

Outdoor Livability Assessment Tool

A Method for Designing and Evaluating
Age-Friendly Outdoor Spaces for All

SAFE and HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Karen Roof, PhD

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.

PARKS and OUTDOOR SPACES for ALL



Outdoor Spaces

- Parks are often designed with the needs and interests of younger populations in mind that can be similar of older adults
- Important amenity that provides numerous benefits to physical and mental health for all populations

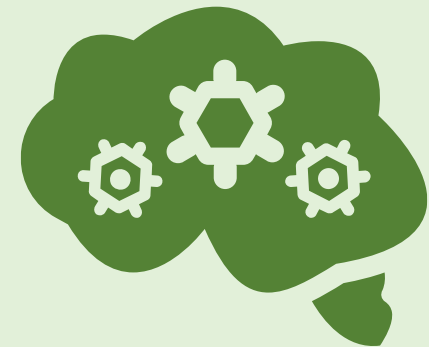
Health Benefits:



Increased
Physical Activity¹



Anxiety, and
Depression²



Reduced Cognitive
Decline³

Fun QUIZ Question😊

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:

- [Benches](#) have backs and armrests to provide support while seated and facilitate getting up
- [Seating](#) is provided in sun and shade all times of day
- [Trees that release seeds](#) (acorns, pinecones, etc.) are located away from paths and heavily occupied areas
- Picnic tables [have at least one](#) wheelchair accessible seating space
- [Restroom doors have pull-style](#) handles (i.e., D-ring) on both sides

Quiz Question

Despite accounting for over 20% of the population, older adults account for what % of neighborhood park users

4%

11%

24%



Parks

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



**Increase
Use**



**Decrease
Safety Risks**

Data Collection for O-LAT

Evidence-Based Research

Literature review: older adults and outdoors, Safety, cognitive and physical health, older adult preferences at parks, planning, park design, universal design

Pilot Tests at Parks

- 27
- Eight states: CO, WY, IL, OH, PA, MD, DE, SC

Existing assessments, tools, and policies

AARP, Universal Design Standards, ADA Standards, National Parks and Recreation Association

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

Too low to the ground

No armrests

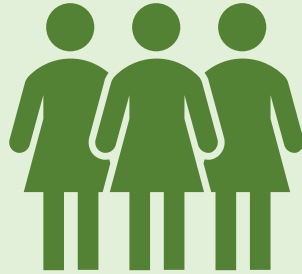
Someone could hide in the shrubbery

Interviews

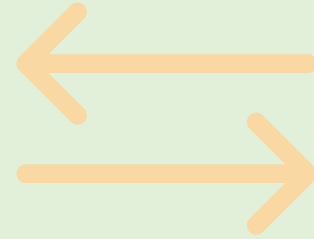
Older Adults and People with Disabilities



**Personal
Safety**



**Park
Activation**



**Proximity &
Convenience**

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.

