

# The Recreation and Park Department Generally Complied With Strategic Planning Charter Requirements, but Improving Its Equity Measurement Tool Would Enable It to Better Identify High-Needs Neighborhoods

## Recreation and Park Department

The Recreation and Park Department generally complied with Charter requirements related to its strategic planning and equity metrics, but should adopt key leading practices for improving its equity analysis to identify deficiencies in resource allocation to neighborhoods with high needs. The department should also improve the performance management of its park equity efforts so it can develop better strategies to mitigate identified equity deficiencies.



October 5, 2021

City & County of San Francisco  
Office of the Controller  
City Services Auditor

## About the Audits Division

The City Services Auditor (CSA) was created in the Office of the Controller through an amendment to the Charter of the City and County of San Francisco (City) that voters approved in November 2003. Within CSA, the Audits Division ensures the City's financial integrity and promotes efficient, effective, and accountable government by:

- Conducting performance audits of city departments, contractors, and functions to assess efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery and business processes.
- Investigating reports received through its whistleblower hotline of fraud, waste, and abuse of city resources.
- Providing actionable recommendations to city leaders to promote and enhance accountability and improve the overall performance and efficiency of city government.

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## Audit Authority

This audit was conducted under the authority of the San Francisco Charter, Section 3.105 and Appendix F, which requires that CSA conduct periodic, comprehensive financial and performance audits of city departments, services, and activities.

## Statement of Auditing Standards

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards (GAGAS). Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. The Audits Division is independent per the GAGAS requirements for internal auditors.



# OFFICE OF THE CONTROLLER

## CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Ben Rosenfield  
Controller

Todd Rydstrom  
Deputy Controller

October 5, 2021

Recreation and Park Commission  
501 Stanyan Street  
San Francisco, CA 94117

Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager  
Recreation and Park Department  
501 Stanyan Street  
San Francisco, CA 94117

Dear Commission President, Commissioners, and Mr. Ginsburg:

The Office of the Controller, City Services Auditor (CSA), Audits Division, presents the report of its audit of strategic planning and equity analysis of the Recreation and Park Department (Rec and Park). The audit had as its objectives to determine whether Rec and Park complied with the planning and reporting requirements in the San Francisco Charter (Charter) and to assess the department's progress in developing its analysis of how equitably it distributes its resources among San Francisco neighborhoods and its strategies to mitigate identified deficiencies.

The audit concluded that Rec and Park has a reasonable process for identifying the lowest quintile of San Francisco's disadvantaged and low-income communities, known collectively as the equity zone, but should improve its performance management process around park equity. According to its Strategic Plan, Rec and Park incorporates equity into many of its operations, including establishing programs to increase access to scholarships and recreational programs among underserved communities and making efforts to promote equity and inclusivity internally. However, because Rec and Park does not establish targets for—or analyze the results of—its equity metrics, the department cannot transparently demonstrate its progress toward rectifying deficiencies in services and resources provided to the equity zone. Also, Rec and Park's methodology for calculating and measuring its equity metrics cannot identify disparities among neighborhoods within the equity zone, potentially causing the department to miss areas where resources could be used most effectively. Finally, the department did not document its compliance with some Charter requirements related to planning and reporting measures.

The report includes three recommendations for Rec and Park, which ask it to follow key leading practices in performance management, improve its methodologies for equity metrics and analysis, and maintain records of its compliance with all planning and reporting requirements in the Charter. Rec and Park's response is attached as an appendix. CSA will work with the department to follow up every six months on the status of the open recommendations made in this report.

CSA appreciates the assistance and cooperation of all staff involved in this audit. For questions about the report, please contact me at [mark.p.delarosa@sfgov.org](mailto:mark.p.delarosa@sfgov.org) or 415-554-7574 or CSA at 415-554-7469.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark de la Rosa".

Mark de la Rosa  
Director of Audits

cc: Board of Supervisors  
Budget Analyst  
Citizens Audit Review Board  
City Attorney  
Civil Grand Jury  
Mayor  
Public Library

# Executive Summary

The audit's objective was to determine whether the Recreation and Park Department (Rec and Park) of the City and County of San Francisco (City) complied with the planning and reporting requirements of the San Francisco Charter (Charter), Section 16.107. The audit also assessed Rec and Park's progress in developing its analysis to equitably distribute its resources among San Francisco's communities (equity analysis) and strategies to mitigate identified deficiencies. The Charter mandates Rec and Park to develop equity metrics to measure the distribution of the department's services and resources to low-income neighborhoods and disadvantaged communities compared to the rest of the City. The department measures these equity metrics for the lowest 20 percent of low-income and disadvantaged communities, known as the equity zone, then Rec and Park compares the metrics for the equity zone against the metrics for the non-equity zone and for San Francisco as a whole. The department is further required to analyze the results of the equity metrics and incorporate this information into its strategic, operational, and capital expenditure plans so that it appropriately considers equity as it plans its strategic vision, capital expenditures, and operations.

## Equity Metrics

Rec and Park measures its equity metrics for:

1. The 20 percent most disadvantaged and low-income communities (equity zone)
2. The other 80 percent of communities (the non-equity zone)
3. San Francisco as a whole

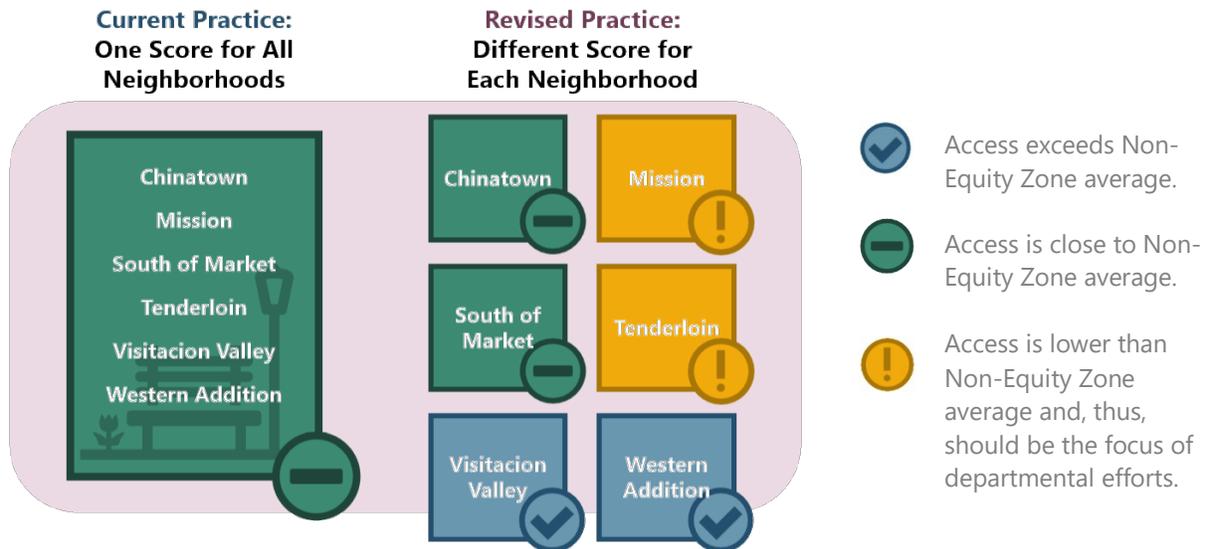
Source: Rec and Park 2019-2023 Strategic Plan

