



FACT SHEET - NOVEMBER 2022

Realizing Park Equity:

An Evaluation of the National Park Service's Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program

This study evaluated the effectiveness of the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) program, which funds parks in low-income urban neighborhoods across the country. The results of this study can be used to improve ORLP program design, administration and implementation. This research can also inform solutions to ensure more equitable access to outdoor recreation for disadvantaged urban communities across the country.

Research Questions and Methods

- Is the federal ORLP program accomplishing its intended goals to promote outdoor recreation access to urban, economically disadvantaged areas?
- What are potential barriers that prevent these areas from better utilizing ORLP funding?

Researchers used a mixed-methods approach using qualitative and quantitative steps, including interviews, spatial analysis and descriptive statistics.

Findings

1. State liaison agencies and ORLP applicants appreciate the dedicated funding to urban, park-poor communities.
2. The ORLP program is funding projects in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.
3. Shifting ORLP timelines, priorities, and grant guidelines make administering the program at the federal, state and local levels challenging.
4. All levels of government are experiencing staff capacity issues that hinder the effectiveness of the ORLP program in being streamlined and timely.
5. Despite difficulty with the application window, state liaison officers and ORLP applicants largely appreciated the two-phase application process.
6. Programmatic elements of the ORLP program such as matching grant requirements and lack of targeted technical assistance tools can be barriers to program participation.

Photo: Edward Rendon Park, Austin. Credit: Cesar Garza / Flickr

Socioeconomic characteristics of ORLP-funded census tracts

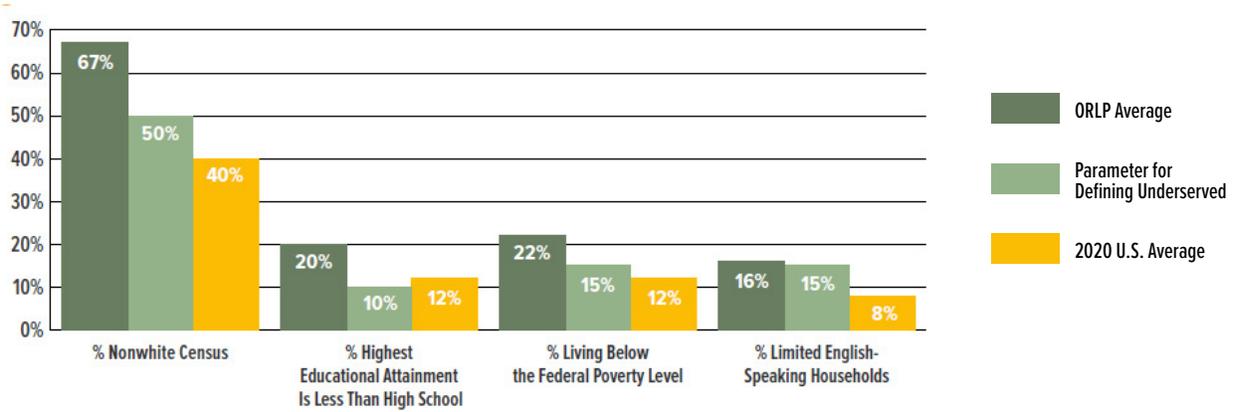


Photo: Deb Qep / Pixabay

Recommendations

1. The National Park Service should create more consistent and predictable application timelines and evaluation and eligibility criteria for the ORLP program.
2. State liaison agencies and local governments should develop tools to assess park equity and need to target ORLP funds to park-poor communities.
3. The National Park Service and park advocates should provide technical assistance to state liaison agencies and eligible applicants throughout the application process and life cycle of the grant period.
4. The National Park Service should facilitate more consistent and transparent communication between the state liaison agencies and ORLP applicants at all stages of the process.
5. Congress and the National Park Service should work to secure administrative funding for increased staff capacity to support Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) implementation at the federal and state levels.
6. Congress should work with the administration and advocates on a legislative solution to the LWCF match requirement and codify the ORLP program to create more consistent program parameters.
7. The National Park Service and park equity advocates should conduct further research on how to address programmatic barriers such as the “in-perpetuity” requirement and application obstacles for tribes.

View the full policy brief at bit.ly/realizing-park-equity-policy-brief