban heat island effect, mitigate excessive noise and reduce flood risk, all of which can impair both physical and mental health.

Everyone in our community should be able to access their local park to support their health and wellbeing whether it is through recreational, exercise or sporting activities, or joining in with the activities of the local Friends group.

However, we recognise that, as practitioners, it is not that simple and that participation in park life is not as diverse or inclusive as we would hope.



# Appraising your group's diversity & inclusion

## What to consider when thinking about diversity and inclusion

### Diversity:

#### This is the “who might be missing?”

Compare your local population with your management team or user group. Often those from racialised backgrounds a term increasingly being used to replace BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic) as BAME ignores a wide range of different ethnicities, essentially putting non white people into one group. Members of the LGBTQ+ community, the elderly, children and young people especially teenagers, and people with disabilities, special education needs or learning disabilities are ‘missing’ from the organisation or ‘missing’ out on what the group does. This means your organisation is missing out on different viewpoints, strengths, and talents.

### Inclusion:

#### This is the “how?”

Think about how social experiences can affect people's perceptions of parks. For some, being out in a natural setting is not part of their background or social expectation and they may feel unwelcome, unconfident or out of place.

If you grew up in a place where greenspace meant dangerous animals, or crime, would you make greenspace a priority in your life now?

Think about the barriers: people often like to know what to expect and to have a planned activity to attend, or to come with a friend, rather than wander aimlessly and feel alone.

Or they might need to know whether there are facilities like toilets, level pathways, or seats they can rest on. Tidy and user-friendly parks feel safer and more welcoming than litter and confusing navigation, so you could consider careful management of nature reserves and good informative signage.

- How does your organisation welcome people from different backgrounds?
- Are your policies inclusive?
- How do you recruit new people – is it just from the same groups and channels, or do you actively seek diversity by targeting ‘missing’ groups?
- Do you offer training and mentoring to overcome a lack of role models or lack of experience, which may be a barrier to breaking the vicious circle of racism and exclusion?
- What are you doing to make everyone feel welcome?

# 01.

## What can we do to improve diversity and inclusion in the governance of parks?

### Firstly, monitor.

Monitor the array of current park users. Find out how diverse and inclusive your park group already is. Not all barriers to inclusiveness are visible, so be careful! You could ask people who already use the park group about their background, and ask what they like or dislike about the park too. Even better, you could ask people in a different place whether they go to parks and what they do there. Have a think about who is missing from your park, and what they might like to use the park for; if possible, ask them!

You might also find that different people use the parks at different times, for example runners and dog walkers first thing in the morning, parents and toddlers in the daytime, older children after school, families on the weekend. Consider asking people about timings to avoid, such as Friday worship or a popular music group in the area for over 60s.

### Secondly, ask people.

We found out all sorts of interesting things by getting to know our local wheelchair users. Lived experience is the best way to discover which ramps are too steep, which doors are too heavy, and which plants are always growing to block the easy-on kerb

### Thirdly, make diversity visible.

Make sure you include pictures and show lots of different people in your posters. If you don't have a very diverse group yet, use photos from the web or cartoons showing people from various groups. Go out to different user group organisations and advertise where they spend time; for example, putting up posters only in a park might not reach those who are not aware of the park and its benefits already.

# 02.

## Starting as you mean to go on - how to think about getting the broadest group when you're starting out.

### From the outset, it is important to be proactively inclusive.

Be explicit in the fact that your group welcomes everyone. For some people, it's a big step to join a new activity and you want to make people welcome and included. If you formalise the group, be sure that any constitution or rules describe your ethos. Simply stating 'Everyone is welcome' on any materials is a first step in letting people know you are inclusive.

When advertising the event or activity, put posters up where hard to reach groups might go, including community notice boards in supermarkets, GP surgeries, mental health projects, or support groups, or share them with local school parent associations. Community events such as school fairs, carnivals, Christmas markets, summer fêtes and melas are excellent opportunities to publicise your activities: you might take a table or hand out flyers. Ask

friends and neighbours to share information on their own networks, whether on Whatsapp, Nextdoor or other social media.

Be sure that all communication makes clear that everyone is welcome!



# 03.

## Getting the invitation right - how to reach out to a more diverse group of people when you're already established.

### Think about how people first encounter your group.

Do you expect them to do all the work, to make the first move? Would you welcome diverse people if any bothered to come along, but they don't come so it's not your fault? This isn't good enough; you need to be actively working to improve the diversity of your group. Sending out an invitation is a great way to work towards active diversity.

