

CULLY PARK COMMUNITY HEALTH INDICATORS PROJECT: Measuring what matters to create a healthier neighborhood

Executive Summary

About the Cully Park Community Health Indicators Project

The indicators project grew out of an effort to build a park on top of a former landfill in a neighborhood with few safe, outdoor spaces for children to play. Residents in the Cully neighborhood of northeast Portland wanted a place in their neighborhood where they could gather, recreate and connect to each other and nature. The project engaged state and local government agencies, nonprofits, community-based organizations and neighborhood residents. Verde and the Oregon Health Authority-Public Health Division (OHA-PHD) Brownfields Initiative co-facilitated the process. Verde is a Cully-based nonprofit organization that builds wealth in low-income communities through social enterprise, outreach and advocacy. The OHA-PHD Brownfields Initiative promotes community health by engaging community members in the redevelopment or reuse of vacant or contaminated properties in their neighborhoods.

What is an “indicator” and why is it important?

Indicators are used to measure whether positive or negative changes are happening. For example, are there sidewalks on the street in your neighborhood? Sidewalks are an indicator for how easy or hard it is for people to get around in their community. The more sidewalks there are, the more people get out and walk and the easier it is for all members of a community to get from place to place. Other indicators include adequate street lighting, safe intersections or safe public gathering places. Tracking these types of indicators will show whether a neighborhood is progressing toward its goal of being a healthier community. It also identifies where more investment and resources are needed in order to reach that goal. When communities identify indicators that address their needs, it increases their ability to advocate for and obtain those things.



Missing sidewalk.

Photo taken by Youth Participants of the Cully PHOTO project

Source: Cully PHOTO Project (Photography cHanneling yOuth To cOmmunity) funded by Portland State University

How were indicators chosen for this project?

A diverse group of Cully neighborhood residents called the Community Action Partners (CAP), met to discuss how redeveloping the former landfill into a park could improve the health of their community. The CAP identified community health interests, such as using the park to improve physical fitness, prevent or manage

health conditions such as obesity and diabetes, deal with stress and improve mental and spiritual health, prevent gang activity for youth, gather socially to build networks of support within the neighborhood, and provide a positive outlet for activities and play for families. The community health interests identified by the CAP led to the indicators selected for this project.

Verde and OHA-PHD also organized a technical group that provided maps, reports and data to the community to serve as resources for selecting indicators. The Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) included expertise and assistance from the health care industry, state and local public health, academia, equity-focused nonprofits, the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA), and Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R).

How were community health interests used to identify “indicators”?

A. Organizing community to identify health interests

The CAP met three times at the local elementary school to discuss their health interests and create a plan for tracking progress in the neighborhood. Participants reviewed maps of data that characterized current conditions in their neighborhood. For example, one map showed where parks and outdoor public spaces are currently located in the neighborhood. Other examples sparked discussions on diabetes rates in the Cully neighborhood as compared to nearby neighborhoods and the high percentage of children who live close to the future park site, as compared to other areas of the neighborhood. Through these meetings, more than 40 health-related indicators were identified and a plan was developed for tracking them.

The CAP meetings also served as a venue for intergenerational and multicultural interaction. Meals were shared, children played together, child care and translation services were provided and transportation was arranged when needed.



“Wordle” created from community list of Community-identified health interests

B. Prioritizing community health interests:

Through the CAP meetings and data-related assistance provided by the TAP, it became clear that data did not exist for many of the health interests the community identified. For example, the community’s interest in measuring “the feelings of well-being that residents have as the former landfill is transformed into natural habitat and park space,” has no known source of data available to use for tracking its progress. This type of data collection would require coordination, funding and an organized effort to develop and distribute neighborhood level surveys, collect and quantify the results, and periodically redistribute the survey to track changes and measure progress. Therefore, The CAP decided to *document* all of the health interests, but prioritize those that: 1) were of greatest interest to the community, and 2) had existing data. The following is a list of community-identified health interests that met these two criteria:

Priority community health interests identified by community members:

1. More outdoor community gathering spaces (including a kiosk for sharing information).
2. More outdoor places for children to play.
3. Feeling safe from crime, gang activity and in general in the neighborhood.
4. Getting to the park safely, including improved sidewalks, bike lanes, traffic calming measures and street lighting between schools, homes and the park.
5. Safe restrooms to use while at the park (and potentially along the way to the park).
6. Programming for children and the community, including Portland’s free summer meals program for low-income youth.
7. Culturally-relevant arts, crafts, activities and programming.
8. Activities that promote intergenerational interactions.
9. Places to connect to nature for spirituality, celebrations and community events.