## WHAT WE FOUND

**The department adhered to most requirements in the Charter related to its strategic planning and development and analysis of equity metrics.** However, the department needs to maintain records demonstrating that it sent its equity metrics, as well as its strategic, operational, and capital expenditure plans to the Mayor's Office for review by the required deadline.

If this did not occur, the department may have missed key input from stakeholders and, therefore, may have strategic plans and equity metrics that do not fully reflect the priorities and desires of stakeholders and the broader public.

**The department's use of a single equity zone for all of its metrics obscures differences in resource access among low-income and disadvantaged neighborhoods.** Rec and Park uses several equity metrics for the equity zone as a whole. However, different areas within the equity zone, such as those in the Mission and Chinatown, may have different levels of need. The figure below shows that although different neighborhoods have different levels of access to park acreage, these differences are blurred when neighborhood scores are combined into a single score for the equity zone.

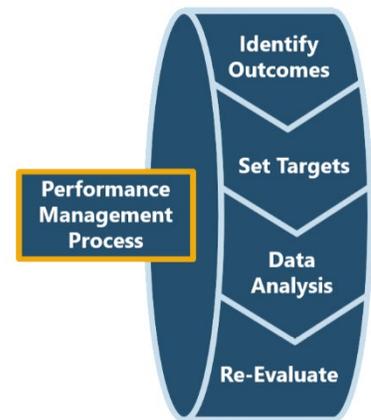


Note: To show that different methodologies for analyzing access to park acreage by population can produce different results, only a selected sample of equity zone neighborhoods is shown.

Source: CSA analysis of performance management best practices; Rec and Park 2019-2023 Strategic Plan; Controller's Office City Performance Division's analysis of access to park and open space in Rec and Park's equity zone

Although it has a reasonable process for identifying equity zone areas, Rec and Park could greatly increase the level of detail of its metrics by following best practices, which include measuring and calculating equity metrics at a local (or neighborhood) level. This improved detail would allow the department to identify the areas of highest need in the equity zone and to better concentrate its efforts to equitably distribute its resources and services.

Although Rec and Park measures park equity and considers equity as a factor in resource allocation, it has not developed desired outcomes, set specific targets, or analyzed the results of its equity metrics to support park-related equity outcomes. The department reports metrics in its strategic plan that measure the allocation of resources and services in its park system, but it has not established desired outcomes or set specific metric targets to meet. Furthermore, Rec and Park accounts for equity zone status in making funding decisions but does not systematically or transparently connect these decisions to the metrics data. The lack of formal policies for reassessing and improving its metrics also inhibits the department's ability to improve its measurement of park equity.



## WHAT WE RECOMMEND

The report includes three recommendations to improve Rec and Park's management of its performance related to park equity. The recommendations are that the department should:

- Comply with all Charter requirements related to its strategic planning and development and analysis of equity metrics.
- Measure and analyze park equity data at a local level, which could be facilitated by adopting the equity analysis dashboard created by the City Performance Division of the Controller's Office. This will help the department identify deficiencies in its resource distribution to communities in the equity zone and further inform the department's decision-making and development of mitigating strategies related to park equity.

- Develop a formalized process for managing its performance related to park equity that includes, at a minimum, leading practices related to stating desired outcomes, establishing specific and relevant targets, making data-driven decisions, and continuously re-evaluating and improving its metrics and analysis.

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# Glossary

Board	Board of Supervisors
Charter	Charter of the City and County of San Francisco (or San Francisco Charter)
City	City and County of San Francisco
City Performance	City Performance Unit, Office of the Controller
Commission	Recreation and Park Commission (which oversees the Recreation and Park Department)
Controller	Office of the Controller
CSA	Audits Division, City Services Auditor, Office of the Controller
Mayor	Mayor's Office
Los Angeles	City of Los Angeles
Rec and Park	Recreation and Park Department

# Introduction

## BACKGROUND

The Recreation and Park Department (Rec and Park) administers more than 220 parks, playgrounds, and open spaces in the City and County of San Francisco (City). The City's park system includes 25 recreation centers, 9 swimming pools, 5 golf courses and numerous tennis courts, ball diamonds, soccer fields, and other sports venues. Also, Rec and Park offers recreational programs, including sports leagues, dance classes, camping, and virtual activities. To help maintain its facilities and deliver its services, the department manages a volunteer program that directs over 200,000 hours of volunteer work per year into planting, litter pickup, trail work, and other acts of service for the City's park system.

Approved by San Francisco voters in June 2016, Proposition B amended the Charter to require that Rec and Park measure and analyze services and resources available to low-income neighborhoods and disadvantaged communities, compared to services and resources available to the City as a whole. If the department's analysis finds equity deficiencies, the Charter requires the department to develop a plan to mitigate these imbalances.

### Key Charter Requirements

Rec and Park must:

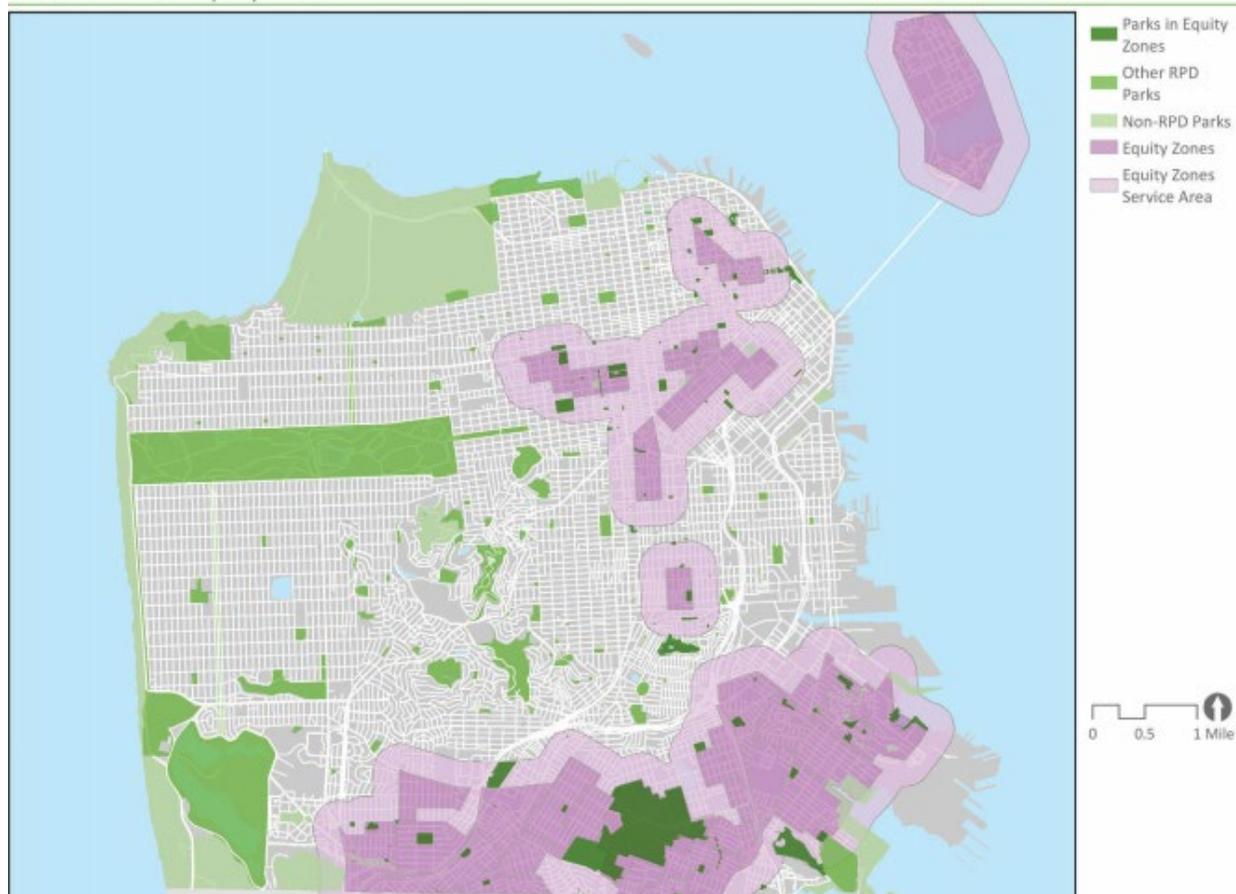
- Develop equity metrics to measure services and resources provided to disadvantaged communities compared to the rest of the City.
- Following Commission approval, submit the equity metrics to the Mayor's Office and Board of Supervisors.
- Beginning on February 1, 2017, and every five years thereafter, develop a five-year strategic plan that includes an analysis of results from its equity metrics.
- If the analysis identifies deficiencies, develop mitigating strategies to be included in the strategic plan.
- Develop a capital expenditure plan and operational plan for each annual or two-year budget cycle that include an equity analysis of Rec and Park capital expenditures, services, and resources using the department's equity metrics.
- Establish a community input process that includes the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Advisory Committee and San Francisco citizens.
- Before adopting any strategic plan, conduct at least five hearings in geographically distributed locations throughout the City to receive and consider public comment.

Source: San Francisco Charter, Section 16.107(h)

Rec and Park used a tool developed by the state to identify low-income and disadvantaged communities, as discussed further in [Finding 1](#). The department designated the equity zone as those census tracts representing the 20 percent of city residents who are most disadvantaged. Exhibit 1 shows the census tracts, in dark purple, that make up the equity zone. The department designates its parks and open spaces as equity-zone parks if they are in an equity zone census tract or within a quarter-mile of the equity zone. These are shown in dark green in Exhibit 1 below.

**Exhibit 1: Rec and Park’s equity zone comprises the 20 percent of the City’s population with the most disadvantaged factors.**

FY18 and FY19 Equity Zones



Source: Rec and Park 2019-2023 Strategic Plan

The department includes multiple aspects of park recreation and services in its equity metrics, including access, safety, investment, maintenance, and recreational resources. Exhibit 2 shows the results of Rec and Park’s equity metrics from its strategic plan issued for 2020 through 2024.

**Exhibit 2: Rec and Park measures several equity metrics for the equity zone, non-equity zone, and City as a whole.**

<b>EQUITY METRICS WITH FY19 DATA</b>				
<b>DEMOGRAPHICS</b>		<b>Equity Zone</b>	<b>Non-Equity Zone</b>	<b>City as a Whole</b>
	Population	178,000	712,000	890,000
	% of Population	20%	80%	100%
<b>METRICS</b>				
<b>PARK ACCESS</b>	Number of Parks	89	130	219
	% of Parks	41%	59%	100%
	Number of Parks / 1,000 People	.5	.18	.25
	Park Acreage	671	2,603	3,274
	% of Park Acreage	20%	80%	100%
	Acres of Park / 1,000 People	3.8	3.7	3.7
<b>SAFETY</b>	SFPD Incidents within 500' of Parks / 1,000 People	30,508	22,668	53,176
	% of Incidents within 500' of Parks	57%	43%	100%
<b>MAINTENANCE</b>	Park Evaluation Scores	91%	92%	92%
	Maintenance and Repair Requests Completed	91%	91%	91%
<b>INVESTMENT</b>	Capital Investment / 1,000 People	\$161,251	\$33,032	\$58,675
	% of Capital Investment	55%	45%	100%
<b>VOLUNTEERS</b>	Recreation Volunteers Hours / 1,000 People	130	61	75
	Park Volunteers Hours / Acre	19	35	32
	% of Total Volunteer Hours	28%	72%	100%
<b>RECREATION</b>	Hours of Recreational Resources / 1,000 People	894	343	1,237
	% of Recreational Resources	72%	28%	100%
	Scholarships Granted / 1,000 People	4.7	.6	1.4
	% of Scholarships	66%	34%	100%
<b>KIDS &amp; NATURE</b>	Outdoor Recreation Registrants 18 and Under	743	2,407	3,150
	% of Outdoor Recreation Registrants 18 and Under	24%	76%	100%

Note: According to Rec and Park, the figures for the Safety metric “SFPD Incidents within 500’ of Parks/1,000 People” should have been divided by 1000.

Source: Rec and Park 2020-2024 Update to the Strategic Plan

According to its strategic plan, Rec and Park carries out many equity-related initiatives including multilingual outreach efforts to increase inclusivity of recreational programs, directing philanthropic activity to parks in low-income neighborhoods, and conducting an equity needs assessment based on input from community members. In fiscal year 2019-2020, Rec and Park launched an effort called “Requity” with the Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development to increase access to services among youth living in shelters, foster care, public housing, and housing developments. The department also formed a Diversity and Inclusion Committee on Equity to hold workshops on promoting diversity and inclusion values in the department’s hiring practices and resource allocation.