Invitations and media are how you brand your group. Its identity should immediately communicate that your group is inclusive.

As discussed, using diverse images or people such as representing all races, genders and abilities will immediately highlight the fact that your activities are inclusive and respectful. Of course, imagery is not enough, and inclusion is a much more complicated issue.

If you are trying to reach older people in an ethnic community, consider having parts of the communication translated into their language.

If you are looking to include people in marginalised groups, such as those from LGBTQ+ communities, rainbow and transgender flags on media will let people know they are welcome.

If you have time, face-to-face publicity is a valuable way to meet people where they are, and talk to them about what you are doing.

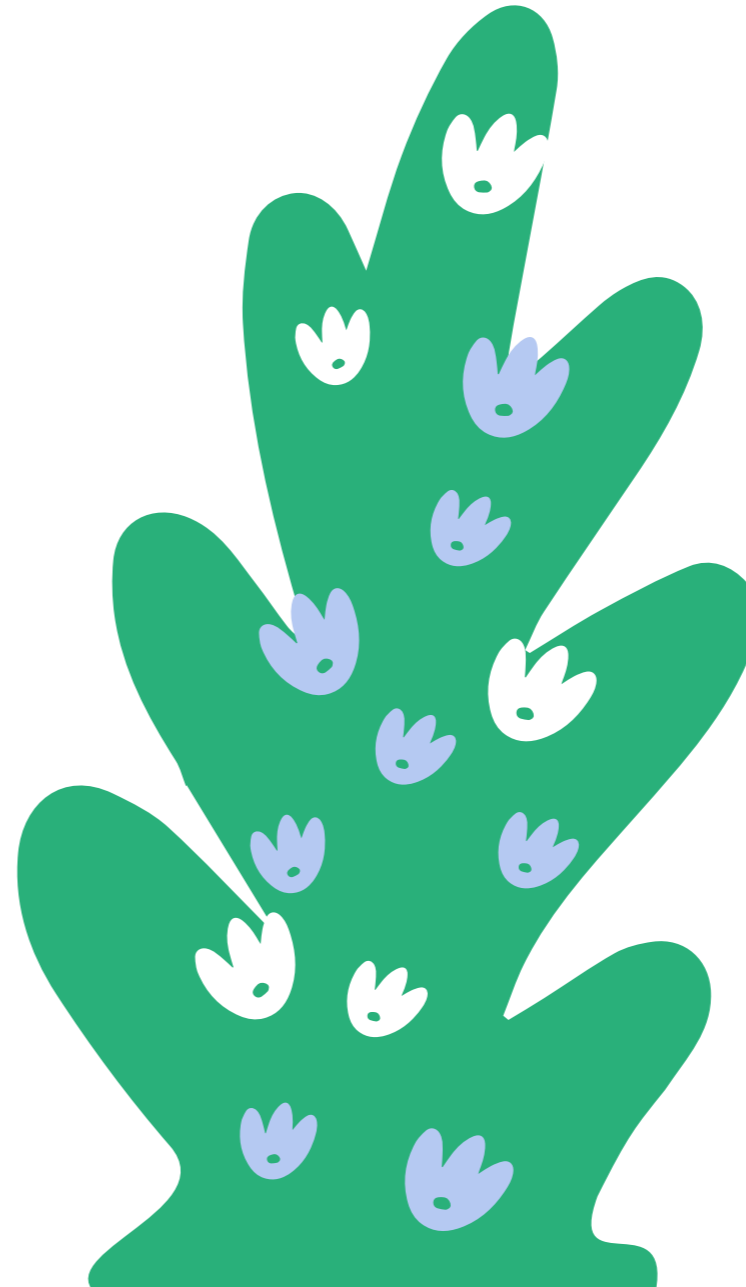
Reach out to successful groups in your area and go to them with your invitation (e.g. the mosque and any other community interest groups).

# 04.

## Dynamics and issues that might arise e.g. embedded or institutional racism, assumptions, cultural differences.

Beth Collier, an expert in nature-led psychotherapy who led an immersive programme called Nature Connectors as part of her Wild in the City organisation, recollected in an article by SWLondoner News, that whilst leading a nature walk, her group was approached by a white man who "barged into the conversation and repeated everything she'd said to her group mere minutes before."

