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changing the story about park and green space equity

a messaging guide for advocates

berkeley media studies group

acknowledgments

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- California Indian Museum and Cultural Center reeducates the public about and preserves California Indian history and cultures.
- Central Texas Interfaith is a coalition of congregations, public schools, and unions working together to address public issues that affect the well-being of families and neighborhoods within their community.
- Make the Road Nevada builds power and mobilizes immigrant communities in Nevada on the issues that impact them the most — including environmental issues.
- South Bronx Unite is a nonprofit organization dedicated to uplifting their community to improve and protect the social, environmental, and economic future in New York.
- The Conscious Connect redevelops underutilized spaces for the purpose of education, culture, and health.
- The Water Collaborative is network dedicated to water and sustainability in New Orleans that has supported community-led efforts to improve water infrastructure in the city.

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introduction

Transforming the narrative about park and green space equity

Take a deep breath, and imagine: outdoor space that belongs to everyone, where all people — no matter their race or income — can breathe freely and safely. Communities across the country are working toward that vision, building their power to literally transform the landscape and ensure that the distribution of parks and green space is equitable, that structures are in place so they remain so, and that community members are the ones leading this work.

How we talk about parks and green spaces can help — or hinder — that progress. To bring park equity to scale, we need to center narratives led by those who are rooted in communities where park inequities are profound. But what is the dominant narrative about parks and green space? And how different is that dominant narrative from the narrative we want to see?

Currently, dominant narratives minimize the importance of parks and green space for health and well-being. As we will see, while people think that parks are "universally good" and "nice to have," they do not consider them essential.[1] Furthermore, when people think of the word "park," grass and vegetation come to mind — but not people or wildlife.[2] When people's conceptualizations of parks and green spaces are "empty" of people and wildlife, it is harder for them to see the connection and value of parks to the well-being of individuals and communities — and why park and green space equity matters.

In short, we need a new narrative: one that centers community and connects park and green space to health, joy, and liberation.

It won't be enough to counter these harmful narratives merely by insisting that parks and green space are essential because, oddly enough, simply rebutting an argument can reinforce it if the language does not evoke a different understanding of the problem. To transform the dominant narrative, communities need to tell their own stories, clearly connect their solutions to their values, and deliver those messages with confidence in many different venues.

The narrative should be flexible so that people coming from different issue areas can see themselves in the story of park equity, elevate and articulate the intersections with their work, and support each other in building power and achieving the necessary changes to bring about park and green space equity. Our new narrative must also adapt to hold a number of policy solutions that cross different issue areas so that advocates can use it to respond to immediate needs and to build support for our long-term vision. In other words, this new narrative will need to encompass the joy of the world we want to see, not just the harms we need to rectify in the short term.

That's what this guide is for. In this resource, you will find frames, language, and communication tools that racial justice and public health advocates can use to shape a new narrative that helps decision-makers see park equity as the result of an inclusive process that can bring more green space into communities, along with the joy and liberation that parks and green space promise. To construct this tool, Berkeley Media Studies Group (BMSG) used an iterative, inclusive process that centers the experiences of those working to advance park equity, health equity, and racial justice — advocates and organizers who know that green space equity happens when processes are in place that recognize the right of residents to determine how land is used, and that mechanisms exist to make those decisions lasting and fair.

As part of this work, BMSG participated in the P3 (People, Parks, and Power) initiative, which leverages community power-building in different locales around the country to transform how decisions are made about parks and green spaces. Throughout every phase of our analysis, we listened closely to P3 participants as they worked to build power to create park and green space equity, putting into practice Prevention Institute's three-part framework of procedural, distributional, and structural equity.

How we wrote this guide

BMSG's message guides, known as Yellow Books, are comprehensive guides, each based on research and deep listening, that provide advocates with consistent, strong messages, taking into account the specific policy context in which the message will be heard, the target audience, the messenger who will deliver the message, and the media context (such as in pitching stories to reporters or answering difficult questions from decision-makers). We call them Yellow Books because they are modeled after an early guide in tobacco control, known as the Yellow Book, that helped the field understand the importance of framing and media advocacy. Many of the concepts we apply to this park equity yellow book are adapted from BMSG's prior work, which includes message guides on sexual violence, assault, and harassment;[3] early care and education;[4] tobacco;[5] and preventing gun violence and firearm suicide.[6]

We used multiple research methods, including news analysis, textual analysis, and in-depth interviews and listening sessions to investigate how problems and solutions about parks and green space are discussed, including who is part of the story about park equity and who is missing. We also partnered with Real Language, a linguistics strategy firm, to refine our message recommendations and explore what metaphors could help make communication around parks and green space relatable, powerful, and effective. We found that a key metaphor — breathing — brings together elements that connect disparate local policy actions and help advance a more unified narrative about parks and green spaces that centers equity and liberation.

Unless otherwise specified, in this guide, "we" refers to a collective "we" — all of us who are involved in advancing park and green space equity whether we are community organizers on the ground, park and green space advocates, media public health researchers and advocates like ourselves, or decision-makers working to create equitable processes.

What do we mean by “parks and space equity?”

To be specific about what it takes to change processes, transform systems, and establish equity, we drew on Prevention Instituteôs green space equity framework.[7] That framework explains how advocates can intentionally change systemic barriers rooted in government policies and practices to establish equitable parks and green spaces. Prevention Institute identifies three types of equity: *procedural*, *distributional*, and *structural*. Each one addresses different questions, such as:

- **Who makes decisions about parks and green spaces (procedural equity)?** While doing research for this message guide, BMSG heard from advocates frustrated that discussions about green spaces were, ñmostly out the mouth of white people who were already connected to different developers and power.òProcedural equity seeks to remedy that problem by centering ñthe most powerful voices in the fights against environmental and climate injustices é the communities most directly affected.òIn other words, procedural equity hinges on processes to center ñthose communities, their leadership, and their prioritiesòto ensure that decision-making is equitable and engages the people most affected.[8]

- **Who benefits from parks and green space equity, and who experiences costs (distributional equity)?** Distributional equity is about location and amount: Where are parks, and who has access to them? Distributional equity is what many people think of when they think of equity in the context of green spaces. When BMSG studied how park and green spaces appeared in news coverage, for example, we learned that if park equity appeared at all, it was about the *distribution* of parks. News coverage rarely addressed other facets of equity, such as whether there was equitable decision-making around park and green space development.

- **How do parks and green spaces redress historical injustices and inequities (structural equity)?** Parks and green spaces represent opportunities to, as the Land Trust Alliance put it, "address inequities regarding access to land … [and ensure] the permanence of land conservation."[9] For example, many Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) residents have been wary of new green space developments in their communities because they are worried about gentrification: They want to live in neighborhoods lush with parks where their families can enjoy all the benefits to health and well-being, but they are worried that "improv[ing] the neighborhood by someone else's standards [would] push them out." A process rooted in structural equity would mean that BIPOC community members are fully included and their pride of place and belonging considered first in decision-making — and that improvements in their neighborhoods would not push them out.

In the Developing Strategy and Crafting your message sections of this guide, we provide examples of procedural, distributional, and structural equity from actual campaigns to illustrate what these concepts mean in real life and demonstrate how to talk about them in plain language.

in summary

This guide is a tool to help communities, organizers, and advocates build narrative power: the ability for a group to have its story be the story. Building narrative power is a long-term goal created in the present, campaign by campaign, organizer by organizer, community by community. We will know we have narrative power when our ideas, values, and norms about parks and green space are replicated, reproduced, and reified over decades.[10] Groups like the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center, which seeks to educate the public about and preserve California Indian history and cultures, for example, are building narrative power by retelling "California Indian history and culture from an Indian perspective."[11] The California Indian Museum and Cultural Center holds goals of fostering a "renaissance of California Indian culture" and "enshrining the leadership of California native people, as it establishes park and green space equity." This is just one example of building narrative power that will be reinforced by others as our voices get louder.

This kind of work is long-term. The good news is that the change we are seeking today sets us up for the next issue we want to win and the narratives that will help us get there. As each campaign or policy action unfolds, the story we tell about park and green space equity will become the story that dominates the narrative. Let's get started.

developing strategy

Naturally this communication guide, like any, will have a lot to say about messages. But underlying any strategic message about green space and park equity is the reason we want a message in the first place: We want a world where every community can breathe freely and enjoy parks and green space. That means that before crafting a message, you need to have an **overall strategy** that specifies the immediate issue you want to address, clarifies the solution that you will advocate for, identifies who has the power to make the change, and names the allies who will help make your case.

What's our entry point?

There are many compelling answers to the question "what needs to happen to make parks and green spaces equitable, and why does it matter?" Just as people might enter a park for different reasons, advocates have many different motivations for seeking park and green space equity, including health concerns, violence prevention, the mitigation of climate breakdown,[12] or establishing housing stability or community cohesion. These starting points may be interconnected: The same group might champion park and green space equity because its members are committed to conservation for its own sake and because they value the health benefits and community connections a park can foster. In short, parks and green space can be linked to many other efforts to create and maintain communities that transform the legacies of slavery and colonialism and ensure equity, justice, and liberation for everyone.

Table 1: Examples of different entry points to park and green space equity.

Parks and green spaces affect ...	because …
Health	Living within walking distance of parks and open spaces encourages physical activity (especially for children), and activity helps to lower rates of cardiovascular,[13] respiratory,[14] and other diet-related diseases like diabetes. Abundant research also shows that access to parks and green space can improve population health and well-being by reducing teen pregnancy,[15] strengthening food security,[16,17] and improving mental health[18–20] and stress.
Violence	Some advocates have characterized the environmental degradation, like air pollution, that happens in highly industrialized places without parks and green space as “slow violence” because while its harms take longer to accumulate in the body, they can still cause death, just like the “fast violence” of firearms.[18,21–24] The good news is that there is strong evidence that “greening” vacant or degraded areas in neighborhoods reduces both the perception of violence and actual crimes, including gun violence[18] and intimate partner violence.[25] Some communities are working to reduce violence and drug use in parks to reclaim these spaces and all the benefits they bring for the community. For example, Eugenia South, vice chair for inclusion, diversity, and equity in the Department of Emergency Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, in her op-ed "If Black lives really matter we must invest in Black neighborhoods," writes about how we can reduce urban gun violence by investing in green spaces and makes the connection to mental and physical health benefits that could help prevent conditions that lead to gun violence. This issue is personal to her as a doctor who has performed thoracotomies, a procedure to stop the bleeding from a bullet.

Table 1: Examples of different entry points to park and green space equity.

