



CALIFORNIA
STATE PARKS
FOUNDATION



Policy Platform

**ACCESS.
HEALTH. EQUITY.**



Introduction

California State Parks Foundation is an independent, member-supported nonprofit that mobilizes a diverse network of Californians to be active champions for our 280 state parks. We believe that all Californians are essential to sustaining our state parks. Every day, we inform and inspire current and future generations of park champions, enabling them to be the passionate advocates our state parks need. Because when we build a movement of park supporters, we ensure the long-term sustainability of our incredible state park treasures.

For nearly 50 years, we have mobilized champions to **advocate, protect, and improve state parks**. We have rallied to keep this system of unique state park treasures open and adequately funded, by activating tens of thousands of members, partners, and supporters.

Today, state parks are beloved and attract visitors far and wide. California's 280 state parks preserve the very best of California with over 1.65 million acres, 340 miles of coastline and coastal habitat, and more than 3,000 historical buildings. From towering redwoods to sand swept beaches, our parks have it all. They provide us all with places to soak in hot springs, explore California's unique history, surf world-renowned beaches, hike to tops of peaks, build sandcastles, discover old ghost towns, walk along winding rivers, and so much more. With more than 81 million visits made from Californians and out-of-state tourists alike, California's state park system is an economic engine with a total economic impact of \$6.41 billion annually in California.

Yet, the reality is too many Californians, especially those from disadvantaged communities, are not afforded the opportunity to experience these wonders in their own backyards. We are working to change this. **We believe equal access to the health and wellness benefits state parks provide should be a right for all Californians**, especially for youth who need access to our public lands now more than ever.

We developed this policy platform to set a clear path forward for achieving more equal access to California's state parks that will allow everyone to experience the critical health benefits they provide.



The Need

More than 60 percent of American adults and nearly 80 percent of American children do not engage in the recommended amount of physical activity – and the problem is worse in low-income communities.

Youth, especially, are spending less time outdoors:

- The average child plays freely outside for just four to seven minutes a day.
- Children are much more likely now to suffer from chronic conditions and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) due to sedentary, indoor lifestyles.
- With the prevalence of technology, exposing young children to too much time in front of a TV or computer can have negative effects on their development, including issues with memory, attention and language skills.

Open access to places for physical activity, like parks, can help:

- Reduce risk of cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes.
- Strengthen bones and muscle and improve mental health and mood.
- Increase cognitive function and improve long term cognitive development.
- Feel restored and focused, and perform better on tests of attention.
- Experience fewer emotional and behavioral problems.

Parks, playgrounds, natural spaces, hiking trails, and neighborhood green spaces help promote and maintain community health. Parks are a clear public health solution with mounting research supporting the health and wellness benefits access to outdoor green spaces provides Californians of all backgrounds.



The Challenge

There is a clear nexus between equitable access to parks and community health. California is facing numerous severe challenges in promoting and achieving positive health outcomes and providing equitable access to the outdoors, which would help to improve health and wellness for all:

- California has the highest rate of poverty of any state in the country at 19 percent and there is a direct correlation between income inequalities and health disparities.
- Youth growing up in tough circumstances – like poverty – are more prone to negative health outcomes.
- Between 13 and 20 percent of American children are experiencing mental health disorders in any given year.
- The pool of California children potentially eligible for mental health services has expanded but the percentage of kids actually receiving help has declined.
- Nearly 1.5 million children in California have asthma, the most prevalent chronic condition for kids ages 0 to 17.
- 57 percent of all Californians live within a state parks visitorshed – which is the communities around each park accessible by a typical walk, bike trip or drive – clearly demonstrating the large opportunity for parks to serve as a resource for families.
- 59 percent of households within the visitorshed of California’s 280 state parks are disadvantaged, including 1 million youth below the poverty line.
- Parks accessible to disadvantaged communities are underutilized due to lack of awareness and access barriers such as cultural relevancy, language, and technology.

