The Outdoor Livability Assessment Tool

A Method for Designing and Evaluating Age-Friendly Outdoor Spaces

SAFE and HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Karen Roof, PhD
Safe and Healthy Communities and This Initiative

Mission, Purpose, Projects

- Non-profit organization dedicated to creating and ensuring safe, healthy, sustainable, and equitable communities for all

- Focus on improving decision-making and public health outcomes within planning, transportation, housing, the natural environment – built environment, policies and programs

- Funding from the Next50 Initiative Foundation – Innovation projects that improve lives of older adults. SHC Team (3)
Outdoor Livability Assessment Tool

Comprehensively assesses most parks for their safety, accessibility, age-friendliness, and the degree to which they promote the health and well-being of older adults and people with disabilities.
Outdoor Spaces

• Parks are among the most commonly used outdoor spaces

• Parks are often designed with the needs and interests of younger populations in mind

• Important amenity that provides numerous benefits to physical and mental health for all populations

Health Benefits:

- Increased Physical Activity\(^1\)
- Decreased Stress, Anxiety, and Depression\(^2\)
- Reduced Cognitive Decline\(^3\)
How much time is needed to reap the health benefits from being outdoors?

- 10 minutes
- 30 minutes
- 1 hour
## Outdoor Livability Assessment Tool

### Importance of Outdoor Space:

- **5-10 Minutes in nature can:**
  - ↑ Mood
  - ↑ Recovery from surgery
  - ↓ Blood pressure

- More important during COVID-19 than ever

  “Feel safer walking on a treadmill for an hour than walking from this building to the parking lot”

### Indicators:

- Accessible benches with backs and armrests to aid individuals in standing
- Seating is provided in sun and shade all times of day
- Trees that release seeds (acorns, pine cones, etc.) are located away from paths and heavily occupied areas
- Picnic tables have at least one wheelchair accessible seating space
- For every 25 parking spots, there is at least one accessible spot
Inaccessible Parks

- Do not meet the safety and mobility needs of older adults and people with disabilities
- ADA Standards ≠ Best Practice

O-LAT

- Support healthy behaviors for the entire duration of individuals' lives
- Universal Design
- Provides evidence-based improvements to parks
- Blueprint for planners
- Change policy and direct resources
Data Collections

Evidence-Based Research
Literature review: older adults and outdoors, Safety, cognitive and physical health, older adult preferences at parks, planning

Existing assessments, tools, and policies
AARP, Universal Design Standards, ADA Standards, National Parks and Recreation Association

Pilot Tests at Parks
- 26
- Eight states: CO, WY, IL, OH, PA, MD, DE, SC

55 Interviews 2020-21
- 31 Interviews with Park User’s
- 5 Park Professionals
- 19 Older Adults about general outdoors
Bench blends into the background foliage

No armrests

Too low to the ground

Someone could hide in the shrubbery
Interviews

Older Adults and People with Disabilities

- Personal Safety
- Park Activation
- Proximity & Convenience
Despite accounting for over 20% of the population, older adults account for what % of neighborhood park users

- 4%
- 11%
- 24%
O-LAT

Overview
A comprehensive tool that assesses ~150 indicators across 7 categories:

• General (bathrooms, parking, trash receptacle, water fountains)
• Seating
• Greenery
• Paths
• Navigation
• Activation
• Management

OUTDOOR LIVABILITY ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR PARKS AND TRAILS
A comprehensive checklist for scoring outdoor spaces on design, physical and mental wellness, safety and security, and management practices to support use regardless of age or ability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Park</th>
<th>Number of Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City or Town, State</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
SCORING: O-LAT

Minimum
• ADA standard; Meets the bare minimum of what older adults and people with disabilities need to access and navigate the outdoor space

Satisfactory
• Can be comfortably used by older adults or people with disabilities, but is not considered best practice

Exceptional
• Meets what is currently considered best practice throughout the park
Park Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park Size</th>
<th># of Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pocket Park</td>
<td>&lt; 5 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Park</td>
<td>5 – 15 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Park</td>
<td>6 – 100 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Park</td>
<td>&gt; 100 acres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Picnic Table Average Score by Park Size

- Max Possible Score
- Regional Park
- City Park
- Neighborhood Park
- Pocket Park
- Minimum Acceptable Score

Picnic Tables Scores range from 0 to 18.
Intergenerational

Q: How important are the following items in a park?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Consistent Signage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Presence of Benches Throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ramps provided wherever Stairs are offered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Walking Loops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Large Print Map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Seatbacks and Armrests on Benches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Park is Activated with Programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adults 65+

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Presence of Benches Throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Looped Sidewalks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Consistent Signage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ramps provided wherever stairs offered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Seatbacks and Armrests Provided on Benches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Large Print Map</td>
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Conclusions

1. Next steps for O-LAT: Scoring, Park size difference, Pilot tests

2. A lot of work to be done in parks to make them age friendly!

3. We can bring actionable items to park and city planners to improve parks for all

4. O-LAT has real life implications
Contact Us and Thank You!

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