SUMMARY OF THE ENTRY

The Fort Lupton Parks and Trails Vision Plan demonstrates how planning can become a tool for trust-building, belonging, and intentionally removing barriers to participation and expanding who is part of community decision-making. The City of Fort Lupton is a small community of approximately 10,000 people located in a rural portion of Weld County in northeastern Colorado's Front Range. The County is well known for its commitment to independence, private property rights, and limited government intervention; not its public parks and trails. However, the City saw the opportunity to provide parks and recreation much needed for quality of life and health, as a community-driven planning process that unites citizens, builds trust, and encourages future community leaders. At the same time, many residents face barriers that often limit participation in traditional planning processes, including language access, limited internet access, long or nontraditional work schedules, transportation challenges, low household income, health disparities, and mistrust of government processes. Thus the engagement process was resourceful to be inclusive of race, ethnicity, national origin, age, income, gender identity, and disability. The project result breaks records for public participation, with roughly one-fourth of the population provided meaning input to shape the future of the city.

AWARDS CRITERIA

Engagement: A Model for Latino, Youth, and Family-Centered Inclusion

The Fort Lupton Parks and Trails Vision Plan was built on a simple but important premise: inclusive engagement is not achieved by merely offering a meeting and waiting for people to attend. It requires removing barriers, building relationships, listening with humility, and creating spaces where residents feel respected, welcomed, and able to contribute in the ways that work best for them.

At a time when national threat of deportation and harassment of Latino populations is causing mass fear and intimidation that fundamentally undermines civic engagement and sense of welcome in public spaces, this project exemplifies how strategic engagement methods to repair trust in government and build sense of community. Fort Lupton is a majority Hispanic community (56%) where nearly 40% of residents speak a language other than English at home.

The population of Fort Lupton is also relatively young community with a median age of 36.1 and 25% of the population under the age of 18. The community is also young, with a median age of 36.1 and approximately one-quarter of residents under age 18. These

demographics shaped the engagement strategy from the beginning. The project team prioritized bilingual communication, youth participation, family-friendly activities, trusted community connectors, visual materials, and events in familiar places.

- Project Advisory Committee. A 17-member Project Advisory Committee included Latino community leaders, local connectors, and representatives who understood Fort Lupton's neighborhoods, institutions, and community networks. Committee members helped guide the project name, logo, bilingual communications, outreach locations, event design, and measures of engagement success. They also served as ambassadors, helping extend the project's reach through trusted relationships.
- Focus Group Dialog: Regional organization representatives participated in facilitated discussions about the future of City park and trail inclusivity regarding race and ethnicity, income, age, gender, and disability. They included institutions such as libraries, schools, religious organizations, public health and advocacy and service groups for a variety of demographics. This established a collective understanding of the current local opportunities, threats, challenges, and partnership strategies.
- Bilingual and culturally responsive communication: All public engagement advertisements and materials were provided in both Spanish and English. Multilingual facilitators were present at events to welcome participants, answer questions, and support conversation. Materials were designed to be visual, plain-language, and time-efficient so residents could participate without needing technical planning knowledge.
- Targeted Survey Outreach: The Community Needs Assessment was informed by a representational survey that received 898 responses, 38% of which indicated they are Hispanic/Latino. Knowing that online surveys tend to have low participation from Hispanic, youth, seniors, low-income, and people with disabilities, thirteen events to capture input were intentionally held in locations and with local groups to quickly capture their anonymous input on graphic exhibits. This resulted in 1,875 youth and adults engaged at local food bank, elementary school, high schools, community college, churches, clubs and organizations, community holiday events, and exhibits continually on display and the recreation center.
- Engagement Events that Welcome: Community events are centered in City parks, which provided an inspiration for plan engagement events to replicate the types of offerings that draw the community together: a popular mariachi band, food, give-aways, and youth activities.

Together, these strategies transformed engagement from a transactional request for feedback into a relationship-building process. Residents were not simply asked to respond to a plan. They helped define the values, priorities, and investments that will shape Fort Lupton's parks and trails system for the next decade.

Methodology and Transferability: Small Town and Low Budget Approaches

Fort Lupton has a lack of quality parks, green space within neighborhoods, outdoor recreation opportunities, and trails especially compared to other Colorado communities of its size. The City also faces health disparities, high rates of inactivity according to health surveys, income challenges, and limited municipal staff capacity. These factors motivated the purpose for this project and urged participants regarding the need for their involvement and action.

Recent opening of a beloved park crafted from co-creation with the community caused City Officials to recognize the Parks and Trails Plan as an opportunity to lead in building community trust in ways other public processes could not. Residents could feel and experience the difference in one space invested in to meet their needs and would believe this future might be possible for transformation with parks and trails throughout the city. In addition, this plan creation became an opportunity city-wide to address bigger topics such as resilience and climate planning, mobility and safe connectivity, identity, culture and placemaking, environmental health, city growth and equitable investment, connection to nature, public health, and other topics that bridge the City Comprehensive Plan and Transportation Plan underway.