Policy Platform

ACCESS FOR ALL

California State Parks Foundation is committed to working with advocates, stakeholders, and local and statewide leaders to improve Californians' quality of life. By addressing existing challenges and opening up more equitable access to the critical health and wellness benefits state parks provide – with a focus on identifying and addressing inequities in access for youth and disadvantaged communities. Three questions summarize our core concerns and provide the foundation for the policy platform.



01

*What barriers are preventing California's youth from **accessing** state parks?*



02

*How do we ensure all Californians, especially disadvantaged communities, experience the **health** benefits of state parks?*



03

*How can we address **equity** to improve access to state parks?*



Access for Youth

EVERY KID IN A STATE PARK

Embrace a statewide model similar to the national *Every Kid in a Park* program that provides families of fourth-grade school children with a park pass to visit state parks.

TARGET COMMUNITIES

Identify target communities where the visitorshed around a state park lacks access to existing programs and resources.

GRASSROOTS

Work with local park partners, nonprofit organizations, state parks and additional community partners across sectors and industries to build a groundswell of support.

PROGRAMMING

Ensure state park experiences are positive and meaningful through approachable and culturally relevant programming.

TRANSPORTATION

Build up transportation options for physical access to state parks, particularly among school groups and families. Increase availability of public transportation routes and lines that includes access to state parks.

EDUCATION

Target science, math and history teachers to integrate state parks into curriculum and use state parks as an outdoor classroom.

FUTURE PARKS

New state parks are prioritized in areas that are park poor and where stories of California's history have not been told. Explore new models for campgrounds, picnicking, and visitor centers to welcome and accommodate new communities.



Health

PARTNERSHIPS

Develop public private partnerships between state parks and youth-serving, health focused organizations to expand and enhance programs supporting health and wellness for youth and families by getting them into parks regularly.

PUBLIC PROGRAM COLLABORATION

Promote cross-collaboration among public health programs that serve disadvantaged populations to communicate about the benefits of parks.

LOCAL OUTREACH & AWARENESS

Identify target communities where the visitorshed around a state park experience higher rates of health disparities and partner with local organization on outreach and multicultural awareness.



LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

Recruit leadership – especially healthcare leaders – to champion the importance of green space as critical to childhood development and healthy communities.

PROVIDER PARTICIPATION

Work with health providers to embrace a parks prescription program to prescribe outdoor play to children as an approach to better health and wellness.



Equity

PARKS AS A PUBLIC BENEFIT

Build connections to integrate the low-income state park pass as part of the public benefits provided to families who enroll in programs like Medi-Cal, CHIP, CalFresh, and the CalEITC.

LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

Recruit leadership – especially equity and community leaders – to champion the importance of green spaces for disadvantaged communities.

COSTS

Ensure that costs to state parks are not a barrier to visiting by establishing a statewide fee policy.