Parks and green spaces affect ...	because ...
Community cohesion	Parks and green space foster a sense of community[26] by providing a physical space where people can connect, celebrate together, and foster community pride. Locally targeted hiring practices — as when parks and green spaces are developed or renovated and jobs go to local residents — can contribute to the sense of connection, community pride, and stewardship.[27]
Climate breakdown	Climate change may be the ultimate health issue since it affects people and the planet as a whole; the extreme heat threatening communities with few parks or trees is just one example. Parks and green spaces are a powerful tool in the fight against climate breakdown. As American Forest President Jad Daley said at the launch of the Detroit Tree Equity Partnership, "The greatest health threat from climate change is extreme heat, and trees are our No. 1 defense against extreme heat … They're also a powerful defense against air pollution; they're even important for our mental health."
Housing	Parks and green spaces can affect decision-making about and advocacy for safe, stable housing. For example, the Chainbreaker Collective in Sante Fe, New Mexico, was initially working to improve housing but focused its efforts on creating a community land trust to ensure that the development on the city-owned property was in the best interest of the neighborhood and created new opportunities. In this case, new possibilities for the community took the form of housing options *and* job opportunities *and* green spaces.[28]

Table 1: Examples of different entry points to park and green space equity.

Parks and green spaces affect ...	because ...
Food sovereignty	Accessible, equitable green spaces can be places to reclaim traditional food practices and stabilize community food sources. For example, the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center educates park and forest service agencies about Native Americans' land stewardship practices so they can understand why California Indians should have the right to freely produce and harvest culturally vital foods and resources. The Museum increases Native visibility and builds power so that communities can fully access lands currently controlled by local and federal governments. Their work helps restore and maintain tribal knowledge and practices, including food sovereignty.[28]
Land sovereignty	Land sovereignty is a key issue affecting Native communities — an issue that hinges on questions about the use of developed and undeveloped green space. Many tribes are working toward rematriation of territory around the country, and some policymakers have realized that they will not be able to achieve their environmental goals without the support, knowledge, and partnership of Indigenous and Tribal communities.[29] Building those relationships is a central component of much park and green space equity work. For example, the Lower Sioux Indian Community had been trying to reclaim their land for over two decades, and, in February 2021, the state of Minnesota returned more than 100 acres of land along the Minnesota River. The tribes are now able to manage, restore, and protect the land. The historical transfer marks the beginning of deeper conversations around returning sacred land back to Tribal control and management.[30]

Whatever our starting point, knowing what we want to change and why we want to change it, from broad structural transformation to incremental policy shifts, is the anchor for changing the narrative about parks and green space and, even more importantly, for building narrative power as we do the work.

What's our policy approach?

Naming the changes we want to see so parks and green spaces are fairly distributed, and subject to equitable decision-making processes, is the foundation of changing narratives about parks and green space. The change can be big and visionary about the world we want to see and, at times, narrow and precise about the immediate next step. Different communities are pursuing green space equity in different ways (see Table 2). Some are working on equitable land use policies, anti-displacement measures, documenting needs and inequities, or instituting public finance measures for park improvement. Others are working toward prioritizing equity internally through organizational policies like increasing community engagement in decision-making. Ultimately, how each community will arrive at their change will differ depending on the circumstances and goals, so *how* we achieve will likely be a combination of organizing and advocacy to pressure decision-makers to enact equitable policies.

Table 2: Approaches for achieving park and green space equity

Approach	Specific policy actions and examples
Establishing community land trusts	• Statutes to limit corporate farming, making farmland more accessible to workers who are seeking a pathway to farm ownership. • Community land trusts can offer the right of first refusal for publicly owned lands for nonprofit developers.
Implementing park dedication fees	• Public financing (e.g., sales or parcel taxes and bonds at the local or state level) or developer impact fees that generate revenue specifically dedicated to reversing green space inequities. • Park dedication fees and/or zoning incentives to ensure equitable access to public green space, even if private developers acquire vacant areas.

Table 2: Approaches for achieving park and green space equity

Approach	Specific policy actions and examples
Increasing community engagement and oversight	• Legislative or administrative policies and ordinances requiring community engagement for park development or funding for community engagement in high-need communities. • Policing reduction policies in parks, paired with advancements to community-led public safety systems. • Organizational hiring practices to increase representation from historically underrepresented groups. • Joint use policies or formal agreements (usually between two separate government entities, such as a school and city) to share public property for greened school yards and athletic facilities.
Codifications of anti-displacement provisions	• Anti-displacement provisions within broader green space equity policies, or public finance measures that require or incentivize anti-displacement strategies alongside green space equity initiatives. • Research requirements that require participatory processes to identify park needs including periodic updates to track progress and account for potential gentrification and displacement.
Investment in park maintenance and stewardship	• Water infrastructure improvements, such as upgrading aging water facilities or improving irrigation systems. • Reseeding practices that improve conditions, sustainability, and longevity of green spaces. • Administration policies that codify required staff training for park personnel regarding Indigenous cultural gathering practices and Native food and land sovereignty.
Increased financing	• Public financing for green infrastructure and nature-based approaches to counteract the effects of climate change, including extreme heat and flooding.

Local organizers have surfaced a variety of approaches for achieving park and green space equity. We will draw on this list of a few of them to provide concrete examples for the strategy and message recommendations we provide later in this guide.

What do we need to know?

Whatever policy approach we take, some basic questions can help us refine our overall strategy by defining what we want to happen and specifying what needs to happen in the near term to achieve that. These questions will influence all the subsequent decisions about messages and other communication tactics and will help connect incremental policy changes to our long-term vision for parks and green spaces that invite and engage every community.

We can establish our overall strategy by asking five questions:

What is the problem?

Park and green space inequities are big problems with deep roots. Groups seeking to advance solutions and change narratives about park and green space equity will need to name the precise part of the problem they are trying to address in their current campaign. It can be challenging to think about how to prioritize what to work on first, but remember:

You can't be comprehensive and strategic at the same time.

In other words, think big, but remember that even the most transformative changes tend to happen one step at a time. While many solutions can make a message appealing to many people, when there are too many different options at the same time, your audience might become torn about what solutions to prioritize — or worse, they might choose something you would not put at the top of your list.

What is the solution?

In campaigns, solutions must match the specific part of the problem the campaign is addressing, which will likely be narrower than the overall transformative change we want to see. That's okay: As we build power over time, the incremental changes will combine to transform the way parks and green spaces are created, distributed, and sustained.

Who has the power to make change?

The answer to this question might change over time, as we make progress and move to our next goal. Remember, too, that one person might have the power to make change, or it might be a committee or other group.

Who are our partners?

Creating and maintaining equitable parks and green spaces can intersect with many other issues, each of which presents an opportunity to identify allies. And as we consider who our allies are, we can also ask equity-rooted questions like:

- Whose perspectives need to be part of the strategy from the beginning?
- Whose voices are usually not part of the conversation we want to have? Do they need to be? How can we include them?
- How can we elevate the voices of people most affected by the lack of thriving parks and green space, including those who have been left out of the conversation?

What will it take to influence those who have the powe to make change?

Some groups will go directly to their audience one-on-one, some will use mass media, and many will combine different approaches to reach their audience.

Example: The Water Collaborative's overall strategy

In a campaign to address flooding in New Orleans, The Water Collaborative — a network dedicated to water and sustainability — urged the city to address many of the challenges New Orleans faces by creating steady funding for infrastructure upgrades, reforestation, and new parks while ensuring transparency and equitable implementation. Specifically, The Water Collaborative's overall strategy (see Table 3) focused on imposing a stormwater fee (a fee that real estate owners pay based on the amount of impervious surface on their property) and a new stormwater management utility.

Table 3: Overall strategy used by The Water Collaborative

What is the problem?	New Orleans is at high risk of flooding because of outdated and inefficient stormwater management systems. Decades of water mismanagement have resulted in "a grossly under-maintained drainage system with insufficient new infrastructure to serve emerging needs"[31] that, in turn, makes the people living there vulnerable to the effects of climate change.
What is your solution?	The city council should create a ballot measure for the public to approve a stormwater fee that would create a revenue stream to pay for improvements in infrastructure for draining water out of the city after storms.
Who has the power to make change?	Residents organized by The Water Collaborative can shape the ordinance details and describe the conditions they want. The New Orleans City Council has the power to put the ordinance on the ballot (starting with one champion on the council), and, ultimately, the voters in New Orleans have the power to pass the ordinance.
Who are partners?	The Water Collaborative worked closely with its partners WaterNow Alliance and the AdvancingCities coalition, as well as a city council member and public advisory group members.
What will it take to influence those with the power to make change?	The Water Collaborative held community workshops, formed a steering committee and public advisory group, held focus groups and town hall meetings, garnered news media coverage, and canvassed.

The Water Collaborative's overall strategy incorporated all three dimensions of equity.

The Collaborative brought "resident voices to the forefront"[32] ***(procedural equity)*** through deep community listening and education with residents: a 10-part workshop series to educate community members, focus groups, canvassing, town hall meetings, public events including panel discussions, and a press event. The Collaborative then presented a polished policy package that embedded ongoing community oversight via the creation of an advisory committee and a website to keep the public informed about how revenue will be managed.

The Collaborative considered different options for increasing revenue but decided to advocate for a fee like those used in Baltimore and Philadelphia, since it would be more equitable than raising property taxes. The fee would apply to all properties, including tax-exempt business properties like the Superdome, and would ensure that low-income homeowners would not foot the whole bill ***(distributional equity)***.

The outcome they sought would address long-term inequities ***(structural equity)*** by protecting New Orleans' "most vulnerable residents through affordability and infrastructure investments"[32] and establishing governance changes. Additionally, if New Orleans abides by The Water Collaborative's recommendations, the city would enable "restorative justice by ameliorating the unequal burden residents and taxable businesses have borne to pay for drainage in New Orleans."[32]

in summary

Messages will be delivered in political and cultural contexts that affect how people hear and receive them, so articulating your overall strategy will enable you to more precisely determine the audience you want to in luence. Your communication strategy is always illed with moving parts developed from strategy (which changes), delivered by messengers (who change) to a target audience (which might also change) against a political or cultural backdrop (which is also constantly changing).

Ultimately, overall strategy questions apply to campaigns on the ground in specific places, sometimes local and sometimes regional or national. We can also use these questions to help us think strategically about building a robust infrastructure for changing the narrative on parks and green space across campaigns by building narrative power.[10]

understanding narratives about green spaces and parks

Even the most thoughtfully crafted strategy — or message — won't inform people, let alone accelerate change, unless it reaches your audience. Building narrative power is a complex process that involves significant and sustained work across many sectors and institutions.

One place where stories are shared — and narratives are reinforced — is news coverage.

Why use the news?

News about parks and green spaces represents only one part of our shared narrative, but it's an important part. News coverage remains a primary source of information for policymakers, a key audience in the movement to build and maintain equitable parks and green spaces.

Other media strategies, including digital and social media, can also be powerful tools for getting your message about park and green space equity to both community members and decision-makers. For example, Springfield nonprofit The Conscious Connect — an organization that redevelops underutilized spaces for the purpose of education, culture, and health — knows that the demographic they want to reach (25-34-year-olds) uses Facebook, so they use the platform to share upcoming events with their community, request support, uplift their allies, and showcase their media coverage. Similarly, Las Vegas nonprofit Make the Road Nevada — known in the community for building the power of Latinx and working-class people of color — uses the news in conjunction with social media tactics to create multiple points of contact for engagement with different audiences. They use Instagram to share community resources, highlight authentic voices in their community, and activate the community on park and green space issues they are working on in the moment.