## OBJECTIVES

The overall objectives of the audit were to:

1. Determine whether Rec and Park complied with the planning and reporting requirements in the Charter, Section 16.107.
2. Assess Rec and Park’s progress in developing its equity analysis and strategies to mitigate identified deficiencies.

## SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The scope of the audit includes Rec and Park’s development and analysis of its equity metrics and its strategic, operational, and capital expenditure plans during fiscal years 2016-17 through 2019-20.

To conduct the audit, the audit team gathered evidence using a variety of procedures and from a range of sources, as outlined below.

### Reviewed relevant city law and departmental budgets:

- [San Francisco Charter, Section 16.107](#), which establishes the requirement for Rec and Park’s equity analysis and this audit.
- [San Francisco Budget and Appropriation Ordinance FY18-19 and FY19-20, Recreation and Park Department](#).

### Analyzed Rec and Park documents:

- 2017-2021 and 2019-2023 updates to the Strategic Plan.
- Operational Plans issued in 2017, 2018, and 2019.
- FY 2019-2020 Capital Expenditure Plan.
- FY 2018-2019 Rec and Park Equity Analysis and Metrics Report to the Recreation and Park Commission.

### Identified and reviewed best practices:

- National Performance Management Advisory Commission, *A Performance Management Framework for State and Local Government: From Measurement and Reporting to Management and Improving*, 2010.
- San Francisco Office of the Controller, City Services Auditor, *Guide to Good Measures*, 2015.
- ChangeLab Solutions, *Complete Parks Indicators: A Systems Approach to Assessing Parks*, 2018.

**Reviewed selected reports from other jurisdictions:**

- City of Los Angeles, Department of Recreation and Parks, *Strategic Plan 2018-22*.

## **Finding 1: Rec and Park complied with most Charter requirements related to its strategic planning and equity metrics and analysis.**

The department generally complied with the Charter requirements related to its strategic plan and equity metrics. As part of its efforts to identify low-income and disadvantaged populations in the City, Rec and Park uses the California Environmental Protection Agency's California Communities Environmental Health Screening Tool (CalEnviroScreen). The department customized the tool for its use in San Francisco by adding race as a factor it considers in determining how disadvantaged a community is.

However, the department could not provide documentation showing it submitted its equity metrics, as well as its strategic, operational, and capital expenditure plans, to the Mayor's Office (Mayor) for review by the required timeline. According to the Charter, Rec and Park must submit the Strategic Plan and equity metrics to the Recreation and Park Commission (Commission) by February 1, 2017. In addition, Rec and Park must submit the Capital Expenditure plan by January 15, 2017, and each annual or biennial cycle thereafter. Last, Rec and Park must submit the Operational Plan by February 1, 2017, and each annual or biennial cycle thereafter. Following submission of the plans and metrics to the Commission, the department must then submit the documents to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors (Board). Although Rec and Park sent the metrics and plans to the Board in 2017, the department could only provide records showing it sent the metrics and plans to the Mayor in April 2019. The department stated the general manager delivered and presented the equity metrics and assorted plans to the Mayor when the documents were published, but staff were unable to locate supporting documentation.

If the department did not initially send this information to the Mayor, Rec and Park may have missed valuable feedback from key policymakers regarding how to better measure the equitable distribution of resources and services to disadvantaged communities. Further, this puts Rec and Park at risk of having the Board withhold 5 percent of the department's baseline funding until the department makes progress toward compliance.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The Recreation and Park Department should comply with all Charter requirements related to its strategic planning and reporting measures, including maintaining adequate documentation to demonstrate the department's compliance.

### **Factors Determining Disadvantaged Communities**

- Age
- Asthma
- Low birth weight
- Cardiovascular disease
- Linguistic isolation
- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Educational attainment
- Housing burden
- Non-white

Source: Rec and Park FY2018-19 Equity Analysis Report to the Recreation and Park Commission

**Finding 2: Rec and Park’s equity analysis and performance management does not fully allow the department to identify areas of high need and develop mitigating strategies.**

Rec and Park’s equity analysis does not delineate the distribution of park resources and services to communities in the equity zone, preventing the department from identifying equity deficiencies and developing mitigating strategies for the communities of highest need. The department analyzes and compares its resource and service allocation to the equity zone, non-equity zone, and City as a whole. However, it does not do this for the different communities within the equity zone. Further, to more effectively manage its performance related to park equity, the department should incorporate leading practices related to performance management, such as establishing desired outcomes or developing specific and relevant targets.

**Finding 2.1: Rec and Park’s equity metrics may miss deficiencies within the equity zone.**

Rec and Park does not measure or analyze whether it equitably distributes resources and services to different neighborhoods<sup>1</sup> within the equity zone, preventing the department from fully understanding the level of access and services it provides to disadvantaged communities. Consistent with the Charter, the department’s equity metrics measure park resources and services offered to the equity zone compared to the rest of San Francisco and the City as a whole. This provides the department with generalized information on how equitably its resources are distributed. However, the department does not measure this information for any individual neighborhood in the equity zone, which would help Rec and Park identify the neighborhoods that should get the highest resource allocation priority.