Name of Park

Number of Acres

City or Town, State

Date



SCORING: O-LAT

Minimum

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

Satisfactory

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

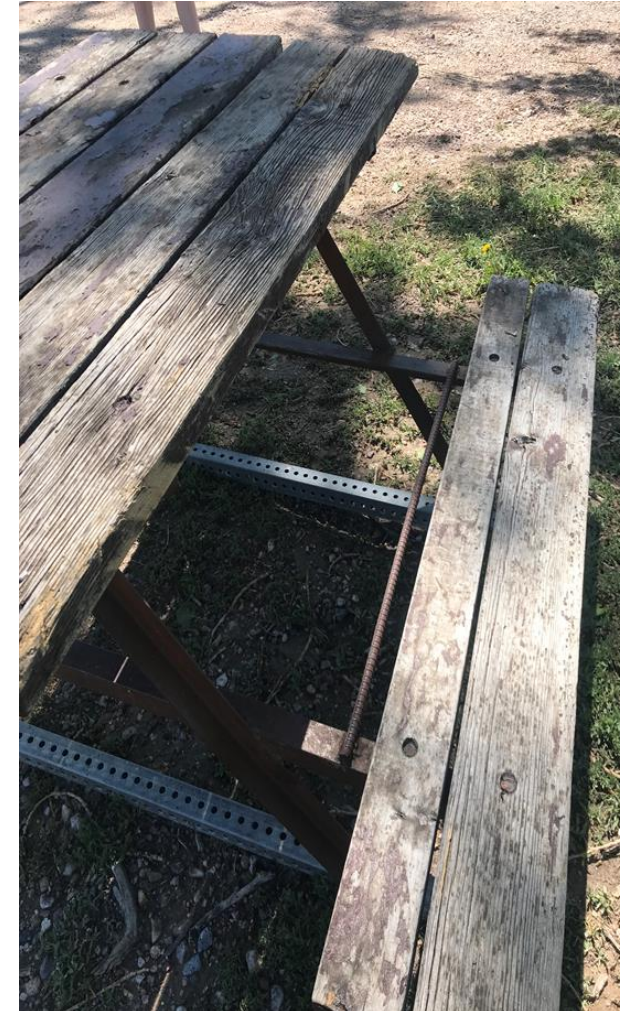
Exceptional

- **Meets what is currently considered best practice throughout park**

RESTROOMS	MINIMUM	SATISFACTORY	EXCEPTIONAL
	3 pts	2 pts	1 pts
Points Worth			
Open and usable year-round			
If no permanent bathroom present or not open year-round, portable toilets are provided year-round			
Large enough to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers			
Bathroom door is not too heavy and is easy to open without excessive twisting or pulling			
Doors have self-closing hinges			
Doors have pull-style handles on both sides of the door			
Has at least one ADA accessible stall that is large enough to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers			
The minimum width of the stall is 60 in (1525 mm)			
The location of the stall door is in front of the clear space and diagonal to the toilet			
Toilet is 2½ in higher than standard toilet (17 to 19 in)			
A grab bar is installed at least 36 in (965 mm) behind the toilet,			
Another grab bar is mounted adjacent to the toilet on the sidewall			
Has non-slip flooring			
Cleaned regularly (at least every week)			
At least one stall is equipped with a changing table			
Stalls have easy-locks for quick access			

Park Size

Park Size	# of Acres
Pocket Park	< 5 acres
Neighborhood Park	5 – 15 acres
City Park	6 – 100 acres
Regional Park	> 100 acres



Conclusions

1. O-LAT Update two weeks: Pilot tests (communities of color, location diversity)
2. A lot of work to be done in parks to make them age-friendly!
3. Green and blue spaces are powerful, even pictures on walls improves mental health
4. Helps bring actionable items for park and city planners to improve parks for all
5. O-LAT has real life implications
6. Need to get tool in the hands of practitioners!



Contact Us and Thank You!

SHC Creators! Sean Rusnak, MPH, MURP

Hannah Ciolek, MPH

Contact: Dr. Karen Roof, Safe and Healthy Communities



kroof@safeandhealthycommunities.org



202-285-6061

www.safeandhealthycommunities.org



Intergenerational

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

Adults
65+

Rank	Item
1	Consistent Signage
2	Presence of Benches Throughout
3	Ramps provided wherever stairs are offered
4	Walking Loops
5	Large Print Map
6	Seatbacks and Armrests on Benches
7	Park is Activated with Programs

Adults
< 65

Rank	Item
1	Presence of Benches Throughout
2	Walking Loops
3	Consistent Signage
4	Ramps provided wherever stairs offered
5	Seatbacks and Armrests Provided on Benches
6	Large Print Map
7	Park is Activated with Programs

Fun QUIZ Question😊

**If 300 feet between benches is the minimum for comfort for all ages
what is best practice?**

100 feet

200 feet

250 feet

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, climate, the natural environment – **built environment, policies and programs**
- Funding from the Next50 Initiative Foundation – Innovation projects that improve lives of older adults.