"He just kept talking at us," recalled Beth, and when she finally was able to say that they were a led group, "he became very much the victim and backed away. The group talked about it for some time afterward, just feeling the anger of that dynamic, of his assumption – his racist assumption – that there wouldn't be a leader."



# 05.

## What to expect when diversifying a group?

### Expect to learn new things.

Expect to learn things and make friends, expect to make mistakes – and be willing to apologise. You will always find commonalities and differences, celebrate both. Try not to make assumptions or to be judgmental, but if you make a mistake, apologise and learn. If you don't start the conversations and invite people in, your organisation will never learn and improve.

Catherine Graham from Castlehaven Community Centre provides an example below detailing the experiences she has had with the diversification of parks groups.

“We invited a black teenager to work with us planting flowers in a park. We expected him to work hard and he did, but he also taught us how his grandmother who grew up in a dry country always created a moat around new plants, so she could water more efficiently and get water to the roots without it running away or evaporating before it could soak in. It was a dry year too, so he probably saved us a lot of extra work with our watering cans!”



## Case study.

# LGBTIQ+ community, Outside project

By Catherine, Environmental Project Manager  
at Castlehaven Community Centre

At Castlehaven Community Centre in Camden, we are supporting the Outside Project, an LGBTQ+ community group, to feel welcomed and safe by providing a comfortable and non-judgmental space to meet up, have socials and organise activities.

This connection started with a conversation a few years ago between Castlehaven and the LGBTQ+ community when the group needed a space to celebrate Christmas Day together. It is now in its fourth year.

The LGBTQ+ community also held their own Pride event in the community park in 2021 which raised their awareness of our

environmental projects and activities to promote wellbeing. The Outside Project also promotes improved social health and wellbeing, and feedback from their community was that many people in the LGBTQ+ community feel uncomfortable going to leisure centres or sport venues.

From these conversations, a joint project has been developed between Castlehaven and the LGBTQ+ community, funded by the Mayor of London Sport Unites Fund, to run a pilot project in 2022 to enable them to use our sports pitch and indoor facilities for football, cricket, running and taekwondo.





# Recommendations

If we want to encourage a more diverse and inclusive use of parks, then people need to feel welcomed, safe and encouraged to engage. We use and enjoy spaces where we feel welcome - this includes having facilities in a park such as toilets, a café or seating as well as a well maintained park. Review the accessibility of your park and see what you could change or suggest changing to the authorities.

Check your policies and communications. Ensure you have a Diversity and Equality policy that is thorough and up to date. Consider how you can reach out to local groups.

Check your events are timely and inclusive. Consider how you can reach out to local groups and ask them how you could celebrate their cultural or religious festival with them in the park. Make the effort to ask the questions, to monitor your group diversity, to work on your invitation and actively reach out to the people you are missing. Conduct a review of your posters, website and media to ensure that it is inclusive and welcoming.

## We do not know it all!

Remember! It is not just about including those from the racialised communities but also people who are disabled, elderly, feel marginalised (e.g. LGBTQ+), or feel 'outside' the community. There are some excellent websites which provide guidance such as The Sensory Trust.

Recognise that cultural sensitivities may influence how inclusive a particular activity will be, e.g. in some cultures men and women will have their own social activities. It is sometimes worth offering activities specifically tailored to a particular group, as offering only a general mixed group may exclude people who want a same-sex group for cultural or religious reasons. You wouldn't expect teens to engage with a toddler group, so consider running activities for different genders, language speakers, ages, and abilities. For example, some projects such as Men's Shed are geared to support primarily men because it is recognised that men are less likely to join groups.

# Learning library

## Link 1:

*An article by Parks and People on making groups stronger and more diverse*

## Link 2:

*A document by Public Health England detailing improving access to green spaces*

## Link 3:

*An article published by New Economic Foundation discussing how parks are for everyone*

## Link 4:

*A piece by the National Recreation and Park Association talking about Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Parks and Recreation*

## Link 5:

*An article by the Future of London discussing whether everyone feels welcome in parks*

## Link 6:

*The youtube video by Future of London featuring a roundtable discussion on whether everyone feels welcome in parks*

## Link 7:

*A variety of guidance and resources provided by the Sensory Trust regarding how to be more inclusive in green spaces*

## Link 8:

*Content by My Community considering a change in language eg , stop using the term BAME and using 'racialised' instead*

## Link 9:

*This SW Londoner article demonstrates how outdoor leadership is changing*



Camden



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