



Making Effective Use of Existing Resources
for Healthier Communities

JOINT USE **DIALOGUE GUIDE**



National Recreation
and Park Association



INTRODUCTION

At the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), we believe that local park and recreation agencies are strong leaders for creating healthy and vibrant communities. We understand both intuitively and from research that the more active children are, the healthier they will be now and when they grow up. It is also becoming increasingly clear that certain places make physical activity harder instead of easier. There is a growing body of evidence documenting the influence of the “built environment” — the many human-made physical elements that form or influence the physical characteristics of communities (e.g., roads and sidewalks, buildings, commercial and neighborhood developments, parks, empty lots, schools, playgrounds, transportation systems and more) as well as the design, location and layout of these structures and facilities — on people’s physical and mental health, youth development, social well-being and community economic vitality. In short, where we live, work and play — the physical environment itself — is a major determinant on our health.

Many of us can probably remember playing as children. Unfortunately, liability, maintenance costs and other concerns have resulted in many existing recreational facilities being closed off to use by youth and other community members.

In many instances, locked fences greet kids and families looking for recreational opportunities during out of school times – such as evenings and weekends. Residents in neighborhoods within our communities that lack parks or formal “recreation centers” may rely on less formal recreational venues such as school playgrounds for physical activity. As access to these areas becomes more limited, so are the opportunities for families to engage in daily physical activity.

One strategy increasingly being explored and used by communities across the country are “joint use agreements.” Joint use refers to an agreement – sometimes informal but increasingly formal – between two or more entities (e.g., school, city and/or a private organization) to share indoor and outdoor spaces like gymnasiums, athletic fields and playgrounds. “Joint use agreements” build on current community assets that may be underutilized. Repurposing these spaces during times of underuse can be a win-win for communities. It is more cost effective than building new facilities in other parts of the community and it provides kids and families with safe places within their neighborhoods to be physically active.

NRPA is the leading advocacy organization dedicated to the advancement of public parks and recreation opportunities. Founded in 1965 through the merger of five national organizations dedicated to the same cause, NRPA has grown over the years — in total membership, in outreach efforts, in building partnerships, and in serving as the voice and defender of parks and recreation.

NRPA is dedicated to educating professionals and the public on the essential nature of parks and recreation. Through learning opportunities, research, and communications initiatives, we strive to generate significant public support for our movement in order to advance the development of best practices and resources that will make parks and recreation indispensable elements of American communities.

INTRODUCTION

As with any strategy, there are real benefits as well as legitimate questions and concerns. However, this information is not always included in our public discourse in ways that facilitate the building of relationships and shared understanding necessary to make progress.

It is important for local park and recreation professionals to create opportunities within their community for people to explore the role that “joint use agreements” can play in creating opportunities for physical activity, improving the health of children and youth, and enhancing the overall health and quality of life in our communities.

Making progress in these areas can be complex with long-term solutions requiring the participation of many different local leaders and stakeholders. Partnering with public and private organizations; developing coalitions of community leaders representing schools, businesses, public health agencies, municipal and county governments, and other key policymakers, and engaging the broader community in the development of plans and strategies that address their highest interests and aspirations can all be necessary for making and sustaining progress.

Convening diverse groups and laying the ground work for successful partnerships or coalitions may be a new role for many park and recreation leaders.

This tool is designed to help local parks and recreation organizations lead a discussion among a diverse team of community leaders and stakeholders to address the potential of joint use agreements as one strategy for creating a healthy community.

This guide offers a starting place for building the trust, relationships, and shared understanding that are needed in order to make progress toward creating built environments that support and promote healthier people and healthier communities. And through the tips, materials and resources offered here, we hope that groups will use the attached action planning template (see “Our Next Steps”) to begin to identify steps they can take to enhance and expand opportunities for community members of all ages to be physically active in their community in ways that promote and enhance health for all people.

