

SHARE WHAT'S THERE: *An Overview of Shared Use*

This fact sheet provides an overview of shared use for TSET Healthy Living Program grantees. Shared use is included as an outcome for three sectors: Cities and Government (G5), Schools (S4) and Community Institutions and Organizations (C4). It is also one of the strategies outlined in the Active Living and Transportation Playbook (G4).

What Is Shared Use?

Shared use—also called joint use or community use—occurs when government entities or private organizations agree to open or broaden access to their facilities for community use.¹ Shared use can create healthy communities by making more spaces available for health-promoting activities. Shared use can happen in a variety of settings, involve diverse partners, and pursue many goals. This strategy can have broad and lasting benefits, especially when community members help develop shared use initiatives that meet local needs.

Why Shared Use?



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: Shared use efforts have traditionally focused on increasing opportunities for physical activity, which is critical for preventing and controlling chronic disease. People are more physically active when they have access to safe, affordable, high-quality space for play and exercise.² However, many Oklahoma communities lack the resources residents need to be active. Only about one-third of Oklahomans live within a half-mile of a park, and only about 40 percent of Oklahoma youth live in neighborhoods with parks, recreation centers, and sidewalks.³ Shared use is one way to increase recreational opportunities where parks and recreational space are scarce.



NUTRITION: Shared use can also support healthy eating. Community gardens and farmers markets can be appropriate activities for shared use sites; they can increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables in areas with limited healthy food options. Shared use of kitchens can provide a setting for healthy cooking programs and even small-business incubation. These efforts that focus on healthy eating can also promote food literacy, job skills, and urban greening.



EFFICIENT USE OF RESOURCES: Shared use maximizes access to existing facilities and spaces, making it an efficient and economical use of resources. Expanding public use of existing facilities is less expensive than building new facilities. And in many communities, inadequate funding can delay or prevent the development and maintenance of recreational spaces. For these reasons, shared use can be a cost-efficient tool.

Where Can Shared Use Happen?



SHARED USE OF PUBLIC PROPERTY:

Public property is a natural place to establish shared use. Public schools, in particular, are a common starting place for shared use and for good reason. They are taxpayer funded and located in most communities. They typically have recreational facilities—playgrounds, tracks, fields, gyms, and more—that are appropriate and available for community use. Public school facilities are often unused or underused before and after school, on weekends, and on holidays.

Other local government entities and agencies may also have public property suitable for shared use. A promising—and often overlooked—strategy for increasing access to public land is for cities and counties to partner with special districts in their jurisdiction that own land appropriate for community recreation.



SHARED USE OF PRIVATE PROPERTY:

Across the country, communities are increasingly turning to shared use of private property and facilities owned by community institutions and organizations. In particular, faith-based organizations often have a variety of recreational resources—playgrounds, multipurpose rooms, and walking trails—where people can be active. Congregations that allow shared use of their facilities can help create opportunities for play and exercise and improve the health of both congregation and community members.

Hospitals are another private property owner that also increasingly allows community access to facilities.

How to Make Shared Use Official Using Agreements and Policies

Successful shared use arrangements take many forms, and property owners and shared use partners can use different mechanisms to formalize these arrangements. Written shared use agreements and policies are not necessarily legally required, but they can help those involved make an official commitment to shared use. Formal arrangements can also help the parties establish a common understanding of their roles and responsibilities and ensure long-term community access to facilities.

There are three commonly used ways to formalize shared use: shared use agreements, open use policies, and community use of facilities policies. These shared use mechanisms are not mutually exclusive. Property owners can make use of these strategies individually or together to allow shared use of facilities.

SHARED USE AGREEMENTS: A shared use agreement is a written contract between two or more partners that sets forth the terms and conditions for the shared use of property. Shared use agreements have many different names—joint use agreements, memorandums of understanding, and contracts, among others. What the document is called is not as important as the intent of the parties involved and the content of the document. Shared use agreements allow partners to allocate responsibility for costs, security, maintenance, repairs, insurance, and potential liability. Shared use agreements are often used in partnerships between school districts and city or county governments.

OPEN USE POLICIES: An open use policy formalizes community access to recreational facilities for informal play and physical activity. Unlike other ways of formalizing shared use, an open use policy allows a property owner to act alone instead of in partnership with another entity. Open use policies are most appropriate when the community wants to use a shared use site for informal activities, such as children and families using playgrounds, small groups playing pickup basketball, and individuals walking around a track or path.

FACILITIES USE POLICIES: Almost all school districts, as well as many faith-based and community-based organizations, have a facility use policy. Under these policies, users are often required to fill out and sign a standard agreement (sometimes called a permit), pay a fee, and provide proof of insurance. These policies and agreements are often used by groups that want to access recreational facilities to host programs, sports leagues, and classes.

What About Informal Shared Use?

In many communities, public and private property owners allow the public to use recreational facilities without a written agreement or policy in place. Sometimes long-standing tradition gives implicit permission for community use. In other situations, there is explicit permission, but no official agreement or policy; these types of informal arrangements are sometimes called “handshake agreements.” Often, formalizing these informal shared use arrangements benefits both the property owner and the public. However, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. When informal arrangements provide sufficient community access, a formal shared use policy or agreement may not be necessary.

For more resources on shared use, visit www.changelabsolutions.org/unlocking-possibilities.

References

1. National Shared Use Task Force. *Collective Statement in Support of Shared Use*. Safe Routes to School National Partnership; 2015.
2. Ding D, Sallis JF, Kerr J, Lee S, Rosenberg DE. Neighborhood environment and physical activity among youth: A review. *Am J Prev Med*. 2011;41(4):442-455. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2011.06.036.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *2014 State Indicator Report on Physical Activity*. Atlanta, GA; 2014. www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/downloads/pa_state_indicator_report_2014.pdf.