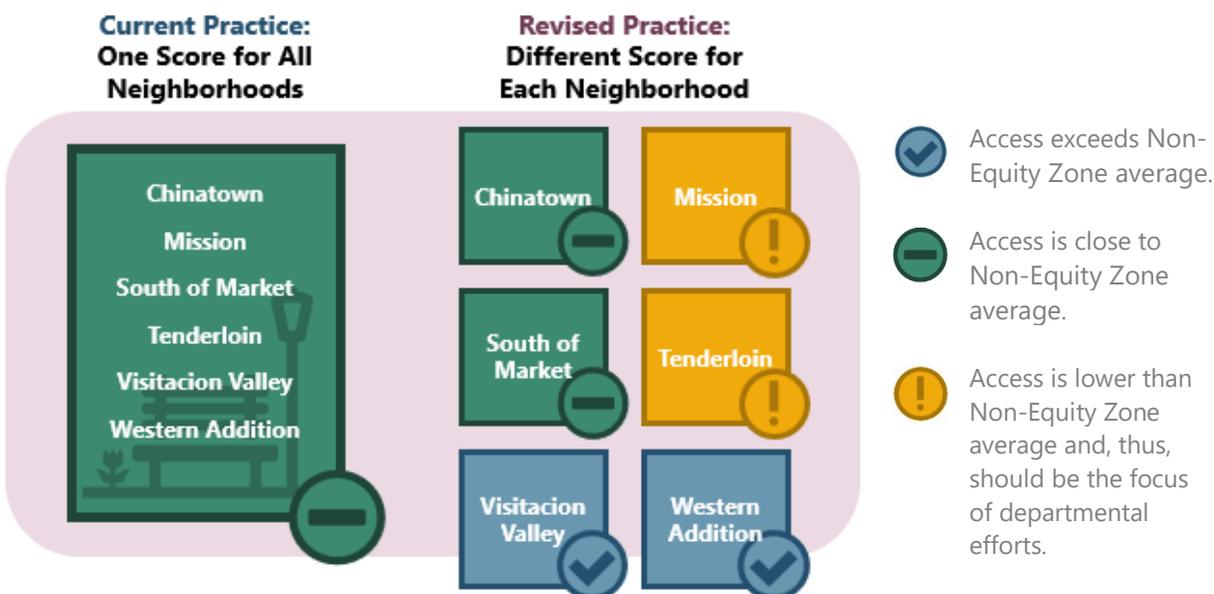
According to a guide on park indicators, data for park metrics should be gathered and assessed at the neighborhood level to determine the specific needs of each neighborhood<sup>2</sup>. This is because different areas in a city, including those in San Francisco’s equity zone such as parts of the Mission and Chinatown, have different levels and types of park equity needs. As shown in Exhibit 3, by aggregating and measuring the communities in the equity zone as a group rather than individually, Rec and Park’s analysis masks potential deficiencies in certain neighborhoods in the zone because of surpluses in other neighborhoods in the zone.

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<sup>1</sup> Neighborhoods in this report refer to collections of census block groups that roughly align with San Francisco neighborhoods defined by the Mayor’s Office of Housing and Economic Development and the Planning Department.

<sup>2</sup> ChangeLab Solutions, *Complete Parks Indicators: A Systems Approach to Assessing Parks*, 2018, p. 8.

### Exhibit 3: Rec and Park’s grouping of equity zone neighborhoods restricts its ability to identify specific neighborhoods with the highest needs.



Note: The list of neighborhoods in this exhibit is not comprehensive of all equity zone neighborhoods, but a selected sample to demonstrate the difference in practice.

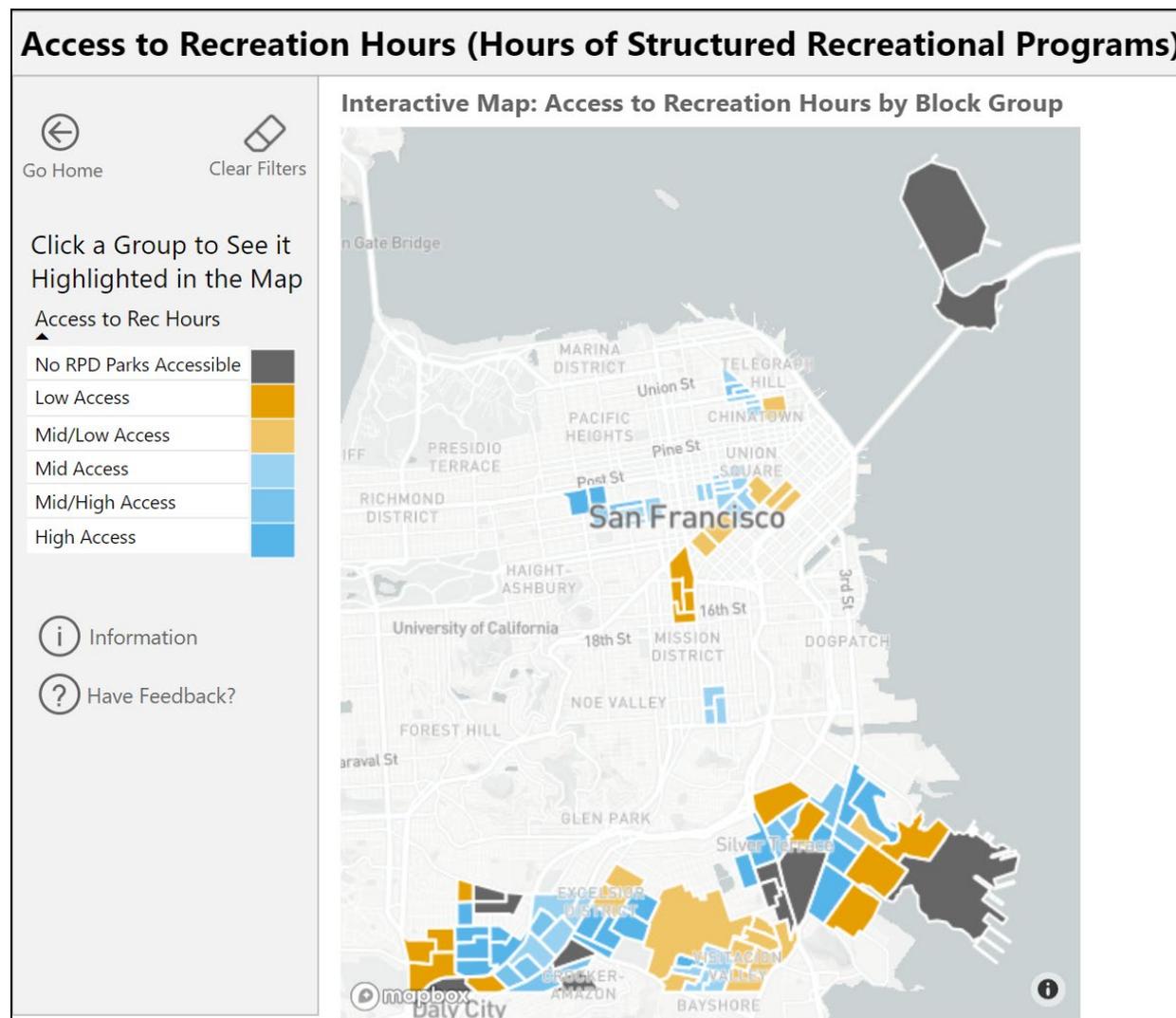
Source: CSA analysis of Rec and Park 2019-2023 Strategic Plan; analysis of access to park and open space in Rec and Park’s equity zone conducted by City Performance

According to Rec and Park, the department has not yet adopted a tool developed by the City Performance Division (City Performance) of the Office of the Controller (Controller) to further support the department’s equity analysis. In 2018 City Performance developed an interactive dashboard that incorporated Rec and Park’s equity metrics to examine in greater detail the department’s resource and service allocation to the equity zone. Consistent with leading practices, City Performance assesses each of the department’s equity metrics for every census block group, a smaller unit of measurement than census tracts, within the equity zone. This analysis allows users to measure the experience of specific neighborhoods in the equity zone.