As the work of Make the Road Nevada illustrates, using traditional media does not have to be an "either-or" decision. Advocates can use a combination of media types to reach their intended audiences. To guide this decision, consider your overall strategy and ask: Is news media the best way to reach our audience? If yes, see the section on Getting Attention (Page 46). If not, ask yourself: What might work better? In some situations — for instance, delivering remarks at a meeting — base-building, or organizing an email campaign may be more effective. Whichever direction you choose, think about how you will know when you've been successful — or when you need to change course.

Whether or not this moment in your strategy calls for getting news attention, news will often be the starting point for how audiences understand equity issues relating to parks and green space. Therefore, we describe in this section the gaps in news coverage we have found in our research — and how you can use that information to anticipate potential roadblocks, plan for how to correct misinformation, and identify strategic communication opportunities.

A word about news and story frames

Stories are important because together they add up to larger narratives that become the basis for how people understand issues. When groups have narrative power, they have "the ability to make the foundation[al] stories we tell — the stories about how things work, our sense of history, who and what matters, and our relationship to one another and the planet — the main stories people use to make sense of the world over time."[10]

Stories can be told — or "framed" — from different perspectives that emphasize some points of view and ignore others. Framing influences how we interpret information. For example, stories focused on the tragedies or triumphs of specific people emphasize personal responsibility, which can make it harder to see why structural and systemic solutions are important (at BMSG, we think of these as "portrait" stories). Conversely, stories that include more context can help audiences see the role government, industry, or community can play in solving problems (we call these "landscape" stories). Ultimately, we want to see stories where portraits are embedded within landscapes so the context for our solutions is clear.

At BMSG, we pay close attention to how news stories are framed because news affects not only what issues policymakers are thinking about, but also *how* they think about those issues — for example, which solutions are elevated or ignored, or whose perspectives are seen as legitimate.

What do audiences think about parks, equity, and green space?

From research, we know that people tend to think that parks are "universally good" and *"nice to have," but not essential*.[1] That narrative could reinforce the idea that there are not enough resources to invest in everything communities need to thrive. That mindset, in turn, can make it harder to call on the government to repair past harms and change policies to prevent future inequities, and easier for those who oppose expending resources to make their case against investing in parks and green space.

We also know that when people think of the word "park," they tend to think of trees, vegetation, grass, benches, walking paths, picnic areas, playgrounds, and gazebos — but not about people.[2] When people aren't part of the story of green space and why it matters, it becomes harder to show how important parks are to the well-being of individuals and communities. As a representative from Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE) observed during an interview, "Conservation groups have struggled to incorporate racial and economic equity in their work, including the mindset shift away from viewing people and green spaces as separate." To address this problem, CAUSE focuses on "break[ing] the divide between conserving land and working it through land trusts and agricultural cooperatives that steward the land as caretakers that sustain people and communities."

What does the news say about parks, green space, and equity issues?

How do issues of park and green space equity appear in the news? To find out, BMSG researchers examined coverage to learn whose voices were included in stories about parks and green space equity, which solutions appeared, and how parks — and why they matter — were characterized (to learn about our methods, see the Appendix). In general, we found that:

Racial equity appeared frequently in the news, but stories rarely mentioned the root causes of the inequities described.

Many news stories referenced examples of systemic racism, such as racial disparities in the distribution of parks[33] or disparate health outcomes related to climate change.[34] Economic equity issues were also regularly named, for example, in articles about how green space inequities affect issues like electric bills to cool homes in areas with higher temperatures.[35] Further, some articles broadly described inequities affecting communities of color and low-income communities without necessarily distinguishing between the two: A typical quote came from the president and CEO of the Trust for Public Land, who discussed the impacts of the climate crisis, noting, “Areas with the least amount of park space, namely communities of color and low-income neighborhoods, suffer the most.”[36]

Despite the focus on inequities, articles rarely mentioned the systemic issues at the root of these inequities, like white supremacy or colonialism. Particularly notable was the absence of news discussion about Native American experiences with land and green space. A rare example came from a story that quoted an author who observed “American Indians lived here and had a very particular relationship with the outdoors. Then people of European descent came over … they segregated things, even the outdoors. We’re still coming out of that.”[37]

Solutions focused on addressing the distribution of parks and green spaces regularly appeared in the news.

Research tells us that news about many issues tends to focus on describing problems, rather than on presenting solutions.[38,39] News about park and green space equity is unusual in that when articles appeared, solutions were part of the story (92% of relevant articles). Moreover, many articles explicitly named the role and responsibility of government in enacting solutions, as when regional leaders and organizers called on state leaders to "bring equitable representation to [the state's] conservancy board."[40]

Solutions that appeared in the news most often addressed distributional equity, which relates to how the benefits, and costs, of parks are distributed. Typical examples included stories about efforts to build new playgrounds or expand tree canopies with tree-planting initiatives.[41] Occasionally, news stories focused on solutions rooted in structural equity, which addresses how parks and green spaces can redress historical inequities. For example, a story about a public finance measure to create funding for parks and recreation initiatives included a quote from the leader of the nonprofit Blackpackers, who affirmed, "It's not that Black people don't have the opportunity, it's that the opportunities have been different … It's why I'm glad we're focusing on an equity bill …. this is something systemic that goes back generations."[42]

Similarly, a rare story about procedural equity (which focuses on decision-making power) highlighted community involvement in developing a greened schoolyard. The article quoted a nonprofit representative who described how the organization "[spends] a year or more working with the neighborhood, working with students, working with the community to get their input on that playground … [so that hopefully] they will be involved in the care, stewardship, and protection over the long term."[43]

Speakers from local governments were often quoted, while community voices rarely appeared.

Many articles (58%) included speakers from local government, about half of whom were affiliated in some way with parks or green space, such as representatives of parks and recreation departments, parks commissioners, or urban foresters. Many of these speakers described plans and made the case for investments to support parks as infrastructure, as when the Long Beach parks commissioner called on city council to act: "We have almost a billion dollars of deferred maintenance in our parks system," he said. "We're asking the council to not just receive and file, but to receive and act."[44]

In contrast, representatives of community organizations, such as nonprofit leaders, were rarely quoted in the news (25% of articles). Other community residents (who did not have any organizational or professional affiliation) spoke in only one in five stories. When they did appear, community residents or nonprofit leaders shared their experiences (both good and bad) with parks, trees, and green spaces while evoking values like health, community, joy, and pride of place. For example, in an op-ed about a local government initiative to improve and upgrade local parks in Houston, one long-time community resident mused, "[The community will] love this park … they'll be proud of this. Not just the kids, but I think a lot of parents out here will be proud of it too."[45]

in summary

People interpret messages about parks and green spaces against the backdrop of what they already know. We know that, in general, people:

- Think parks and green spaces are nice, but not essential;
- Tend to think about green spaces as being divorced from the people who use them.

News stories about park and green space equity can shape what the public and policymakers believe about parks and the policies that surround them. We found that:

- News coverage regularly acknowledges government responsibility and solutions but fails to highlight solutions that address different dimensions of equity;
- News stories seldom depict the root causes that underlie inequities in parks and green spaces.

How might these frames influence your campaign work and how you engage with your audience? What will you want to build on, correct, or learn more about as you work to build your own messages and strategies to support the goal of equitable parks and green spaces in your community?

crafting your message

Whatever our overall strategy, and however media frames shape our audience's starting point, we'll need to consider our message strategy. A message strategy helps shape what is said — the message), who says it (messengers), and to whom (audiences). Both messengers and audiences may change over time, depending on where you are in your overall strategy.

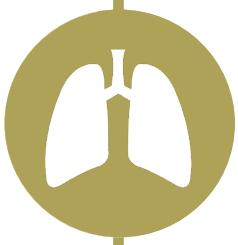
A word about messengers: Narratives have narrators, and building the narrators' message muscle is one way local groups can build power to shape how people understand parks and green space equity. That's why we at BMSG emphasize the importance of working with authentic voices, 46 people with direct experience in the issue.

This section reviews components of effective messages that can help audiences understand why parks and green spaces are a "need to have," not just a "nice to have," and illustrate the solutions that can help us achieve park and green space equity — including procedural, structural, and distributional equity. Based on our research (including in-depth conversations and interviews with equity advocates from around the country) and decades of experience supporting advocates in crafting and delivering strategic messages, we know that there are several core components to effective messages about park and green space equity.

How to create effective messages about park and green space equity

Evoke values

Values motivate and inspire others to take action. Though data can help people see the extent or gravity of a problem, people will mobilize and act based on the core values they hold deeply, not because of statistics. For example, advocates interested in mobilizing their community to fight for equitable green spaces might evoke values like public health, nature, stewardship, community connection, and even liberation. To be sure your message evokes values, check to see that it answers the question "Why does this matter?"



Use metaphors relating to breath or breathing

Metaphors help people understand complex ideas, and when metaphors are based on experiences we have in our bodies, they become easy to understand. BMSG partnered with Real Language, a linguistics strategy firm, to identify a metaphor that evokes the importance of park equity and can support messages that are both practical and aspirational.

After a deep analysis of the language around parks and green space, Real Language identified metaphors that evoke breathing as a way to make communication around park and green space equity relatable, powerful, and effective. The metaphor can connect to any audience because everybody breathes, and because it can be used in both a literal sense (as in "parks help us **breathe** fresher air and **exhale** our stress") and a metaphorical sense (as in "being kept out of decisions that affect our lives is **suffocating**"). Further, the breathing metaphor encompasses positive triggers (like exhale, breathe easier, breathe freely) and negative triggers (like stifle, suffocate, choke), and, as we will see in the sample messages, can be applied to solutions that address many dimensions of equity.

State the problem

It's easy to talk about problems because they are so visible and pressing, but they shouldn't dominate your message. It is impossible to be comprehensive and strategic at the same time, so don't name every data point that illustrates the magnitude of the challenge. Instead, include a concise problem statement that aligns with the solution you are working toward as part of your overall strategy. One aspect of the problem for messages about parks and green space equity will likely be inequities (rooted in decision-making power, distribution of benefits and costs, or structural impact) that need to be corrected.

Highlight solutions and show the equity pathway

As we know from our analysis of news about park and green space equity, solutions are at the forefront of the public conversation about this issue — so audiences may be receptive to learning more about your approach. Drawing on your overall strategy, keep your solution focused so the change you want to see is clear, and name the person, group, or entity that needs to act to make this change. The solution should explain how your approach advances equity to solve the problem.

Sample messages

Here we offer sample messages applied to example strategies that are inspired by the real-life work of advocates from around the country. Each sample message is based on the context of a briefly outlined overall strategy that specifies potential audiences and messengers. **Each sample message incorporates the breathing metaphor (in bold).** Adapt these sample messages — in whole or in part — to help your audience understand what is at stake and why we need all three dimensions of equity. Use your messages to help your audiences see that success is possible.

sample 1

Changing land use policy

Acknowledgment: This policy example is based on the work of South Bronx Unite, which created a community land trust that enabled them to transform the waterfront in Mott-Haven into green spaces accessible to the public.