Whether you are new to convening diverse groups, or have lots of experience building coalitions and partnerships, the discussion guide that follows will help you hold a highly productive conversation with potential partners. A well-planned and well-facilitated initial meeting will:

1. **Raise awareness about the role of the built environment in healthy communities;**
2. **Identify shared interests; and**
3. **Begin to establish a strong foundation for future collaborations.**

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A. USING THIS TOOL

There are different ways to use this tool, including:

1. To host an initial conversation about a particular facility or small set of facilities **within one neighborhood** that currently has limited recreational and play options for youth and community members; or

2. As a conversational starting point for a meeting of representatives from different organizations or neighborhoods to look more broadly across an entire community for places within which joint use agreements could be an effective strategy to address increased access to recreation and physical activity opportunities.

These different approaches each have their potential advantages. Multiple conversations among a broad range of residents can build momentum and lead to a variety of outcomes including: grassroots activities; the creation of task forces; and the inclusion of resident recommendations into a strategic plan. Neighborhood-specific dialogues sometimes have the advantage of gathering people who already have a strong tangible connection and interest in the conversation, and also may be able to move more quickly and readily towards shared action following the initial conversation. In all cases, the *Action Plan Template: Our Next Steps* (Attachment 3) will be useful in helping groups to be clear about how they are moving forward.

Whether your focus is an individual park, a section of town, or the whole community, plan to engage a diverse group of participants and be sure to invite formal as well as informal leaders.

The convener tips in the next section will walk you through the basics needed to organize and facilitate a successful conversation. For additional tools and advice about how to organize large-scale public dialogue, see the Resources Appendix for further information from Community Initiatives, Everyday Democracy, and National Coalition on Dialogue and Deliberation.

B. CONVENER TIPS

To enhance the quality of your community conversation, and also build a stronger potential for actions emerging from it, it is important to be thoughtful around the organizing and set-up of your meeting. Based on experiences of other successful community dialogues, we offer the following tips for *organizing* an effective conversation:

1. Be clear about what you are asking people to do and why.

- Explain the purpose of the meeting.
- Identify the goal(s) of the meeting.
- Let people know the time commitment for the initial meeting.

2. Identify a diverse group of 8 to 15 people, including:

- Formal and informal leaders.
- Participants who use parks and surrounding areas.
- People who may already be working to improve community health.
- People who are in a position to make decisions about parks and the physical environment.
- People from different parts of town, age groups, income or education levels, cultural or racial groups.

There are likely a number of different groups and organizations already with some level of interest or engagement in the relationship between the built environment and a healthier community. And there may be other groups who you recognize will be important “influencers” or decision-makers able to affect progress in this area. While the precise “mix” will look different in each community, some specific groups to consider could include:

- Town, city, county or regional planning departments or commissions.
- Transportation Authority.
- Public works department.
- Other government agencies serving youth, families and the elderly.
- American Association of Retired Persons.
- Schools.
- Business groups such as the Chamber of Commerce or Rotary.
- Youth organizations such as the YMCA, or Boys and Girls Clubs.
- Local health care providers and health insurance companies, including local health departments, community health centers, hospitals or physicians groups.
- Private businesses.
- Elected officials and community leaders.

- Parent groups (e.g., “walking school buses”).
- Non-profit organizations promoting biking, walking and other forms of active transportation.

3. Use a personal touch to recruit participants.

- Do some homework about those you are inviting, so you have a sense of why this issue might be relevant for them.
- Begin with a personal phone call or visit.
- Follow-up with a written invitation.
- Send a confirmation prior to the meeting.
- If the person you are recruiting is not available, invite them to suggest another person who might have a similar perspective.

4. Choose the time and location of the meeting carefully.

- Keeping in mind the invitees, decide whether business hours or evening hours will work best.
- Make sure the meeting space is welcoming and accessible to all kinds of people.
- Consider adding elements such as healthy snacks to create a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere.

5. Invite someone with facilitation experience to lead the discussion.

- If you plan to lead the discussion, become familiar with basic facilitation skills to ensure a successful meeting (see Attachment 1 in the Resources section for facilitator tips).

6. Evaluate the process.

- See Attachment 4 in the resources section for a sample evaluation.

7. Be prepared to establish next steps if needed.

- Use the *Action Plan Template: Our Next Steps* with the group to identify, clarify and record proposed action items emerging from the dialogue.
- Follow up with attendees and participants to clarify their roles and action items for potential next steps.
- Schedule follow-up meetings.
- Plan of action (sample/template as appendix).