City Performance’s work resulted in an interactive equity dashboard that measures Rec and Park’s equity metrics for every census block in the equity zone. It also introduces an important metric that identifies high-priority areas based on the number of equity metrics in which that area has a low score. These high-priority areas highlight neighborhoods that warrant additional consideration from Rec and Park when deciding how to distribute its resources and services.

Exhibit 4 presents the dashboard’s view of access to hours of structured recreational programs for equity zone census blocks. This detailed analysis shows, for example, that the equity zone areas in the northern part of the Mission neighborhood have less access to hours of recreational programs than do the equity zone areas of the Crocker-Amazon neighborhood.

**Exhibit 4: City Performance’s equity analysis dashboard for Rec and Park measures the access to recreation hours of census block groups in the equity zone.**



Note: The exhibit’s legend categorizes access scores for equity zone census block groups relative to each other, not compared to other parts of the City or to any specific standard of access.

Source: Equity analysis dashboard created by City Performance for Rec and Park

The access to park acreage metric provides another example of how Rec and Park’s single measurement for the equity zone can mask potential deficiencies. The department’s results for this metric show that the equity zone has access to 20 percent of park acres in the City’s park system, which is exactly proportional to the zone’s percentage of the City’s population. However, nearly half of the acreage included in the calculation number is in a single park, John McLaren. Although McLaren Park is large, its location at the southern edge of the City, combined with the much larger size of the equity zone, means that it may be difficult to access for those in the more distant parts of the equity zone. If park access were measured for each census tract or block, this metric would show

deficiencies in access to park acreage for those in the equity zone who live farther from McLaren, such as those in the northern part of the City.

Rec and Park does not follow some leading practices for its equity metrics, resulting in certain metrics being less meaningful and accurate than they could be. For example, the department measures park access by calculating the number and size of parks in the equity zone, and within a quarter mile of the equity zone to account for residents that live just outside the equity zone. However, the department’s calculation of this metric does not account for a park user’s actual access and available routes to parks, as recommended by leading practices.

In its dashboard, City Performance defines accessible parks as those with an entrance point within a ten-minute walk for a user of a given census block, which may better reflect the reality of how potential users judge the accessibility of parks. For example, Rec and Park designates Bernal Heights Park as an equity-zone park because it is within a quarter-mile of equity zones, but City Performance’s dashboard shows that the closest entrance to the park is more than a ten-minute walk from the closest point in an equity zone, and therefore less accessible to equity zone residents. As Exhibit 5 shows, the department also does not follow leading practices when calculating data for other equity metrics.

**Exhibit 5: Rec and Park’s equity metrics do not align or only partially align with leading practices.**

Leading Practice Principle and Its Benefit	Rec and Park’s Equity Metrics	City Performance’s Dashboard
<p><b>Principle:</b> Metrics should focus on accessibility of parks and safe routes to and through parks, regardless of the users’ needs or mode of transit.</p>	<p>Measures access by calculating the number and size of parks in the equity zone census tracts or within a quarter-mile of them compared to the rest of the City.</p>	<p>Measures access by calculating the number and size of parks—and recreational program hours—whose entrance points are within a ten-minute walk of each census block group.</p>
<p><b>Benefit:</b> Analyze access to parks and recreation based on users’ experience traveling to parks.</p>	<p><b>Issue:</b> The quarter-mile perimeter does not account for obstacles to access, such as freeways, hills, or park entrance points, all of which can affect users’ experience with park accessibility.</p>	<p>This method may improve the department’s methodology because it considers obstacles to access.</p>
<p><b>Principle:</b> Metrics should measure the level of safety, cleanliness, and maintenance in and around parks.</p>	<p>Measures safety by calculating the rate of non-traffic San Francisco Police Department (Police Department) incidents within a 500-foot radius of equity-zone parks and the rate of those in the rest of the City.</p>	<p>Measures safety by calculating the rate of non-traffic Police Department incidents within a ten-foot radius of parks accessible for each census block group, divided by the total population of block groups within a ten-minute walk of the park.</p>

Leading Practice Principle and Its Benefit	Rec and Park’s Equity Metrics	City Performance’s Dashboard
<p><b>Benefit:</b> Track the reality and perception of safety, based on crime, cleanliness, and maintenance of parks.</p>	<p><b>Issue:</b> A 500-foot (0.1 mile) radius captures 37 percent of all Police Department incidents, which is a broad sample that makes it difficult to draw inferences about park-specific safety. A smaller, more focused dataset would be more park-specific.</p>	<p>Rather than the department’s 500-foot radius, a 50-foot radius may capture a population of incidents more relevant to perceptions of park safety. Dividing by population also reduces the risk that higher crime rate could be reflecting higher density communities around equity-zone parks.</p>
<p><b>Principle:</b> Metrics should be used to determine areas of high, unmet need for park and recreational resources.</p>	<p>Measures equity zone residents’ proximity to a park or recreational resource compared to that of residents of the rest of the City to determine need.</p>	<p>Calculates an accessibility score for each census block group based on the population of that neighborhood and nearby census block groups that access the same park and recreational resources.</p>
<p><b>Benefit:</b> Conveys how population density can affect accessibility of park and recreational spaces, in addition to distance.</p>	<p><b>Issue:</b> Distance to a park or recreational space is important but does not account for demand for those park or recreational spaces. Crowded fields, courts, picnic areas, or paths in high-density areas may indicate unmet demand.</p>	<p>The department could better measure demand and identify unmet need if it accounts for the number and size of neighborhoods accessing a park or recreational space.</p>

Source: CSA analysis of documents from ChangeLab Solutions, Rec and Park, and City Performance

The department indicated that it has not adopted the leading practices discussed here or City Performance’s dashboard due to the significant amount of work required to update the metrics. Although we recognize this challenge, Rec and Park and the public could benefit from the department applying these leading practices to its equity metrics and analysis.

**Finding 2.2: Rec and Park’s process for managing its park equity performance does not facilitate data-driven decisions.**

Rec and Park’s process for managing its park equity performance lacks key elements recommended by best practices, preventing the department from using a data-driven process to make decisions that could result in more equitable outcomes. As discussed, Rec and Park maintains a set of equity metrics that measure the services and resources provided to equity zone residents and compares the levels of each service or resource to what is provided to residents of the non-equity zone. Rec and Park incorporates equity zone status in determining funding priority for parks and recreational facilities and has presented limited analyses of the metrics in presentations of the capital expenditure plans to the Commission. However, the department’s equity metrics and analysis do not fully

incorporate four key elements recommended by the National Performance Management Advisory Commission, as shown in Exhibit 6.<sup>3, 4</sup>

**Exhibit 6: Rec and Park’s equity performance management process does not incorporate or only partly incorporates key leading practices.**

Performance Management Element Recommended by Best Practices	Definition	Does Rec and Park Incorporate Element?
Outcome-Oriented	Measurement should focus on the desired results achieved for the public.	
Specific Targets	Progress toward outcomes is measured through the setting of quantifiable goals.	
Data-Driven Analysis and Decision Making	Data resulting from measurement is analyzed and used to inform new strategies.	
Continuous Improvement and Re-Evaluation	Metrics and targets are re-assessed for effectiveness every cycle.	