Overall strategy: To transform a local waterfront into a series of public, interconnected green spaces where residents can gather.

Problem: Part of the neighborhood faces a significant imbalance in how land is distributed between industrial use and public access.

Solution: To confirm support from the city to use a community land trust to purchase and rezone areas for new green spaces near the waterfront.

Possible messengers: Advocacy and community groups, like South Bronx Unite, that are interested in using community land trusts to build new green spaces.

Possible audience: Local policymakers (city council members)

Possible communication channels: City council meeting, or an op-ed the day of the meeting to create pressure on city council members.

No matter where we come from, what we look like, or how much is in our wallets, we all want our families and our communities to have healthy and safe spaces where we can relax, **breathe deeply, and gather as a community so that our ideas can flow freely.** This waterfront can be that place. Green space and water access are vital to improving the local environment in our neighborhood, where our neighbors face high rates of asthma, infant mortality, and poor maternal health. Decades of discriminatory planning decisions and public policies that allowed polluters to have free reign are **suffocating** our community, **stifling our ability to simply breathe.** That history has left our section of the city with just one park for 60,000 residents — we have some of the lowest access to green space in the entire city — and this has to change!

Values

Problem: Structural Equity

The city can change this by creating a set of public green spaces that **flow** together, where residents can relax, connect, and be together — **a chance to breathe health and community into their lives.**

Even on days when the kids aren't on the swingset, or when people aren't hanging out under the trees, parks benefit our community. Equitable green spaces help **clean our air**, improve public health, support the fight against displacement, provide green workforce development opportunities, and will allow communities **space to heal**. That's why we want you to support our Waterfront Plan, which will use our community land trust to acquire and redevelop the area to create green spaces near the waterfront, which has been **closed off** to residents for decades. We are fighting for systems change, such as the Community Land Act, to strengthen community land trusts and other funding. Creating these parks will help rectify the injustices caused by historically racist, top-down planning policies.

Solution: Structural Equity

Just as breathing clean air is fundamental to our health, our community members' voices are essential to this decision-making. We are all keepers of this land, and it's our collective responsibility to use it in a way that values the lives of the people who will live on it for generations to come, especially when green spaces not only provide a connection to nature, but are a critical gateway to community health and well-being.

Values

sample 2

Engaging communities

Acknowledgment: This policy example is inspired by the work of Make the Road Nevada, part of a community-led initiative that installed air quality sensors in the east side of Las Vegas and collected data on air pollution to pressure legislators to act.

Overall strategy: To reduce air pollution in the east side of the city by convincing legislators to commit to a plan for sustained support for green spaces in those areas.

Problem: Data show that one part of the city experiences some of the hottest days in the United States and that extreme heat and stagnant air during a heat wave increase pollution — but legislators haven't seen the information.

Solution: To mobilize community members to share data collected from the community project at a State Lobby Day to pressure legislators to allocate funding and land for more green spaces in the east side of the city.

Possible messengers: Community organizations and advocacy organizations such as Make the Road Nevada

Possible audience: Local community organizations

Possible communication channels: Community meetings, social media, newsletters

Every resident, regardless of what they look like, what they have in their wallet, or which zip code they live in, **deserves to breathe safe air**, especially during the extreme heat we are faced with here. Parks and other green spaces can be our great equalizers because they help whole communities be healthy.

Values

We have been trying to convince policymakers for years about the dangerous levels of **air pollution** in the east side of the city — but instead, we have been zoned out of basics like shade, sidewalks, and access to the green spaces that every community needs to be healthy, while other, wealthier parts of the city have beautiful green spaces and are less polluted. Air pollution affects our quality of life everyday: We can't see a clear blue sky because of the smog, we **smell and breathe in** contaminated smoky air, and we can't **hear** properly because of our stuffed sinuses. In short, our neighborhoods are being **suffocated by extreme heat and pollution**, and we're living without the shade, **cool air**, and comfort that parks bring — yet we are still not included in the decision-making processes that could fix the problem. We know our community best, we know what we need — and we need to be part of deciding what happens here.

Problem: Procedural Equity

Now we have a chance to show legislators that we know **what it takes to clear the air**. Thanks to all your efforts, we conducted a community-led initiative that equipped east side residences with indoor **air quality** sensors and gave residents the ability to track **air pollution** in their own neighborhoods. We now have concrete data to show legislators just how much **air pollution** is in our communities — and how dangerous it is.

On our State Lobby Day, we can create pressure on legislators to act. Come join us to tell your story of how extreme weather and **choking** pollution harm your family, and ask them when it will finally be **safer to take a deep breath**. Speak directly to lawmakers so they understand the meaning of the data, and tell them to allocate funding and land for parks and green spaces so everyone in our community can **breathe freely**.

Solution: Procedural Equity

We will support and prepare your organizations and community members in every way we can, including providing translators, helping with talking points, and arranging transportation for those who need it. **Just as breathing clean air is fundamental to our health, ensuring that we have a voice in decision-making is crucial for keeping our community strong, safe, and connected**.

Values

sample 3

Making the case for public financing

Acknowledgment: This policy example is based on success in rejecting a tax abatement policy in East Austin, led by the Central Texas Interfaith Coalition.

Overall strategy: To prevent tax abatement applications that would give corporations tax breaks that could take away green spaces around schools.

Problem: The city government is planning to give tax breaks to corporations that would lead to industrial sites that could encroach on green spaces and air quality around schools.

Solution: To call on city leaders to listen to Black and Latine/x communities, reject the tax abatement policies, and instead invest in green spaces to benefit community health.

Possible messengers: Residents and advocacy community based coalitions, such as Central Texas Interfaith Coalition

Possible audience: City council members

Possible communication channels: City council meeting testimony, news articles

Every resident of the city, regardless of their background, race, or income, deserves to live in a place where they can **breathe safe, clean air**. But Black and Brown communities in East Austin are **suffocating**. The manufacturing plants and industrial sites are polluting the air **we all breathe**. Now, our city officials are planning to implement a new tax abatement that will allow these plants in the East side of the city to further infiltrate our community — leading to further industrialization and potentially encroaching on green spaces around our schools.

Values

Problem: Procedural Equity

Our coalition is led by community members who have lived here for generations — we know our city, we know what we need, and what we need is green spaces that can reduce pollution, let kids play, and help our communities **breathe easier**.

We strongly urge the city council to reject this measure because it would further burden our communities, which already suffer disproportionate environmental harm from factories and industries that operate in our area, and could lead to fewer green spaces for our children. It is incomprehensible and unfair that multimillion-dollar corporations will be given tax breaks while residents are forced to take on these costs to their health and well-being. This measure will not only increase pollution in our community but it will take money out of our pockets to do so. In our community, we are good neighbors to each other and pay our fair share — the corporations should too. We are concerned that the city is trying to pass this measure without engaging in meaningful **public dialogue** with those of us who are most impacted and without giving us sufficient time to review the measures.

Solution: Procedural Equity

Values

Fully voicing our opinions on the decisions affecting our lives, neighborhoods, and communities is important especially because we are the taxpayers who would foot the bill for the tax abatement. For any future laws and measures that impact our communities, city officials must engage our coalition and other community organizations earlier in the process. Working together, we can ensure that future legislation does not contribute to the pollution that **smothers** our neighborhoods. We want to work together so future legislation will better serve our neighbors and improve green spaces that would help residents of East Austin lead a healthy lifestyle. It's those of us **who live and breathe the polluted air** in our neighborhoods who are directly suffering from your actions.

Solution: Procedural Equity

Values

sample 4

Formalizing land rights

Acknowledgment: This policy example is inspired by the work of the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center, which is working to formalize Native rights by partnering with parks departments.

Overall strategy: To acknowledge and formalize Native rights to land currently owned by parks departments.

Problem: Native communities must undergo burdensome processes to obtain the proper permits to conduct cultural practices or risk being charged with a crime.

Solution: To create trusting partnerships with parks and forest agencies to bridge gaps and formalize Native rights.

Possible messengers: Groups working on formalizing Native rights such as the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center.

Possible audience: Parks departments and those who set the rules for them

Possible communication channels: Meetings or email, news articles

Parks and public lands serve an essential role in preserving natural resources and wildlife habitats, protecting clean water and clean air, and providing open space for current and future generations. The spirit of the land is in the **air we breathe**. It is a core part of our being.

Values

As the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center notes, historically, California Indians gathered native resources like acorns, buckeyes and abalone, which they used for food, medicine, and ceremonies. The land provided the people with what they needed to **live**, and they cared for the land in return.

Today, tribal communities have been displaced from their land. Tribal communities here face obstacles that disrupt their relationships with the land where they **live and breathe**. California does not protect Native fishing, hunting, and ancestral gathering rights. State and local governments have also excluded Native people in decision-making on matters related to land they have inhabited for generations. The park system has **stifled** Native traditional practices, and Native communities must undergo burdensome processes to obtain the proper permits to conduct cultural practices or risk being charged with a crime.

Problem: Procedural Equity

We **speak together** for the restoration of our inherent rights to steward and to gather — to **share breath** with the land and all the life that it holds. We ask that the parks department partner with us and formalize Native rights, such as the right to gather, fish, and hunt, and exempt our community from the need to obtain permits to participate in our longstanding cultural practices and traditions — practices and traditions that long precede the parks department.

Solution: Procedural Equity

We want a **voice** in decision-making with the parks department to ensure that we have a meaningful relationship with our ancestral land from which we were displaced. The relationship to our land is as **fundamental to our existence as breathing**.

Values

sample 5

Preventing displacement

Acknowledgment: This example is inspired by the work of the Chainbreaker Collective in Santa Fe, New Mexico to prevent the displacement of marginalized communities.

Overall strategy: To prevent displacement in a neighborhood by creating a community land trust.

Problem: Residents are concerned about the lack of affordable housing in their neighborhood, which sits on acres of undeveloped city-owned property that could be developed and drive up housing prices, forcing current residents to leave.

Solution: To use a community land trust to acquire the city lands that surround their neighborhood, prevent displacement by ensuring that housing remains affordable, and give residents a voice in how the land is used.

Possible messengers: Advocacy groups such as the Chainbreaker Collective

Possible audience: City council members

Possible communication channels: City council meeting, news articles

In our neighborhood, everyone takes care of each other, knows each other, and looks out for each other. We have been rooted here for generations and should be able to continue to live in a community where we have strong ties. We believe in self-determination and having control over our own future, starting with where we live and how our land is used, including for parks and green spaces. When it comes to land, housing, and green spaces, preventing a community from self-determination **throttles** its ability to thrive.

Values

There has been disinvestment in our predominantly Latine/x neighborhoods for decades. It is one of the most affordable, yet one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in the city. It's not okay that some communities are underfunded to the point their residents are **stifled** by their own living environment. As our neighborhoods grow and suffer through gentrification, many of us can no longer afford housing and are forced to move away to other neighborhoods without our strong community ties. Residents should not have to choose between displacement and disinvestment.