C. DISCUSSION GUIDE

AGENDA (3 HOUR MEETING)

1. Welcome and Introductions _____ 20 min.

Introduce yourself and let people know the purpose of this discussion.

Possible meeting/discussion goals could include:

- **Begin to establish a shared understanding about:**
 - a. The role and status of community design, the built environment, and their impact on the health and well-being of community members; and
 - b. Joint use agreements as potential strategies and their potential applicability to the neighborhood/community.
- **Identify shared interests among meeting participants.**
- **Identify possible opportunities for future collaboration.**

Invite people to say name, organization and their connection to or history with the community/neighborhood.

Establish discussion ground rules (see Attachment 1 for some sample "Operating Agreements").

2. Explore shared values, perspectives and interests _____ 30 min.

Invite participants to talk briefly about their connection to the community (or neighborhood). Before starting, offer the following statements to all participants:

- **According to The Prevention Institute, "the way a community is designed affects how healthy we are. Our surroundings influence the quality of the food we eat, how much exercise we get, and our quality of life."¹**
- **Increasing obesity rates in the United States continue to trigger discussions about how public health can be improved through the built environment with particular focus on safe, easy access to places and spaces to engage in physical activity.²**

In smaller groups of 3–4, invite participants to turn to their neighbors and discuss the following:

- **What are some examples we see in our own community/neighborhood that seem to support this statement?**
- **Which of these examples seem more "positive" to you (i.e., elements of community design that help create access to opportunities for play, recreation and other forms of physical activity) and which seem more "negative" (i.e., barriers or challenges to accessing opportunities for being physical active in the community)?**

After about 10 minutes, invite at least one person from each smaller group to share highlights of their conversations with the whole group. (If more than one person from a smaller group wishes to share their reflections, that's fine.)

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS:

Consider having this definition written out and posted on a flipchart for reference throughout the gathering.

Hand out one large, blank piece of paper to each small group.

Hand out multi-colored markers or pencils to each group.

¹ Prevention Institute's "Fact Sheet: Joint Use and Health"; www.jointuse.org/resources/make-joint-use-happen/fact-sheet-joint-use-and-health/, 2009.

² "Parks and Recreation in Underserved Areas: A Public Health Perspective" (NRPA); www.nrpa.org/research-papers

After each smaller group has had a chance to share some of their highlights, ask the full group:

- **From your perspective, what’s going well?**
 - What contributes to this community being a healthy, vibrant place to live, work and play?
- **Where do there seem to be significant opportunities for improvement?**
 - What assets or opportunities do we see for enhancing the opportunities for recreation and physical activity — especially for youth and children in our community/neighborhood?

While listening to the discussion, take note of themes, repeated examples, similar stories, shared interests and goals. Invite participants to do the same and reflect on these toward the end of the conversation.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS:

Record key ideas on several pieces of flip chart paper.

3. Consider opportunities for joint use agreements as a strategy for creating a more active and healthy community _____ 45 min.

Reintroduce the concept and practice of joint use agreements by reading and posting the following statement:

According to the Prevention Institute, “Joint use — two or more entities (e.g., school, city and/or a private organization) sharing indoor and outdoor spaces like gymnasiums, athletic fields and playgrounds — improves people’s chances of being healthy by making it easier for them to be physically active. Joint use provides kids and adults with safe, conveniently located places to exercise and play. Examples of joint use agreements:

- **A principal unlocks the school gate after hours so neighbors can shoot hoops or play ball on evenings and weekends.**
- **A school and swim team share a pool.**
- **A school opens its soccer field to a local league for weekend games.**
- **A local park and recreation agency opens its Recreation Center to the local PE teacher so students have a place to exercise.”³**

As a full group, begin to identify those places and facilities in the community where joint use agreements — either formal or informal — have happened in the past or are currently in place; for example:

- **Park and recreation agencies.**
- **Schools already opening up their facilities after hours to organizations or community groups.**
- **Churches**
- **Etc.**

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS:

Consider having this statement written out and posted on a flipchart for reference throughout the gathering.