Grass Dance, Cully Park Tribal Blessing Ceremony. Source: Saria Dy

C. Selecting indicators to track progress in health interests

The following pages of this handout include a brief description of the indicators selected and a baseline score or rank for each indicator. In general, it is considered best practice to follow up on indicators by collecting new data every 2–5 years. These indicators will help to drive actions within the community and by partner agencies and organizations looking to promote health through the park’s development. Some of the health interests the community identified could not be ranked or scored, because they will be simply “met” or “unmet” after actions are taken. For example, once a restroom is built and opens for use the indicator would be reported as “met.” However, the community still might consider monitoring conditions like vandalism, illegal use or cleanliness of the bathroom facilities to assess safety.

(Baseline) Cully Park Community Health Indicators: What they mean for health

Tracking these indicators will help show if conditions in the neighborhood are improving, worsening or staying the same.

Indicator:	Rank or Score
Park and natural areas proximity: Parks and natural areas serve as informal gathering places and provide opportunities for the entire community to be physically active. Time spent in parks and nature promotes healthy coping with mental stress, encourages brain development and fosters environmental stewardship.	44 (out of 100)
People visiting a park near their home at least once a month in the past 12 months: If parks are too far away, difficult to get to or are unsafe, residents are less likely to visit them. The more people visit parks near their home, the more they will benefit from them.	55%

Number of publicly accessible outdoor community spaces: The number and variety of outdoor community spaces available to all residents influences physical activity and the ability to socialize with neighbors outdoors. In addition, opportunities to grow nutritious food and connect with nature provide mental, physical and spiritual health benefits.	8
Percent who feel safe walking alone in parks <u>during the day</u>: There is a direct relationship between safe parks and their use. If parks feel unsafe they are used less often by communities. Feeling unsafe can also create stress, anxiety and fear, which negatively impacts health.	81%
Percent who feel safe walking alone in parks <u>at night</u>: Like the indicator measuring perceived safety during the day, this indicator measures whether residents feel safe at night. Fear of crime is associated with poorer mental health, reduced physical functioning and lower quality of life.	30%
Walkability (sidewalk density): Neighborhoods that are more walkable are associated with increased physical activity, increased social capital and improved mental health. Walkability is greatly improved by sidewalks, especially for children, families, the elderly and the disabled. Other walkability features that improve safety and security include community-scale lighting, safe pedestrian street crossings and traffic-calming approaches such as decreasing speed limits and adding speed bumps.	1.8 (out of 5)
Safe restrooms: Amenities like safe restrooms encourage the use of parks and are especially important for families with young children and adults of all ages with incontinence conditions.	Unmet
Culturally-relevant programming: The Cully Park neighborhood is one of Portland’s most diverse communities. Ensuring relevant activities at the park appeal to and honor the diversity of cultures and communities living nearby the park. The CAP identified many ways this improves community health, including building self-esteem, fostering a sense of self- and community-identity, fostering respect for culturally-diverse values through multi-cultural learning, and creating opportunities for youth to engage in activities that allow them to maintain a cultural connection to the natural world.	Unmet
Intergenerational activities and events: Fostering relationships between generations enables the sharing of wisdom, cultural traditions and values, and builds a sense of personal and societal identity. Connecting older and younger generations helps to alleviate loneliness, promotes friendships between older and younger people, improves tolerance of generational differences, and improves social connectedness in the neighborhood	Unmet
Free summer meals program at Cully Park: Many factors limit children’s access to nutritious meals during the summer. When school is not in session, free meal programs help to ensure that children who need it can access at least one nutritious meal a day. This program can help to increase household food security, improve nutritional status for children who need it and expand social interactions that build community.	Unmet
Using the park for community celebrations and social gatherings: Using the park for important celebrations and gatherings, both large and small (graduation parties, quinceaneras, wedding receptions, etc.) Promotes public health and social resilience. Using public spaces for community building improves social cohesion and the feeling of connectedness within and between neighbors. Social cohesion is an important element for building a healthy community.	Unmet



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For more information about this report, please contact EHAP at ehap.info@state.or.us or call 1-877-290-6767.

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