Problem: Structural Equity

One reason our residents face displacement is because our neighborhood is surrounded by acres of land owned by the city, which will be developed and drive up home prices. The cost of living is rising, yet the incomes of families who live here are falling. We can already see the impact of new businesses and restaurants on housing prices in certain areas where residents have had to move away.

We are being **smothered** by these hardships and the very real possibility of displacement. We know the consequences this will have. According to the Health, Healing, and Housing report, "residents in gentrifying neighborhoods face financial distress, loss of community services and institutions, and overcrowded and substandard housing conditions, while displaced residents experience relocation costs, longer commutes, disruptions to health care, fragmentation of community support networks, and direct impacts on mental and psychological well-being."

Our community has found a solution that will allow us to **breathe easier**. We have worked tirelessly to raise money for a community land trust that would enable us to purchase land surrounding our neighborhood. A community land trust is an organization that provides stewardship over tracts of land with the intent of making housing and community needs accessible to low- and moderate-income families in the community. Community land trusts enable the stewardship of land for the community as a whole, for both current and future generations. A community land trust creates a space where we can **voice** a new vision for our community.

Solution: Structural Equity

We are asking the city to allow us to acquire the land surrounding our neighborhood with our community land trust. When we own the land, we will be able to **breathe freely** because we will be able to create affordable, stable, and permanent housing and will not have to fear displacement from our neighborhood and community. We will be able to create the green space our children and elders need to thrive.

Researchers have found evidence that community land trusts are one of the “best ways to stabilize neighborhoods, preserve affordability, and build community assets in neighborhoods.” A community land trust would create affordable and permanently stable housing for generations of families and help to mitigate displacement in our neighborhoods. It would also give our community control over the use of land for creating green spaces that allow children and families to gather safely and connect with nature. Parks and green spaces are one way we can **breathe life** into neglected neighborhoods. We envision a future where we have stability, affordability, and community control. We will be able to **breathe easier** once we have been able to use our community land trust to ensure a better future for our neighbors now and for generations of future residents.

Values

sample 6

Investing in park creation and maintenance

Acknowledgment: This example is inspired by the work of The Conscious Connect to transform abandoned lots into green spaces in South Springfield.

Overall strategy: To convince the city council to turn an abandoned city lot into a park for local residents.

Problem: Due to systemic disinvestment, one part of the city does not have enough outdoor spaces, and residents are often excluded from conversations about solutions.

Solution: The city should pass a measure to allow for the conversion of an abandoned lot in the south side to a park, allocate funds to support this transformation, and maintain ongoing dialogue with community organizations to center the needs of residents in designing the green space.

Possible messengers: Groups working to transform abandoned lots into green spaces like The Conscious Connect.

Possible audience: The city council

Possible communication channels: City council meeting, news articles

We're proud to represent our town, where we are coming together to build power and reject the idea that someone's zip code dictates their future. We envision neighborhoods with green spaces where our children have safe spaces to play and our communities are able to gather and connect with nature — but the sheer number of vacant spaces is **stifling** the potential of our neighborhoods.

Values

The southern part of our city has experienced decades of disinvestment resulting in severe deterioration of neighborhoods that have historically been home to African American and low-income communities. Only six percent of our city's land is used for parks and recreation. There are few places where children can learn, play safely, and connect with nature. That is why we need more parks. The southern part of the city has the highest crime rate in the region, but a park is a place where not only children, but whole communities, can feel safe and **breathe** easy, unburdened by the stress of the city. There are abandoned lots all over the city that have the potential to be transformed into places where people can gather, but the south sector continues to be overlooked when it comes to that kind of investment, and our communities are too often left out of decision-making, even though the decisions impact them directly.

Problem: Structural Equity

Problem: Procedural Equity

We can do better. The core of our work is to build community power and help residents to reimagine and redevelop underutilized spaces for education, culture, peace and health. We won't stop until the south side is full of beautiful, healthy, accessible places that are designed for and by residents to serve them instead of displacing them.

It's not easy, but we've done hard things before. We're calling on you to work together with our communities by using our **voice** to transform the vacant lot we have identified in the southwest of the city into a usable green space. The residents **who live and breathe** in our neighborhoods are the ones who know what is needed and how green spaces should be created in our communities. We will know that you have heard us when the city allocates sufficient funds to create shared green spaces to help rectify years of disinvestment in our historically Black and low-income neighborhoods.

Solution: Procedural Equity

Solution: Structural Equity

It's not okay that some communities are underfunded to the point that their residents are **stifled** by their own living environment. Just like the **air we breathe needs to flow freely**, we can't **restrict** the resources communities need and expect them to thrive. Our communities are taking the initiative to reshape their neighborhoods so that children have a safe place to learn, play, and connect with nature. We hope that you will support us in bringing their vision of healthy, thriving communities to life.

Values

in summary

There's no one message — or even a set of messages — that works all the time for everyone, but we know from the research that carefully constructed communication can help audiences see how the solutions we're working toward advance equity and make communities healthier, safer, and more just. To do that, we need to:

- evoke shared values;
- use metaphors that evoke breath and breathing, and;
- be thoughtful, clear, and concrete about describing the problem and solution.

getting attention

If our overall strategy points us to using the news media to reach (and put pressure on) our audience, the next step is to think about how, specifically, we can attract news attention. Fortunately, there are many ways for community leaders and park and green space equity advocates to enter and influence the media narrative around parks and green space. Done thoughtfully, attracting news attention can elevate community voices, invite others to the fight to build power, and elevate solutions — especially those we are seeking in the near term to address procedural, distributional, and structural equity around parks and green space. As we have done throughout this guide, when it comes to using media, we emphasize being strategic: Decisions about where to focus your attention and how to engage with journalists will depend on what you have prioritized in your overall strategy.

It might feel overwhelming to think about how to push through the media din and get news coverage that reflects the story of parks and green space that we want to see — but it can be done, especially if you make it part of your routine. As just one example, South Bronx Unite, a nonprofit organization dedicated to uplifting their community to improve and protect the social, environmental, and economic future in New York, has positioned itself as the go-to expert on environmental justice in their community. With a limited staff and no dedicated communication person, South Bronx Unite was able to garner 21 news stories within the first half of 2024, including a piece in *The New York Times*. According to the staff, they did this by:

1

Cultivating relationships with reporters/journalists

According to South Bronx Unite Executive Director Arif Ullah, “We made sure to prioritize journalists by inviting them to our tours and events. By doing this we cultivated genuine relationships where journalists would both know us and our work.”

2

Understanding the importance of hyperlocal media

Hyperlocal media is a news or content provider focused on a small community.[47] Arif Ullah noted that this kind of media is “often hungry for stories, and the work we’re doing is compelling, important, inspiring, and exciting. Larger media outlets sometimes look to local media for story ideas, which has helped us get coverage from major media outlets as well.”

3

Connecting the dots

“Our work is focused on improving the lives of community residents, making it relevant to local media outlets,” Ullah said. “We find that reporters are often drawn to stories that resonate with their audience, especially those that involve local people and address community needs.”

4

Doing the work even when the media is not covering it — establishing a reputation for credibility

“Our work is focused on improving the lives of community residents, making it relevant to local media outlets,” Ullah said. “We find that reporters are often drawn to stories that resonate with their audience, especially those that involve local people and address community needs.”

5

Having and sharing a consistent message

Ullah pointed out that South Bronx Unite has “established a reputation for credibility, and we are consistent in our messaging.” And they “create media advisories and invite media to our events and actions.”

6

Creating relationships with universities

"We make ourselves available to journalism school students who remember us and the issues we work on when they become reporters/ journalists," Ullah said.

7

Connecting with allies

"We have built relationships with many organizations, institutions, and people (including elected officials), and they often refer reporters to us," explained Ullah.

8

Having a strong social media presence

Senior Organizer Matthew Shore noted, "Every journalist I've met has mentioned how they follow us and stay up to date with our stories and posts. It's clear that many news outlets get their story ideas from our posts on our socials."

9

Speaking truth to power

South Bronx Unite founding member Mychal Johnson explained, "You must be willing to speak the truth to power for the community's benefit; this often means challenging the status quo. Honesty and commitment build respect and relationships."

These 10 principles have made South Bronx Unite the force they are in building narrative power. Lessons from these and other park and green space equity advocates show what we need to do to get news attention for our solutions:

- identify and connect with journalists who are interested in and open to reporting on your work;
- craft elements to make stories easier to tell;
- become part of the news cycle; and
- reuse the news.

Let's consider each of these in turn.

Identify and connect with journalists who are interested in and open to reporting on your work

Although it may be tempting to run straight to a news outlet to share your story, monitoring the news can help us learn: Is our particular take on parks and green space being covered? If so, how is it being covered, who is covering it, and what's missing? If your goal is to get the attention of specific policymakers, how does the issue appear in the outlets they listen to, read, and watch?

BMSG's news analysis found gaps in park and green space coverage around equity, but those gaps may be different from what appears in your local outlets. By monitoring the news, you can learn precisely:

- **which outlets care about park and green space equity, and might be open to covering your story.** Monitoring the news will help you pick the right outlet when it comes time to pitch your story based on your overall strategy. Depending on what you've determined about your targets, you might monitor news outlets from national TV networks to radio talk shows, podcasts, influential blogs, regional newspapers, trade publications, social media, and popular web sites.

- **which journalists are reporting on your issue.** You can create a media list of relevant reporters, influencers, and freelancers and then start to build meaningful relationships with them. That list can be a starting point for deciding whom to contact when it's time to pitch a story. Journalists will be more likely to respond to your pitches if they know who you are, understand your authentic connections to communities working to improve parks and green space, and can rely on you for fresh interpretations of the issue. Social media is an easy way to follow and begin connecting with journalists — as you cultivate these relationships, track their contact information and any details about the types of stories they produce in your media list.
- **how parks and green space are being covered.** Media monitoring doesn't have to be too complex or in-depth: Advocates can sign up for automatic updates when new stories are posted about parks or other topics using free services like Google News Alerts and keep a brief record of answers to basic questions like:

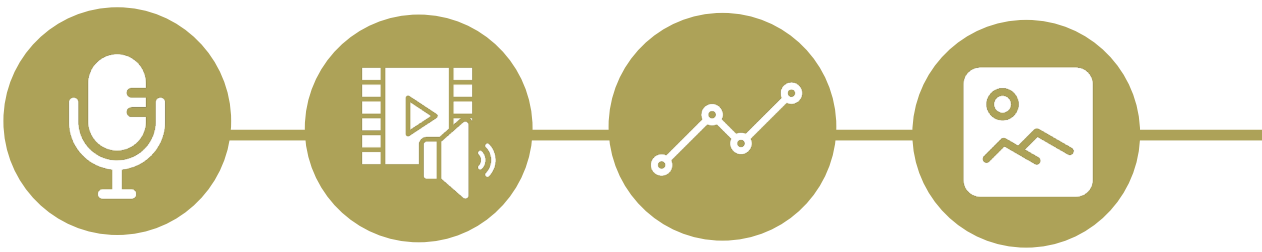
- What was the publication? Who does it reach?
- Who wrote the story? Have they written about park and green space equity — or related issues, like gentrification, displacement, or climate change — before?
- Who was quoted? Was our organization mentioned or quoted? Any of our partners?
- Were solutions mentioned? Was our solution named?
- Were there any problematic frames or terms used that we want to correct, or is there any information missing?
- Is there an action we should take to correct misinformation, pitch a story, or reach out to the journalist for another reason?