Consider developing and distributing a short (less than 1 page) intro to joint use agreements; see Attachment 5 for possible resources.

³ Prevention Institute’s “Joint Use 101”; www.jointuse.org/resources/joint-use-101

Part way through this discussion, it may be helpful to prompt and encourage participants to “think outside the box” and consider non-traditional partners—corporate partners, faith based organizations, health & fitness facilities, camps etc. Although the discussion may start with a focus on physical activity, joint use agreements are expanding to include community gardens, utility corridors, kitchens, and even privately owned facilities.

After generating an opening list, invite participants to reflect on examples.

- **Have they been effective? If yes,**
 - What seemed to help make these partnerships or agreements work?
 - What have been some of the benefits?
- **In cases where they did not catch on or last, what were some of the challenges?**

Move back into smaller groups of 3-4 people. In each group, ask participants to generate a short list of opportunities they see in their community or neighborhood to effectively use joint use agreements. For each possibility, include:

- **What would be the focus or desired outcome (i.e., what need is being addressed)?**
- **Who would be the key partners?**
- **What might be some of the “big questions/concerns” to work through?**

After about 10–12 minutes, invite each smaller group to share their initial ideas. After all of the ideas have been shared, invite participants to ask any questions of each other regarding any of the ideas emerging from each smaller group.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS:

Record examples on flip chart paper.

Leave space between examples so that you can come back with additional notes from following discussion of experiences (i.e., what made these effective or not).

4. What do we need to get smarter about? _____ 25 min.

Guide participants in a discussion of what “big questions” have yet to be addressed before the group can begin to move forward with a plan for joint use agreements. The group can dive deeper into questions that emerged in section 3 or introduce and invite them to explore some common issues of “joint use agreements”, for instance:

- **UTILIZATION** — How will we assure utilization of the facilities once the agreements are in place? In essence — “if we open it, will they come?”
- **BALANCE** — How do we balance usage of the space between “formal” (ex. organized sports leagues) and “informal” (e.g., unstructured family play time) users/organizations?
- **INCLUSION** — How do we fully include all segments of our population (neighborhood) in this discussion and assure that everyone has equal access to facilities?

Invite participants to join a small group to discuss one of the “big questions” (from above or from section 3) that they may have knowledge about or interest in. Have each group focus their discussion on any particular challenges and insights their question may bring to any joint use agreement that may be pursued by the group.

After 10–12 minutes, have each group share 1–2 themes from their discussion with the larger group. Allow time for follow up questions/comments from the larger group regarding any themes or thoughts that emerged from the smaller groups.

5. Identify potential next steps _____ 30 min.

Invite participants to reflect on the conversation so far, and consider whether there is enough shared interest in order to move forward. If the interest is there, the questions below will help the group begin to explore next steps. (The attached *Action Plan Template* may help you record the group’s responses and clarify your intended next steps.)

When you think about all we’ve discussed so far:

- **What stands out?**
- **What themes did you notice?**

What existing relationships, capacities, experiences and successes can we utilize and build upon if/when we move forward?

- **If we decide to move forward with work to enhance our built environment, what role might our different organizations play?**
- **Who else needs to be at the table?**

What specific next steps will we take?

6. Closing _____ 15 min.

If there is interest in moving forward,

- **Use the attached action planning template — “Our Next Steps” — to identify possible future directions.**
- **Discuss plans to reconvene the group.**

Thank everyone for coming.

D. RESOURCES

ATTACHMENT 1: FACILITATION TIPS

It's important to stress that you don't need to have an expert facilitator to have productive meetings. The following are tips and ideas to help make your team experience as productive and enjoyable as possible.

Know Your Role

As the group's facilitator you should:

- Help the group understand its task/purpose.
- Make sure that everyone has an opportunity to speak and be heard.
- Create a safe environment for dialogue (including disagreement).
- Keep an open and balanced conversational flow.
- Focus energy of the group on the common task.
- Manage the group's time.
- Manage the group decision making process.
- Maintain neutrality when playing the primary facilitator role.
- Have available a mechanism through which contact information can be exchanged (e.g., a copied sign in sheet or a networking worksheet).