Fully incorporated    Partially incorporated    Has not incorporated

Source: CSA analysis of Rec and Park 2019-2023 Strategic Plan; Rec and Park strategic planning documents; National Performance Management Advisory Commission, *A Performance Management Framework for State and Local Government: From Measurement and Reporting to Management and Improving*, 2010

**Outcome-Oriented**

None of Rec and Park’s department’s strategic plans or equity analyses specifically describe desired outcomes for equity zone residents. Rec and Park has similar generalized outcomes in its strategic plan, such as “Inspire Play: Promote active living, well-being, and community for San Francisco’s diverse and growing population.” However, contrary to what best practices suggest, none of Rec and Park’s equity metrics are tied to any of these outcomes.

According to the National Performance Management Advisory Commission and City Performance, outcomes represent the results or benefits of departmental programs or activities for the intended population.<sup>5, 6</sup> Incorporating desired outcomes is important because it ensures the department’s work is tangibly connected to the experience of park and open space users. Appropriately, Rec and Park’s equity metrics measure various elements of park equity, but the metrics should be used to measure the department’s success in achieving desired outcomes. For example, the department

<sup>3</sup> National Performance Management Advisory Commission, *A Performance Management Framework for State and Local Government: From Measurement and Reporting to Management and Improving*, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> City and County of San Francisco Office of the Controller, City Performance, *Guide to Good Measures*, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> National Performance Management Advisory Commission, *A Performance Management Framework*.

<sup>6</sup> City Performance, *Guide to Good Measures*.

measures outputs such as the amount of capital investment and number of recreational resource hours provided to the equity zone without tying them to a desired outcome.

Although Rec and Park’s metrics are reasonable, the impact of the things being measured on the park experience of equity zone communities is unclear without the context of an outcome. Dollars spent (an input) and service hours provided (an output) are more meaningful when they are connected with the facilities and services that residents can access and when a written analysis or plan shows this connection. Tying metrics to outcomes, as shown in Exhibit 7, helps the public understand why these metrics were chosen and what they represent.

**Exhibit 7: Two outcomes and corresponding metrics**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Metrics</b>
Equity zone residents feel safe at parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of graffiti or litter sweeps</li><li>• Number of light posts installed</li><li>• Park ranger response times</li></ul>
Facilities in equity-zone parks are well-maintained	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Park maintenance scores</li><li>• Amount spent on preventive maintenance</li><li>• Maintenance response time</li></ul>

Source: CSA analysis of City Performance’s *Guide to Good Measures*

As Exhibit 6 demonstrates, comparable jurisdictions report establishing or planning to establish outcomes and corresponding metrics to measure whether they are achieving these outcomes. For example, the strategic plan of the City of Los Angeles’s Department of Recreation and Parks includes as a desired outcome, “Increase participation in youth sports, fitness and aquatics programs by removing barriers to enrollment, specifically in low-income communities of color” and uses the metric “Number of youth participants in sports and fitness programs” to evaluate the department’s performance in achieving that outcome.

### Specific and Relevant Targets

In addition to desired outcomes, Rec and Park has not established specific targets for its equity metrics hindering the department from definitively measuring its progress. Although, Rec and Park displays the metrics for the equity zone and the rest of the city, it does not indicate any performance targets for any of the metrics.

According to City Performance’s *Guide to Good Measures*, targets are the desired performance level of measures and provide context for audiences to understand how an organization is doing.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the National Performance Management Advisory Commission states targets are an essential part of performance management because they enable departments to measure their performance.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Los Angeles includes explicit targets for its parks and recreation equity metrics and connects those targets to success in achieving desired outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> National Performance Management Advisory Commission, *A Performance Management Framework*.

<sup>9</sup> City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, *Strategic Plan 2018-22*.

As illustrated in Exhibit 8, Los Angeles uses the metric “Number of parks in low-income areas connected to regional parks via free or subsidized transportation” to support the outcome of improving health of children in low-income families through greater park access. Los Angeles sets a target of 20 such parks by 2022 to determine whether it is meeting its outcome of increasing access for children in low-income families.

### Exhibit 8: Performance management example from City of Los Angeles Recreation and Parks’ strategic plan

**WALKABLE PARK ACCESS IN LOS ANGELES**  
Walkable park access is the ability to reach a publicly owned park within a half-mile walk on a road network, unobstructed by freeways, rivers, fences, and other obstacles. Currently, only 55% of Angelenos live within a half-mile of a park. As part of the Sustainable City pLAn, Mayor Eric Garcetti has established an aggressive goal of increasing walkable park access in Los Angeles to 65% of residents by 2025, and 75% of residents by 2035.

**OUTCOME 4**  
The health of young Angelenos, particularly children of low income families, is improved through greater access to regional parks.

**KEY METRIC**  
Number of parks in low income areas connected to regional parks via free or subsidized transportation

**TARGET**  
20 by 2022

Source: City of Los Angeles, Recreation and Parks, Strategic Plan 2018-2022

Rec and Park indicated it hesitated to set targets for its metrics because of the difficulty in determining quantitative targets that would reflect the historical and systematic disadvantages faced by equity zone communities. Although this may be true, the lack of targets for Rec and Park’s equity metrics prevents the public and the department from identifying whether measurable progress is being made—which is a purpose of any performance measure—and where deficiencies may exist in park equity.

### Data-Driven Analysis and Decision-Making

As discussed in Finding 1.1, Rec and Park’s equity metrics are insufficient for measuring or analyzing the distribution of park resources and services to specific neighborhoods in the equity zone. Also, although the department measures and compares the distribution of resources to the equity zone against the resources provided to the non-equity zone and to San Francisco as a whole, it does not address the results or implications of the metrics in any publicly available documents. For example, the department does not describe if or how it uses its equity metrics to inform its decision-making or strategy development in either its commission reports, or its strategic, operational, or capital expenditure plans issued from 2016 through 2019.