Adapt this list to include the items that are most important to you. When you have a sense of what's missing from the news that your targets are seeing, you give yourself leverage to pitch the story from a fresh angle, making it more enticing to a journalist.

Create elements to make stories easy to tell

As *60 Minutes* producer Don Hewitt famously said, reporters don't tell issues, they tell stories.[48] For example, a story about community residents fighting to increase green space to contend with rising asthma rates will hold more interest than a report about how air pollution aggravates asthma. That's because the story about community residents has all the components of a story: characters (the residents, their allies, and the people opposing them), a scene (the neighborhood or place for the park and green space or maybe the city council chambers where the argument is made), and action (what the residents are doing to make their case). The health harms of air pollution and how it aggravates asthma will be part of the story and be easier to understand within the context of the story.

Good stories have a scene, a plot, action, and characters — even stories about policy and systems change. But, as we know, a story that focuses too narrowly on individuals won't help the audience understand the policy or environmental factors at work, so the plot and the scene are just as important as the characters. Story elements can help make our stories compelling and breathe life into the plot and scene. They are the pieces that reporters put together to tell a story, like a picture, a relevant data point, or a compelling statement from a source. If we develop story elements before talking with reporters, we make it easier for them to tell the story in ways that illustrate our frame. Of course, you can't control how the reporter frames the issue, but you can control who and what you put forward to make your case. You can provide reporters four story elements — authentic voices, media bites, social math, and compelling visuals — to help them create a story that reflects your overall strategy for park and green space equity.



Authentic Voices

Authentic voices are spokespeople who can provide a unique perspective on the problem and need for the solution based on their personal or professional life experiences. They might have suffered from the problem directly (typically referred to as "victims" or "real people" by reporters). Or they might have other direct experience as park users, local business owners, or community organizers. Think carefully about the range of authentic voices you can prepare to make your case because, as the saying goes, "the messenger is the message." In other words, news professionals and your audience will respond to who is speaking, not just to what they say. For example, Warinda Harris grew up in Texas, where she saw firsthand the disparities between parks in affluent communities versus those in lower-income communities. Living through the history that led to these disparities makes Harris a dynamic spokesperson, whether she is speaking to reporters or decision-makers. Her values and lived experience touch many audiences, as when she sat on a panel hosted by the Children and Nature Network, an organization committed to the belief that nature makes kids healthier, and shared her experience around power.[49] She sparked a fire for more people to recognize their communal power and organize when she told that audience of allies and advocates:

"We're rooted in communities that have had negative experiences with power, with folks who perceive power as something that is being used against them or is part of something being done to them. Our work is in developing leaders from within those spaces, meeting them where they are, and training them to reshape their relationship to power — to understand that while they may not have vast amounts of money, collectively they have the power to organize around issues of common concern … They can claim their place at the table with decision-makers — that's power meeting power."

Ms. Harris is an experienced speaker, but no matter who they are, credible messengers need support. Depending on their experiences and background, they may need training and practice, logistical help (like child care or transportation), or emotional support (like someone to sit with them during or after an interview). Training and supporting authentic messengers takes work, but it's worth it: The lived wisdom of those closest to the problem, and the solution, breathes life into efforts to build power so we can all enjoy equitable, just parks and green spaces.

Media Bites

Media bites are concise statements that capture the essence of the story in just a few words. Reporters face serious time and space constraints in their stories, and many of them will not have considered the equity issues around parks and green space. A well-crafted media bite can help them see the issue — and communicate it to their readers and viewers — quickly. No matter how complicated your overall strategy, only a few sentences from the most compelling spokespeople are likely to appear in any given story. Your challenge is to be strategic in what you say to increase the chance that the park and green space equity issue you are focused on in the immediate moment is what gets repeated in the story. Your media bites are based on that foundation.

Media bites communicate your core message — problem, solution, and values — tailored to respond to a reporter's question to emphasize one key point. For example, Arif Ullah of South Bronx Unite clearly and succinctly evoked his organization's core values when he told a TV reporter, "Waterfront access should not be correlated with a person's income or a person's livelihood."

A media bite from New Orleans nonprofit The Water Collaborative, which appeared in an article by New Orleans Public Radio, explained the rationale behind The Collaborative's overall strategy of seeking fees to support a new storm water system based on land conditions rather than property value: "'Concrete doesn't drink water. How much concrete do you have on your property? That's how we base your rate,'" said Rebecca Malpass, The Water Collaborative's policy and research director."

This media bite is especially powerful because it also evokes the body and physical processes like breathing or drinking. Consider ways to incorporate metaphors that evoke breathing — or other physical processes like inhaling or choking — into your media bites to help audiences feel more directly what is gained by equitable access to parks or green space, or lost when that access is denied.

Social Math

Every day we are bombarded with news stories involving very large numbers, but often we are numbed rather than informed because, outside a meaningful context, large numbers stop making sense.

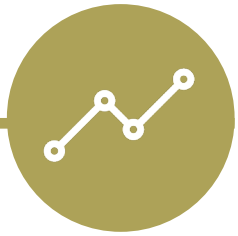
One solution to this problem is using social math. Social math translates statistics and other data so they become interesting to the journalist, meaningful to the audience, and helpful in advancing public policy. The best social math surprises people, provokes an emotional response, or paints a picture that helps your audience see what you are saying. To create social math, you can:

Break numbers down by time

> South Bronx Unite is fighting for community access to the waterfront. The headline in the news story about their work brought time into focus: “Mott Haven gets waterfront access for 1st time in 100 years.”[50] That means that the last time residents had unrestricted access to the waterfront in their own backyard, Calvin Coolidge was president, and the Environmental Protection Agency was almost 50 years away from opening its doors!

Break numbers down by place

> In an unprecedented action, in February 2021, the state of Minnesota returned to the Lower Sioux Indian Community more than 100 acres of land along the Minnesota River. While the tribes celebrated the significance of the action to start the process of healing, Lower Sioux President Robert Larson also put the amount of land in context and set the tone for next steps when he told the *Minnesota Star Tribune*, “There are local farmers that have more land than the tribe does.”[30]



Personalize or localize numbers:

> In Hawaii, state and national parks cover almost 10% of the state's 4,134,000 acres. This is compared to Kansas, with just 0.06% of the state's 52,660,000 acres made up of state and national parks.[51] We need to rectify the inequities in states across the country and ensure that all cities have sufficient open space for people to breathe, heal, gather, and create community.

Providing comparisons to familiar things:

> The half-acre Walnut Park is equivalent to the space of an average Starbucks coffee shop. A Starbucks requires between half an acre to an acre of land.[52] Surely if we can dedicate that amount of space to one coffee shop, our residents are also worthy of that amount of public outdoor gathering space?

As you are constructing your message, decide what numbers you need to make the case as stand-alone statistics and as social math comparisons. Choose carefully so you don't drown a reporter (or other audiences) in numbers because **you can't be comprehensive and strategic at the same time.**

Compelling visuals

Media stories rely on images in our increasingly visual culture. When you are pitching a story, reporters will often ask, "What will I see when I get there?" What they are really asking is, "What can I show my viewers or readers if I cover this story?" Make sure you have something visual to offer.

Developing the right visuals for your story is a strategic decision as well as a creative endeavor. Brainstorm visual possibilities and then pick the ones that illustrate the landscape so people can easily see the relevance of your policy goal. For example, the heat severity map that GreenInfo Network, an organization that assists others in using Geographic Information Systems and other related technologies, made for Make the Road Nevada, an organization that builds power and mobilizes immigrant communities in Nevada on issues that impact them including environmental issues, displays the correlation between heat islands or high temperatures and a lack of green spaces.

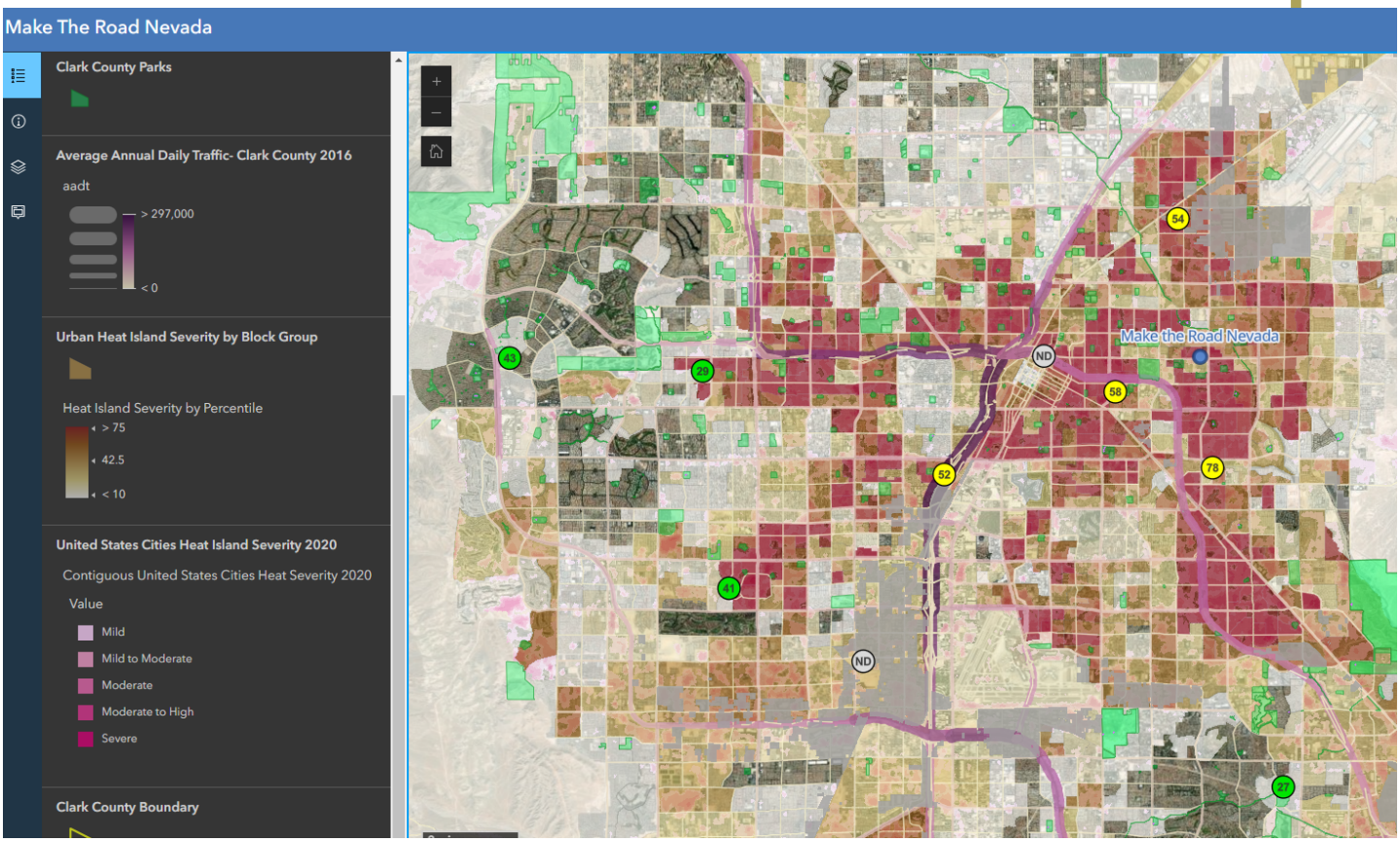


Image: Geographic Information System (GIS) map of heat severity in Nevada, generated by GreenInfo Network for Make the Road Nevada.