Set Simple Operating Agreements

Review "group operating agreements" and ask the participants if they agree with them or want to add anything. Basic operating agreements may include:

- Be respectful.
- Everyone gets a fair hearing.
- Share "air time."
- One person speaks at a time. Speak for yourself, not for others.
- If you are offended or upset, say so, and say why.
- You can disagree, but don't make it personal.
- Everyone helps the facilitator keep moving and stay on track.
- Personal stories are not shared outside the group.

Support the Group Process

Even though your team has agreed on some basic operating agreements, you will need to monitor how well the participants are honoring these agreements and communicating with each other — who has spoken, who hasn't, and whose points haven't received a fair hearing. Here are a few ideas to support the process:

- A well thought-out agenda is the key to a productive meeting; agenda needs to include desired outcomes/ agenda items/key questions/time estimates. (It is always good to give people a chance to shape/refine the agenda before the meeting and help with the creation of the agenda for the following meeting).
- Send relevant materials being discussed a couple of days before the meeting to make sure people have enough time to review them.
- Give the group an estimate of time you propose they spend on each question and give them time updates as needed (have a "game plan" for how the group could use its time and then be flexible).
- Don't be afraid of silence (it will sometimes take a while for participants to offer an answer to a question you pose).
- When deciding whether to intervene, err on the side of non-intervention. Facilitators are frequently trapped into taking too much responsibility for the group which can undermine the group experience. Encourage the group to take responsibility for the quality of their process.

Focus On Content

In addition to helping the group with process, you will also need to help the group deal with the "content" of the discussion:

- Make sure the group considers a wide range of views.
- Ask the group to think about the concerns and values that underlie their beliefs.
- Steer the group away from focusing too much on or be overly influenced by one point of view.
- Remain neutral about content and be cautious about expressing your own values.
- Help participants identify "common ground," but don't try to force consensus.

TIPS FOR HANDLING TYPICAL CHALLENGES

The Quiet or Shy Participant

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

Try to draw out quiet participants, but don't put them on the spot. Make eye contact: it reminds them that you'd like to hear from them. Look for non-verbal cues to see if they want to speak. You can be more direct and ask them for their opinion: "Laurie, what do you think?"

The Dominator

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

As the facilitator, it is your responsibility to help ensure an individual does not dominate the discussion. Once it becomes clear that a person is dominating, you must intervene and set limits. Start by reminding the group (and the individual) that you want to hear from all participants. Next, you might ask the individual to wait until everyone else has had a chance to give their opinion on the question. If the pattern continues you may need to be more direct: "Joe, please finish your point because I feel we are wandering a bit from our agreed upon agenda and I'd like to give others a chance to speak."

Lack of Focus/Wandering Off Track

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

Responding to this can be a hard call. After all, the discussion belongs to the group members. Yet, it is the facilitator's job to maintain group focus. You may wish to give some leeway to participants who want to explore closely-related topics. However, if only a few participants are carrying the discussion in a new direction, the others are likely to feel frustrated, resentful, and bored. The facilitator should try to refocus the discussion, perhaps by asking, "How does your point relate to the ____?" or stating, "That's an interesting point, but I'd like for us to return to the initial question."

Lack of Interest/Excitement

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

When people help craft the agenda, they are more likely to engage in the discussion. However, lack of interest/excitement can happen when the facilitator talks too much or does not give participants enough time to respond after posing the questions. It may help to pose a question and go around the circle so that everyone has a chance to respond. Another possible reason for the apparent lack of excitement in the discussion may be that the group seems to be in agreement. In this case the facilitator might check this assumption and then gain agreement for moving on to the next question or topic on the agenda.

Conflict/Tension

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

If there is tension, address it directly. Remind participants that disagreement and conflict of ideas is fine and useful. You must interrupt personal attacks, name calling, or put-downs as soon as they occur. Remind group/the individual that it is acceptable to challenge someone's ideas, but it is not acceptable to challenge them personally. Don't hesitate to appeal to the group for help; if the group members are bought into the ground rules, they will support you.