Leading practices emphasize that data analysis requires the reporting organization to answer why a given result was produced and how a result could be improved.<sup>10</sup> These practices also highlight the need to evaluate metric results to make data-driven decisions about new strategies.<sup>11</sup>

Los Angeles reports that it employs this element in its park and recreation performance management processes. Exhibit 8 shows information from a recent Los Angeles strategic plan that includes an analysis of park access data, which determined that some communities lack walking access to a park. This analysis is connected to the outcome Los Angeles identified to address this need and the metric it used to determine success. This analysis provides context and transparency for why Los Angeles selected this metric and sets the stage for future analyses to evaluate its progress toward the target.

Rec and Park considers the equity zone designation as a factor when prioritizing funding and resourcing decisions, such as in its capital expenditure plan for fiscal year 2019-20 and its plans for spending general obligation bond funds. However, neither the strategic plan nor the staff reports to the Commission contain an analysis that engages with the metric results data to provide context for the public on the department's progress, why a specific result occurred, or how the department is using the equity metric data to inform its resource decisions. Thus, the department deprives itself of an opportunity to evaluate its progress, develop new strategies, and transparently communicate key information about its decisions.

### **Continuous Improvement and Re-Evaluation**

Rec and Park does not have a formal process for re-evaluating or improving its equity metrics and analysis. Neither the department's staff reports to the Commission nor its strategic plans from 2017 through 2019 include any trend analyses. In the fiscal year 2018-19 staff report to the Commission, the department states that it has discussed improvement and expansion the metrics with the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Advisory Committee, but neither the contents nor results of these discussions are stated.

Leading practices suggest that, as new data becomes available, desired outcomes, metrics, and performance targets be re-evaluated periodically to determine whether they are still relevant and effective.<sup>12</sup> The Charter requires that Rec and Park staff update the Commission on the strategic plan every two years, which is an interval that could give Rec and Park staff more time to collect data and conduct an analysis. Also, Los Angeles includes in its strategic plan commitments to periodically review its metrics to continuously improve its performance management of park equity.

Rec and Park expressed that instead of a structured process, employees have internalized the concept of equity during the course of their work. For instance, the department indicated it tied strategic plan objectives, including those related to equity, to employees' appraisals and evaluations. However, the department could better identify strengths and weaknesses, set measurable targets, communicate its work on equity to key stakeholders, and make data-driven decisions by adopting a more thorough and formalized process for managing its performance related to park equity.

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<sup>10</sup> National Performance Management Advisory Commission, *A Performance Management Framework*.

<sup>11</sup> City Performance, *Guide to Good Measures*.

<sup>12</sup> National Performance Management Advisory Commission, *A Performance Management Framework*.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Recreation and Park Department should:

2. Measure and analyze park equity data at a neighborhood level, such as by adopting City Performance's equity analysis dashboard, to identify deficiencies in its resource distribution to communities in the equity zone. This will further inform the department's decision-making and development of mitigating strategies related to park equity.
3. Develop a formalized process for managing its performance related to park equity that, at a minimum, includes leading practices related to stating desired outcomes.

# Appendix

## Department Response



London Breed, Mayor  
Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager

September 24, 2021

Mark delaRosa  
Director of Audits  
Office of the Controller  
City Hall, rm 316  
One Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, Ca 94102

Dear Mr. delaRosa,

We thank you for the careful review and evaluation of our compliance with the Charter's planning and reporting requirements and your assessment of the Department's progress in analyzing how equitably it distributes resources among San Francisco's neighborhoods. The findings of your audit have already informed and guided a refinement to our data methodology and strengthened the structure of our equity measurement tool.

Even more important than measurement, however, are the everyday actions, initiatives, and projects undertaken by the department to ensure all San Franciscans have access to high quality parks and recreation. No matter your zip code, language at home, income, ability, gender, race, or status, our staff work to provide everyone in our diverse community with connection to play, nature, and each other.

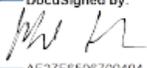
- Of the \$237 million allocated to parks in the 2020 Health and Recovery Bond, more than 74% is allocated to equity zone park sites and [facilities](#);
- Our [Requity](#) program provides hyper local, culturally relevant outdoor experiences and connection to play for some of our communities' most isolated members: kids in the juvenile justice system, folks living in federal housing projects, and homeless families living in [shelters](#);
- Recreation program catalogues are printed quarterly in three languages beyond English to reach immigrant [neighbors](#);
- Adaptive and inclusive recreation allows full participation for differently abled bodies and [minds](#);
- Increasing participation of girls in sports and athletics drives enhances their later [success](#);
- Mobile Play visits every equity zone neighborhood twice a year, bringing new experiences and challenges to kids; and,
- Scholarships ensure access to economically disadvantaged families

Before the audit issuance, we have already implemented all three recommendations as directed. A procedure for record-keeping is in place, we've improved the methodology for equity analysis, and metrics will match best practice when they go before Commission next month. With these changes, our measurement of equitable allocation will be refined and more precise.

28 | Rec and Park Should Improve Its Equity Measurement Tool to Better Identify High-Needs Neighborhoods

As we enter the fifth year of Strategic Planning, our collaboration on this audit provides the next level of improvement to measurement of equity, and we shall continue nurturing, supporting, and enriching the communities we serve.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:  
  
AE27E6596709494  
**Phil Ginsburg**  
General Manager

## Recommendations and Responses

For each recommendation, the responsible agency should indicate in the column labeled Agency Response whether it concurs, does not concur, or partially concurs and provide a brief explanation. If it concurs with the recommendation, it should indicate the expected implementation date and implementation plan. If the responsible agency does not concur or partially concurs, it should provide an explanation and an alternate plan of action to address the identified issue.

Recommendation	Agency Response	CSA Use Only Status Determination*
The Recreation and Park Department should:		
1. Comply with all Charter requirements related to its strategic planning and reporting measures, including maintaining adequate documentation to demonstrate the department’s compliance.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Do Not Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Concur The Department agrees and a formal process for issuing and documenting distribution is already in place.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open <input type="checkbox"/> Closed <input type="checkbox"/> Contested
2. Measure and analyze park equity data at a neighborhood level, such as by adopting City Performance’s equity analysis dashboard, to identify deficiencies in its resource distribution to communities in the equity zone. This will further inform the department’s decision-making and development of mitigating strategies related to park equity.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Do Not Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Concur This recommendation will be implemented with the FY21 Equity Analysis and Metrics going to the Rec and Park Commission for approval in October 2021.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open <input type="checkbox"/> Closed <input type="checkbox"/> Contested
3. Develop a formalized process for managing its performance related to park equity that, at a minimum, includes leading practices related to stating desired outcomes.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Do Not Concur <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Concur The FY21 metrics include a target to be measured against and a stated desired outcome.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open <input type="checkbox"/> Closed <input type="checkbox"/> Contested