Become part of the news cycle

Once you have a sense of who's writing about park and green space equity and how your story fits into the media landscape, you can develop a story that is compelling, timely, and meaningful to the audience of the news outlet.

To create news, you need to take action. To get news coverage, we can't just say something, we have to do something. Will you hold a demonstration, call attention to an injustice, make a demand to a policymaker, or release an important report? Will you "piggyback" off breaking news? Will you submit opinion pieces or meet with editorial boards to ask that they write editorials supporting your issue? Will you pitch a story to a reporter you have gotten to know? Will you use some combination of these tactics?

Your strategy to create news doesn't need to be elaborate, but make sure you're prepared with story elements as you plan to become part of the media landscape about park and green space equity.

Make your story newsworthy

A good story must be newsworthy, which means it must be relevant now. Park and green space equity is important to us every day, of course, but journalists cannot produce stories about every issue every day. They will need a good reason to convince their teams that your story about parks and green space should take precedence over other stories already in the queue. In order to make your story newsworthy, think: What will make this story most attractive to a journalist? What will break through all of the noise and grab their attention?

Over many years of studying news coverage, BMSG has found several news hooks that consistently attract journalists, including controversy or conflict, breakthroughs, injustice, irony, new research, anniversaries or milestones, seasonal connections, celebrity, or broad appeal. You can try on each of these news hooks to find one that fits your moment:

Table 4: Identifying newshooks

Newshook	Ask yourself...	Example
Controversy or conflic	• What drama or controversy do you want to highlight? • What is at stake? For whom? • Should a business, institution, or government agency be doing something differently? • Are rules or regulations being violated? • Who is benefiting from thi problem not being solved? • Who is losing out? How?	Op-ed: Resident Concern About Loss of Hundreds of Trees During Redevelopment Project: This op-ed written by a local advocate centers on a controversy in Watertown, MA, pitting a newly arrived real estate equities firm against the people, wildlife, and history of the town.[53]
Breakthrough	• Does your story mark an important medical, political, local, or historical "first" • Can you make the case that, given a particular event, decision or action, things will never be the same on this issue or in your community?	Becerra says extreme heat emerging as a 'public health crisis': Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra gave remarks in Phoenix, acknowledging a rise in temperatures has led to a "public health crisis. The climate change that we are experiencing cannot be denied."[54]
Injustice	• What is inequitable or unfair about a particular situation? • … About the decision of an institution or government agency? • … About the treatment of a vulnerable group? • Is this injustice serious enough for the media to adopt an ongoing watchdog role?	Flooding is a big problem in New Orleans. Could a stormwater fee help? This story points out a serious injustice facing residents of New Orleans: "Old infrastructure, subsidence, and extreme rainfall caused by climate change are worsening flooding in New Orleans. That, plus rising insurance rates, are pushing residents out of the city."[55]

Table 4: Identifying newshooks

Newshook	Ask yourself...	Example
Irony	• What is ironic — unusual or surprising — about this story? • Is there a contradiction to point out between how things should work and how they are really happening? • Is there hypocrisy to reveal?	DeSantis wants to build golf courses and hotels in Florida's state parks: "People don't go to Florida state parks to play golf …. They go to the parks to get away from artificial settings like that."[56]
New research or data	• Is there a newly published study, report, or dataset that you want to highlight? • Can this new information help illustrate why your solution is essential?	Sacramento ranks among worst cities for 'heat island' neighborhoods. New study shows why: "Creating green space in natural space is probably one of the most effective and easily achievable ways for cities to change their urban heat island intensity."[57]
Anniversary or milestone	• Can your story be connected to mark the day of a local event or tragedy that has significanc locally, nationally, or historically? • Was any progress made previously that has made a difference to this problem? • Does the date of the event offer the opportunity to ask what has happened since then and where we need to go? • What progress has been or should have been made?	Over 10,000 Pounds of Trash Collected During the 20th Anniversary Facelift Clean-Up in Yosemite National Park: "We have been reeling from the massive turnout of dedicated volunteers at this year's Facelift. The event's 20th anniversary was celebrated accordingly with a whopping 10,432 pounds of trash collected, sorted, and disposed of."[58]

Table 4: Identifying newshooks

Newshook	Ask yourself...	Example
Seasonal or holiday	• What about your story, issue, or policy goal can be connected to a holiday or seasonal event? Is there a winter, spring, summer, or fall take on your solution? • Go through the calendar and see whether you can create fresh stories around holidays reporters always cover: What does New Year's have to do with your overall strategy? Valentine's Day? Earth Day? Mother's Day? Thanksgiving?	Proposed changes to open green space and the merits of community participation: In this article, written because "spring is upon us," the author affirms the "vital role individuals play in influencing land use planning, access, and decision making" and encourages the audience to work together to "foster equitable development and resilience."[59]
Celebrity or popular culture	• Do any celebrities (including local celebrities or well-known opinion leaders) support your issue and policy goal? • Would they be willing to lend a hand to your efforts? • If you are able to form a partnership with well-known people (like influencers community leaders, or others), will the relationship be worthwhile — and predictable? When celebrities mention parks and green space, you can piggyback off of their coverage and insert your perspective if you react fast enough, even if you don't have a formal relationship with them.	Jason Momoa on environmental restoration: From the ashes we rise — how nature can still heal: Actor Jason Momoa powerfully evokes shared values, wondering "Do we restore Lahaina and other degraded areas using nature-based solutions that build on what had worked for centuries before, or do we let powerful profit-driven corporations steamroll our voices? My appeal to our generation is to embrace and advocate for the restoration of nature and start making waves."[60]

Table 4: Identifying newshooks

Newshook	Ask yourself...	Example
Broad appeal or "evergreen" stories Stories without a time-sensitive hook that may be used at any time; journalists refer to them as evergreen stories because they are always relevant. Evergreen stories are often scheduled ahead of time or "filler" pieces used on slower news days, or "news you can use" like advice columns.	• What are chronic issues in the community that will always be important, regardless of the time of year? • Who are people that the community will always want to hear from? Could you conduct an interview about their work that you can use anytime there is a gap in the news cycle? • What stories about the community's history are less well-known that would be of interest year-round?	Strong partnerships help local groups support better parks: "Seattle Parks Foundation currently partners with more than 90 volunteer-driven community groups, including Restaurant 2 Garden. Projects range from tiny pocket parks and 'off the map' community spaces to large capital campaigns in high-traffic areas. Some larger groups like Volunteer Park Trust are under Seattle Park Foundation's wing, with dozens of volunteers and thousands of supporters. This kind of partnership between a nonprofit organization, city parks, and community members is proving to be a powerful tool for creating and supporting public spaces that meet local needs."[61]

Think about the messages and strategies you have developed — could any of them be used as news hooks? Which category would they fall into?

Piggyback on breaking news

When you find a connection between park and green space equity and news of the day, let journalists know and use that connection to draw attention to your work. For example, starting in March 2020, news stories in the U.S. began to focus on the Covid-19 pandemic as people became infected with the virus and panic set in. In the following months, as state governments implemented restrictions on gathering, park advocates saw an opportunity to "piggyback" on the news around Covid-19 to highlight the inequities around parks and green spaces. An article published by the Wilderness Society, for example, reported on the restrictions on accessing outdoor spaces with the closure of beaches, parks, and playgrounds,[62] and observed that for many communities that are primarily Black or Latine/x, having unequal access to healthy outdoor spaces is nothing new. Similarly, advocates like Francisco Romero, Manager of Community Transformation for Promesa Boyle Heights (PBH), a Los Angeles community-based nonprofit organization, used the news about Covid to talk about the systemic inequities around parks and green spaces, and to advocate for a post-pandemic world that would take a new approach in funding priorities that makes equitable investments in park-poor communities across Los Angeles.[63]

Use opinion space

Newspapers have three regular spots for publishing opinion pieces: editorials, letters to the editor, and op-eds (guest commentaries).

- Editorials are written by the news outlet's editorial board to express the voice of the paper; unlike news coverage, editorials take strong positions on an issue. You can send a letter to an editorial board asking them to write an editorial on your issue and, for example, ask policymakers to vote a certain way. Often, the editorial board will want to meet with a team from your coalition to understand the issue better and determine whether they want to do an editorial about it. Some outlets also run regular columns; you can pitch them just like you would pitch a reporter.
- Letters to the editor are short (100-200 words) reactions to a news article or opinion piece the paper has already run. Many outlets have forms on their websites for submitting letters to the editor and op-eds. Successful letters are usually sent the same day the story appears.

- Op-eds are a great way to get your concise story in front of target audiences. Crafting and pitching an op-ed can be challenging, but worthwhile: Op-eds help shape narratives because they allow advocates to make a strong case for action as they tell their story from their perspective and frame it from their own point of view. For example, an op-ed from Diane Regas, head of The Trust for Public Land, "Let's close the park equity divide," used Covid-19 to illustrate the lack of parks in communities of color, including the historical factors that led to this great divide and the history of racist housing policies known as "redlining." Within the op-ed, Regas led with values while making sure her policy solution was clear.

BMSG's guide for writing an op-ed can help your organization structure the piece when your voice needs to be heard on park and green space equity.

Pitch a story

A pitch is an invitation to a reporter to cover a news story. Sending a pitch, usually by email, will help reporters explain to their news directors and editors why they should do the story. Of course, there is no perfect recipe — pitching, news releases, and media advisories can all help — but pitching first can whet the appetite of a reporter without bombarding them with too much information. Crafting the pitch will force you to be concise and name your values, solution, and problem in just a few short sentences, all based on the message you developed as part of your overall strategy and how you are taking advantage of news hooks.

Tips for crafting an engaging pitch

1 **Pitch to reporters you know — or whose work you know.** That way, you can link your story to something they have already covered and say, for example, “Last month you reported on X; I’m calling to talk to you about Y, which expands on your news story by explaining Z.” A media list can help you keep track of reporters you will want to pitch to.