RESOURCES

DIALOGUE V. DEBATE

DEBATE/DISCUSSION	DIALOGUE
Assuming there is one right answer, and you have it	Assuming many people have pieces of the answer and together can craft new solutions
Combative: participants attempt to prove the other side is wrong	Collaborative: participants work together toward common understanding and commitment
About winning	About exploring common ground
Listening to find flaws and making counter-arguments	Listening to understand, find meaning, and agreement
Defending assumptions as truth	Revealing assumptions for re-evaluation
Critiquing the other side's position	Re-examining all positions
Defending one's own views against those of others	Admitting that others' thinking can improve on one's own
Searching for flaws and weaknesses in others' positions	Searching for strength and value in others' positions
Seeking a conclusion or vote that ratifies your position	Discovering new options, not seeking closure

Adapted from The Public Conversations Project, Study Circles Resource Center, The Common Enterprise and Community Initiatives.

RESOURCES

ATTACHMENT 3: ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

OUR NEXT STEPS

What change(s) do we want to see?

What specific action ideas do we want to work on?

ACTION IDEAS/ STRATEGIES	WHAT IS ALREADY BEING DONE?	WHAT OBSTACLES AND/ OR OPPORTUNITIES DO WE SEE?	WHAT INFORMATION DO WE NEED?	SOME IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS: • Who will take the lead? • Other key participants?

ATTACHMENT 4: EVALUATION FORM

1. Please rate the discussion:

EXCELLENT GOOD FAIR POOR

2. How well did the meeting achieve the goals listed below:

GOALS

- Begin to establish a shared understanding about the role of joint use agreements in our community.

EXCELLENT GOOD FAIR POOR

- Identify shared interests among meeting participants.

EXCELLENT GOOD FAIR POOR

- Identify possible opportunities for future collaboration.

EXCELLENT GOOD FAIR POOR

3. Are there topics or issues regarding joint use agreements that we missed during this discussion? If yes, what?

4. What next steps would you recommend?

5. Would you like to continue to stay involved?

YES NO MAYBE

6. Contact Information.

NAME

E-MAIL

PHONE

ADDRESS

RESOURCES

ATTACHMENT 5: INFORMATION ABOUT JOINT USE AGREEMENTS AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Below is a list of available resources that may be helpful for you to reference. Please note this list is not inclusive, but rather a short list of compiled resources that NRPA has found useful in the past.

Active Design Guidelines — Promoting Physical Activity and Health in Design: www.nyc.gov/adg

Active Living by Design: www.activelivingbydesign.org

American Public Health Association: www.apha.org

The Centers for Disease Control, Designing and Building Healthy Places: www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces

The Centers for Disease Control, Physical Activity Resources for Health Professionals — Active Environments: www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/professionals/environment/index.html

Change Lab Solutions — Joint Use Policies: www.changelabsolutions.org/search?keys=joint,use,agreements

CPTED — Crime Prevention through Environmental Design, Chulavista, CA: www.ncpc.org/training/training-topics/crime-prevention-through-environmental-design-cpted

Design for Health: www.designforhealth.net

Joint Use: www.jointuse.org

Liability Risks for After-Hours Use of Public School Property: A 50-State Survey: www.nplanonline.org/nplan/products/liabilitysurvey

Liability Primer: [www.nplanonline.org/sites/phlpnet.org/files/Primer-on Liability_FactSht_FINAL_20100820_0.pdf](http://www.nplanonline.org/sites/phlpnet.org/files/Primer-on_Liability_FactSht_FINAL_20100820_0.pdf)

National Recreation and Park Association: www.nrpa.org

National Recreation and Park Association Community Garden Toolkit: www.nrpa.org/uploadedFiles/Explore_Parks_and_Recreation/Project_Initiatives/2up_Final_BuildingaCommunityGarden.pdf

