

How to... Increase your range of audiences

This short guide on increasing the range of audiences in parks is based on the work we have completed with projects funded by the HLF / BIG Lottery Parks for People programme. In order to successfully engage and attract a diverse range of visitors, parks need to:

- Understand the profile and numbers of existing visitors;
- Understand the profile of residents surrounding the park and identify under-represented and hard to reach groups;
- Develop a programme of activities and events which target specific groups.

Understanding existing visitors

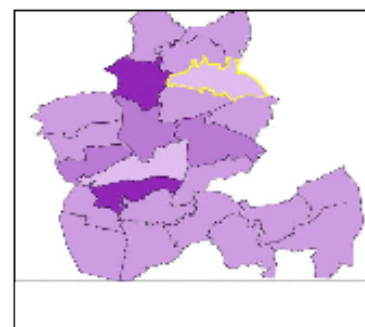
To develop an effective plan for engaging more or different visitors, parks need to understand their current audience base. There are a number of ways to achieve this:

- Install electronic visitor counters at main entrances.
- Carry out manual visitor counts to test accuracy of electronic counters (or as an alternative where these aren't appropriate).
- Carry out a visitor survey (using GreenStat or equivalent) to develop an understanding of your visitors' age range, gender, ethnicity and reasons for visiting.

Case Study: Burslem Park in Stoke on Trent has found that the use of electronic gate counters and surveys has helped to emphasise the importance of parks to the local community and actually how well used they actually are. "We were astounded that our park has 200,000 annual visits. We now have real knowledge about our visitors and are keen to ensure that this is the case for all our other major parks. This is likely to be a consideration in our future staffing structure for parks". (Stoke on Trent City Council)

Identifying target groups

To diversify their audience base, parks need to understand how their current visitor profiles compare to neighbouring communities. This can be achieved by carrying out a neighbourhood survey or using existing datasets such as the census. From this, they can identify under-represented groups and set appropriate targets. The image shows the population density surrounding Priory Park in Dudley, taken from www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk

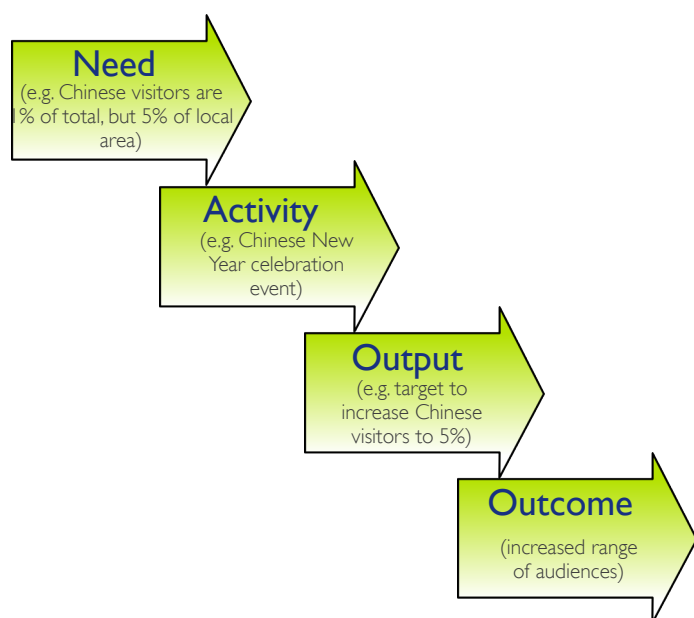


Parks can also use free market research data such as Acorn or Mosaic statistics. These provide a profile of the local area in terms of income levels and consumer preferences.

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Developing a varied programme of activities

Parks should not rely solely on the physical improvements to the park to attract new and diverse audiences. Effective audience development or activity plans are ones which clearly show a link between the current visitor profile, targets to diversify visitors and the proposed activities.



Plans should be developed in consultation with visitors, volunteers and non-users to ensure that the activities and events meet existing and future audience needs.

Plans to engage traditionally hard to reach groups such as young people, elderly, disabled and BME communities need to be carefully considered. Parks that have worked with specific groups to develop and implement their activity plans have found this to be particularly effective.

Case Study: Barnes Park in Sunderland lies within an area with a large Bangladeshi community. This community rarely uses the park and this is thought to be due to antisocial activity. The project has built links with a local Bangladeshi women's group and supported training for members of this group. Through this they hope to build and strengthen links with this community and encourage greater use of the park.

Top tips

Projects have identified the following critical success factors to successfully increasing and diversifying audiences:

- Employ a dedicated park team present on site;
- Employ someone whose role it is to develop and implement the activities programme – e.g. Urban Park Ranger or Activities Officers have proved invaluable in most cases;
- Talk to the local community and consult visitors on what events and activities they would like to see;
- 'Brand' the park and implement an effective PR and marketing campaign;
- Improve play areas, cafes and other facilities to attract more visitors – it's important for visitors to have 'something to do';
- Have a website to promote the park and its activities and events;
- Engage other organisations, voluntary groups and schools who can deliver activities in the park.
- Improve the physical infrastructure - remove disincentives for visitors such as overgrown shrubbery and increase accessibility by improving paths.