2 **Provide a compelling story.** Don’t approach a reporter to talk about an “issue,” but rather, help them create a story, with characters and clear stakes, using story elements.

3 **Emphasize newsworthiness.** Tailor your pitch to the audience of each news outlet. A local reporter will be focused on community impact and may cover the actions of a local organization, as Ohio journalist Brooke Spurlock did when she wrote about The Conscious Connect, a Springfield-based group receiving a sizable grant from the People, Parks, and Power (P3) initiative and the impact the money would have on Black, Latine/x, and Indigenous communities that lacked green space. Meanwhile, a national outlet will be interested in an issue if there is a broader impact, such as implications for federal policy or signs of movement-building. That was the case for *The New York Times* when it reported an in-depth story on tree equity spanning the country. Although local and national coverage differ in breadth, they still often inform each other. For example, when a story about park equity is reported locally, it may capture a larger outlet's attention and prompt them to dig deeper and see if there is a trend across multiple regions. Similarly, when a national story about green space is reported, it may lead local reporters to explore how broader trends are showing up in their own communities. That’s why, when you’re making your pitch, it's important to customize. And if you are reaching out to a national outlet, consider sharing several similar articles from multiple states to show that your story would resonate widely.

4 **Pay attention to reporters’ deadlines.** Don’t be put off by reporters who seem to be in a rush — often they are! Always start by asking if now is a good time to talk: If the reporter is on a deadline, arrange a better time. Learn how each reporter prefers to be contacted, perhaps by phone, email, or text. If you’re sending a pitch to a reporter you are unfamiliar with, do not include an attachment, since many newsrooms are wary of hackers and may delete an attachment from an unknown address.

5 **Practice your pitch.** Practice your pitch out loud before making a call or sending an email. Describe your story to a colleague, emphasizing newsworthiness, the most compelling reasons why a reporter should cover your news story. Explain what you are going to do. Be able to describe the aspect of park and green space equity you are focused on and why your solution matters in clear, simple language without acronyms or technical jargon. If you pitch by phone, know what you will say if you get sent to voicemail. Whether you pitch by phone or by email, make sure the contact person whose information you give is available around the clock, since some journalists have tricky schedules.

Email pitch template

Hi (Recipient's name)

I am reaching out because I think I have a story that would be perfect for your publication! I especially loved your last article about [insert topic].

Here in [add in your city], we believe all residents should be within a 10-minute walk of a high-quality public park and green space. Unfortunately, X% of [add in your city] residents do not fall into that category. We all deserve a park where our children can play safely, our elders can breathe peacefully, and we can gather as a community. That is why this week we are hosting a community-led event to call on our local leaders to pass _____ policy, which will allocate more funding to _____.

If you're interested, I can send over some high-resolution images/ videos and a news release. I also have the contact for two experts and three members of the community that you can speak with before or during the event. Would this be something you'd be interested in covering? Let me know if you have any questions.

_____ will be your point of contact. Their information is listed below.

Thank you,

(Point of contact name)
(Point of contact cell phone or office number)

answering tough questions

Whether you are pitching a story and have a relationship with a reporter or get a call out of nowhere and are talking with someone you have never met, talking to a reporter can feel intimidating! Luckily, some simple steps can help you home in on their needs when they call — including whether you want to say yes to the interview at all. It may be tempting to accept any interview you're asked to do, but not all news is good news.

Here are a few questions you can ask a reporter when you get that first call.

- What's your story about?
- Who else have you talked to? or How did you learn about my organization/our work?
- What is your deadline?
- What do you want to know? or Can you share the questions in advance?
- Can we schedule a time to talk more in-depth later?
- When will the story run?

Preparation can help make interviews less intimidating! Remember to:

Brainstorm and prepare for hard questions — and how to pivot away from them:

If you don't have access to the questions ahead of time — or even if you do! — brainstorm a few questions that you think you might receive or use questions that you've gotten in the past to organize your thinking, keeping your overall strategy in mind.

Sometimes hard questions, such as those that reinforce the idea that parks are just "nice to have" ("shouldn't we be using that money to fund ____?"), or that narrow the focus to individual choices ("isn't it parents' job to make sure kids get the outdoor time and exercise they need?") can derail an interview.

For these kinds of questions, you'll want to have answers ready to go and pivot phrases that will help you redirect the conversation. Review the message strategy you developed, and figure out how you could pivot from the "wrong" question the reporter might ask to the message you know will direct people to your solution and why it matters. You can try pivot phrases like:

- We get that question a lot but one thing people don't know is … [reframe]
- What I want to make sure people remember is that … [solution]
- Some people do say that, but I'd argue that what this is really about is … [reframe]

Practice

Before you call the reporter back, do a practice interview with a colleague to make sure you are hitting all of your key talking points and staying on your message. Even one run-through with a colleague can help calm your nerves, focus your message for the specifics of this story, and home in on your overall strategy, helping you feel more prepared for the interview.

Reuse the news to build momentum once you've gotten coverage

Attracting news attention takes work, so when you get news coverage, be sure to share it widely. At BMSG, we call this "reusing the news." News, simply by virtue of its having been published, confers legitimacy and credibility on issues. Reusing the news is a way to remind your target — and those who can influence the target — that the public is paying attention.

You can use media monitoring tools to track stories about your issues. The key is to examine the coverage and, if it seems like it will be strategically useful based on your overall strategy, share it with your networks or key audiences:

- Send op-eds, news stories, letters to the editor, and supportive editorials directly to your target. You can also use newsletters and social media posts to share with your networks and urge people to forward the piece to the target so that, for example, elected officials can see that their constituents are paying attention and watching their actions on the issue;
- Send coverage to your partners and allies so they can see that momentum is building as you strategize together about what needs to happen next;
- Use copies of the pieces to educate reporters who are new to the issue by including the coverage in future media kits;
- Use published news and opinion pieces to educate new staff or new partners. For example, include documents in orientation packets or introductory memos;
- Feature relevant news coverage on your website so that people seeking you out are aware that your organization and/or issue are getting attention.

Even when you don't get coverage, you should feature your work on your website and share highlights via newsletters, flyers, social media, or even word of mouth for decision-makers and community members. For example, the nonprofit Central Texas Interfaith is known in their community for using skilled community organizing to "develop leadership, identify issues, reweave relationships, and build the capacity within their institutions to act on issues which affect families." Even when the organization doesn't get news coverage, they share their stories to connect with their community, illustrate impact, and create an easy way for advocates and their followers to disseminate stories to others in the network — or even with the targets themselves — to share what's been accomplished and what still needs to be done.

Evaluating your efforts

Evaluation can help you ensure that the time you're spending developing your strategy, assessing framing challenges, crafting your messages, and getting media attention is time well spent. Revisit your media advocacy plan periodically to make sure it still reflects your overall strategy and make adjustments if needed. Immediately following a news event you organized, or after you get news coverage for another reason, is a good time to reflect on and evaluate your progress to date.

Evaluation doesn't have to be too complex: Some basic questions and reflection among key players on your team at each stage in developing your strategy can help you determine how you'll approach your next task and elevate what's working and stop doing what is not working. Consider questions like:

- Did our target see this coverage, or get wind of our event? How did our target respond?
- Did the news stories reflect our perspective? Is our frame apparent in the coverage? Did we say what we wanted to say?
- Did we establish new relationships, or cement old relationships, with reporters? Are we starting to be considered a trusted source?
- Did we get better, as an organization, at contacting and talking with reporters and creating news?
- What would we do differently next time?

Depending on the answers to these or other questions, you can refine your approach.

in summary

News media can be a powerful tool to breathe life into efforts to build and maintain safe, equitable parks and green spaces for communities that have too long been shut out of those places. Whether and how you use the news depends on many factors, including your overall strategy; if media coverage is the best way for you to reach your audience to effect change, remember to:

- Monitor the media so you know where coverage of park and green space equity is — or should be — happening;
- Use newsworthy stories and strong interviews to become part of the conversation;
- Craft story elements that help reporters tell dynamic stories about park and green space equity work and why it matters for everyone; and
- Capitalize on news coverage to build momentum for future efforts.

conclusion

Imagine a future where no matter where we come from, what race we are, or how much money we make, we all have healthy and safe outdoor spaces for our families and our communities within reach — a future where everyone in every community can breathe in nature, commune, heal, and gather together.

Building that future is possible, but it has to begin with believing it is within our reach. Fostering that kind of collective vision will happen only if our stories about parks and green spaces build a narrative that shows how people are connected to nature, elevates our values — such as stewardship, liberation, health, and community connection — and helps our neighbors and our leaders see themselves and their communities in the hard and necessary work of creating and sustaining equitable parks and green spaces.

Advocates, organizers, researchers, policymakers, and residents in every community can make these narratives the norm, the expectation, and, ultimately, our new reality by fine-tuning their change goals; identifying, training, and supporting spokespeople who can deliver clear, compelling messages that highlight shared values and community-led solutions; and building relationships with key news outlets to ensure that the right messages reach the right audience at the right time.

No matter why you care about parks, we hope the communication tools in this guide will help you advance your equity goals. Be sure to use the layers of strategy to clarify your vision before you begin, and remember that when you craft messages, metaphors that evoke breathing can help give life to your messages and help your audience see and even feel themselves in your words. As you do the work, take a breath, look around, and recognize the incredible strides you and other advocates have already made in advancing park and green space equity.

If we are able to tell the stories that need to be told in a way that people can hear them, we will be creating a more equitable future where people can connect with one another, enjoy nature and good health, and be liberated from historic inequities to exhale and finally be able to breathe freely.

appendix

News analysis methods

To understand news narratives about green space and park equity, we first searched the Lexis-Nexis database for news and opinion articles published between January 1, 2021, and October 15, 2022, in U.S. newspapers and wires. We excluded wires because they produced a high volume of news without a local focus where advocates may be working.

To capture articles about green space equity, we created a search string to capture all mentions of “green space” and “park equity” that included terms like “equality,” “inequality,” “ecological,” “environmental,” “park land,” and “community garden,” among many others. We identified a universe of English-language print articles from Lexi-Nexis news archives and collected a random sample from the period of coverage to reflect the distribution of news for further analysis.

We used an iterative process to develop and refine a coding instrument by drawing on existing literature about green spaces and park equity. Our coding instrument captured information about where articles were published and when; whether the stories were opinion pieces with a specific perspective or news articles that aimed to present multiple perspectives; and why articles about green spaces and park equity were published on a given day. We also assessed how often solutions appeared and if procedural, distributional, and structural equity were discussed as part of them.

Before coding the full sample, we tested intercoder reliability to ensure that coder alignment did not occur by chance. Specifically, we used an iterative process and coded multiple subsets of articles, then held discussions about any disagreements and adjusted coding decisions until we reached consensus about what the codes included. We achieved satisfactory intercoder reliability scores for all coding variables (Krippendorff’s alpha >.8),[12] and took additional qualitative notes during coding.

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