Public Health Law & Policy: www.phlpnet.org/search/node/joint%20use

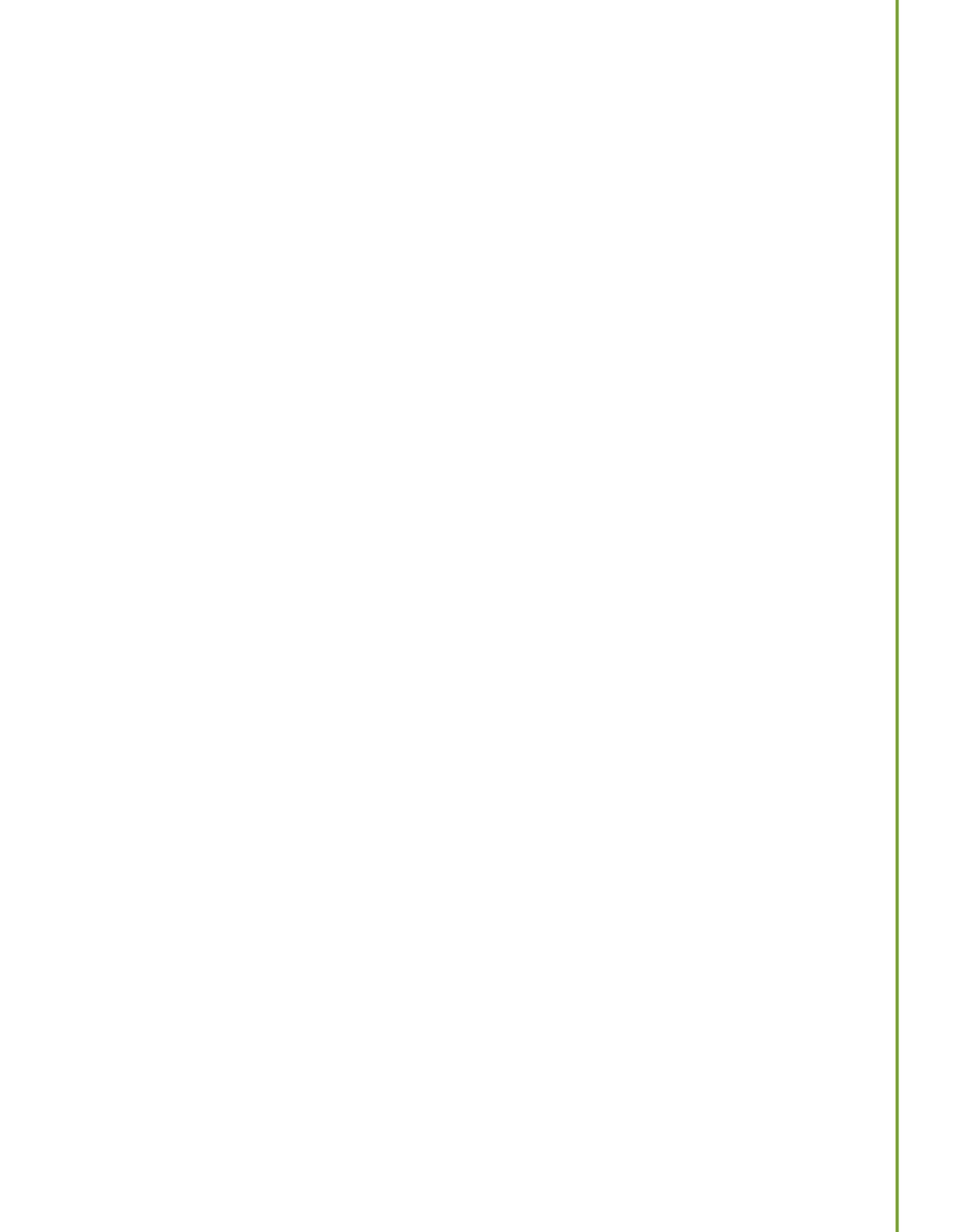
21st Century School Fund & Center for Cities & Schools: Policy Recommendations to Expand and Sustain Community Use (www.citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/joint-use.html)

ATTACHMENT 6: RESOURCES FOR PUBLIC DIALOGUE AND COMMUNITY CHANGE PROCESSES

Everyday Democracy: www.everyday-democracy.org

Community Initiatives: communityinitiatives.com

National Coalition on Dialogue and Deliberation: www.ncdd.org





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7-1-1 for speech and hearing impaired

www.NRPA.org