LOCAL OUTREACH & AWARENESS

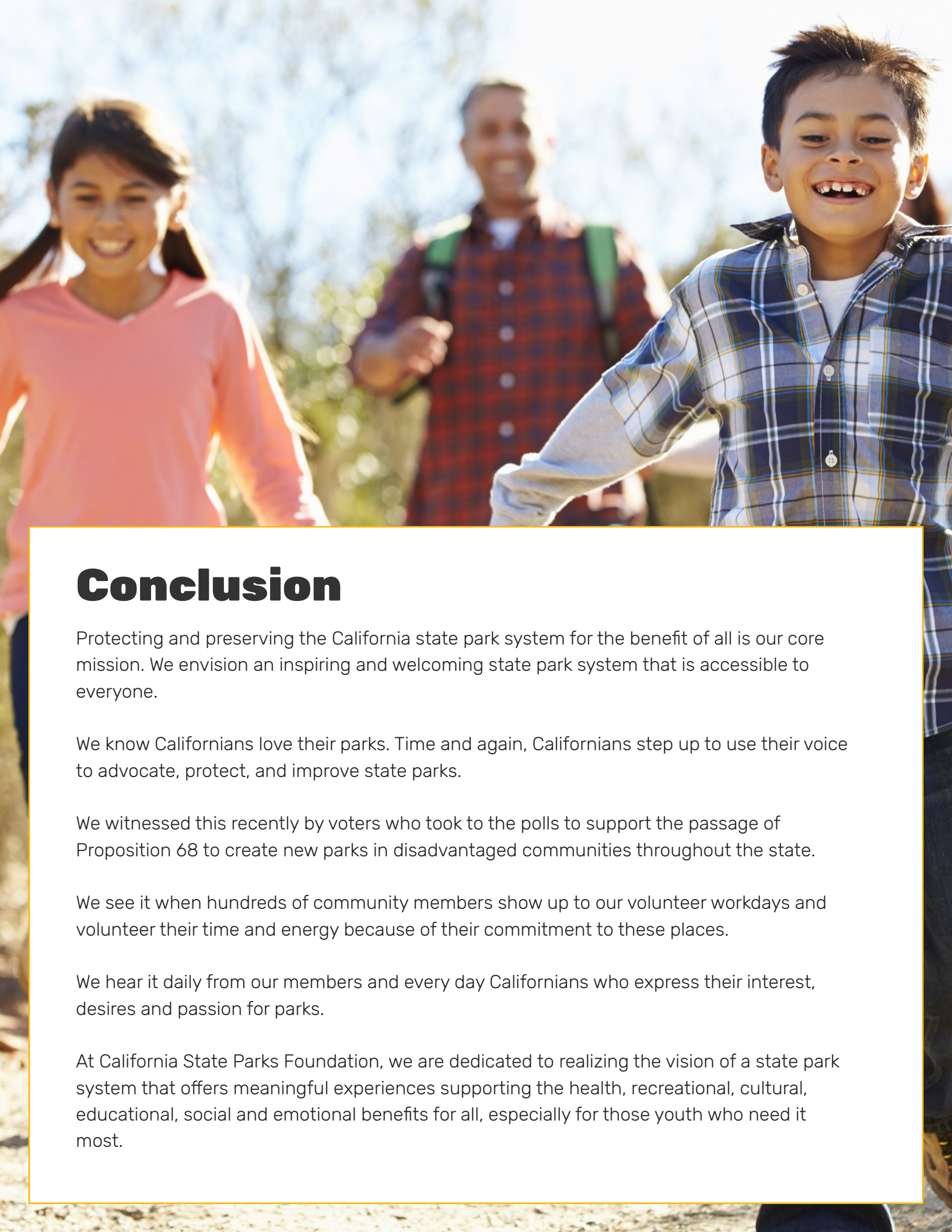
Identify target communities where the visitorshed around a state park experiences higher rates of poverty and partner with local organizations on outreach and multicultural awareness.

INTERPRETATION

Update and modernize existing interpretive displays and materials in parks so that they are relevant, modern and tell California's diverse history.

OFFSET

Advocate for policies to make entrance fees a California tax write-off.



Conclusion

Protecting and preserving the California state park system for the benefit of all is our core mission. We envision an inspiring and welcoming state park system that is accessible to everyone.

We know Californians love their parks. Time and again, Californians step up to use their voice to advocate, protect, and improve state parks.

We witnessed this recently by voters who took to the polls to support the passage of Proposition 68 to create new parks in disadvantaged communities throughout the state.

We see it when hundreds of community members show up to our volunteer workdays and volunteer their time and energy because of their commitment to these places.

We hear it daily from our members and every day Californians who express their interest, desires and passion for parks.

At California State Parks Foundation, we are dedicated to realizing the vision of a state park system that offers meaningful experiences supporting the health, recreational, cultural, educational, social and emotional benefits for all, especially for those youth who need it most.



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