The project was supported by Great Outdoors Colorado funding, which helped expand the City's capacity beyond what a small municipal budget could otherwise provide. Grant resources supported community event hosting, local youth employment, and the consultant planning team. The process also relied on partnerships, volunteers, local organizations, and community ambassadors to extend the reach of a small city staff. This model is highly transferable to other Colorado communities, particularly small towns, rural communities, and places with limited staff capacity or historically underrepresented populations.

Originality and Innovation:

The Fort Lupton Parks and Trails Vision Plan reimagined what equitable engagement can look like in a small, rural community. Rather than relying on traditional public meetings and surveys alone, the project created a customized engagement program that reflected the culture, demographics, and gathering places of Fort Lupton residents.

Engagement activities were intentionally designed to be experiential, interactive, multi-lingual, and family-oriented. Community events incorporated recreation demonstrations including obstacle courses, fly-fishing lessons, disc golf, yoga instruction, youth-focused games, music, food, and other amenities that transformed participation into a welcoming community experience. These activities introduced hundreds of residents to recreation opportunities they may not have previously experienced while simultaneously gathering meaningful planning input.

The project also utilized co-creation design exercises that empowered residents to actively shape future park investments. Through hands-on activities such as the "Build Your Own Park" workshop station, participants worked along side park design professionals to prioritize selection of park amenities, explore tradeoffs in space allocation and distribution, and layout park concepts using scaled program pieces. This approach enabled residents of all ages, literacy levels, and planning backgrounds to contribute ideas in a meaningful way.

Innovation also extended to technical analysis. The planning process integrated demographic, health, recreation, mobility, visitation, trends, and equity data with extensive community input to better understand barriers to park access and participation. Benchmarking and best-practice research, including research on park design strategies that support teen girls' park use, informed the recommendations. The plan therefore combines lived experience with technical analysis, ensuring that recommendations are both community-rooted and implementation-ready.

Effectiveness and Results

The effectiveness of the Fort Lupton Parks and Trails Vision Plan is demonstrated by the scale of participation, the diversity of voices reached, the quality of community input, and the direct connection between engagement and plan recommendations. The project generated one of the highest levels of participation for a community of its size, including 898 survey responses, approximately 8.5% of Fort Lupton's population, and engagement with more than 2,300 youth and adults through workshops, pop-up events, and meetings hosted where they already gather. Importantly, participation reflected the diversity of the community.

Beyond participation numbers, the project successfully transformed engagement from a transactional planning exercise into a shared community experience. Residents saw their ideas reflected throughout the planning process. Community input revealed strong interest in fishing, time in nature, family gathering spaces, community events, trails for exercise, and safer connections between neighborhoods, parks, schools, and destinations. The team analyzed differences in needs and activity interests across demographic groups to

ensure that the strongest responses from specific populations were not averaged out by aggregate data.

Residents' input directly shaped recommendations for river access, new fishing ponds, regional trail alignments, improved street crossings, safer access to parks, pavilions, event spaces, and family-oriented park amenities. The plan also connected parks and trails to larger community goals, including public health, environmental quality, resilience, mobility, identity, and equitable investment.

The project also established a strong foundation for implementation. Focus groups, stakeholder partnerships, and a grant funding workshop connected the City with dozens of regional organizations and funding partners that can support future projects. As a result, the Parks and Trails Vision Plan is not only broadly supported by residents, community partners, and elected officials, but also positioned to guide policy, investment, grant applications, and decision-making for the next decade.

The planning process also built civic capacity. More interest in participating in local governmental leadership roles resulted from project committee member involvement, engagement volunteers and youth paid to support engagement activities to create more diverse elected official voices in the future.

The lasting contribution of the Fort Lupton Parks and Trails Vision Plan is not only the physical system it recommends, but the civic infrastructure it built: trust, relationships, youth leadership, community ownership, and a replicable model for inclusive planning in small Colorado communities.

Fort Lupton
COLORADO

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May 29, 2026

APA Colorado
Attn: Chapter Awards
PO Box 1683
Berthoud, Colorado

Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

We are writing on behalf of the City of Fort Lupton to express our enthusiastic and unequivocal support for the Fort Lupton Parks and Trails Vision Plan's application for the Advancing Diversity and Social Change Award. Through an intentional and inclusive community engagement process, the project demonstrated a profound commitment to fairness, inclusivity, and meaningful community input.

Engaging Fort Lupton's Hispanic and Latino residents is absolutely vital, as this community represents a cornerstone of our city's cultural fabric, economic vitality, and future growth. Historically, language barriers and traditional planning methods have inadvertently excluded these vital voices from civic planning. The engagement process intentionally addressed these barriers through culturally responsive outreach, bilingual materials, trusted community partnerships, and accessible engagement opportunities designed to meet residents where they were. We deeply appreciate their thoughtful coordination to create a truly welcoming environment where our residents felt genuinely heard, safe, and authentically represented. Their team utilized culturally relevant outreach, bilingual materials, and accessible meeting spaces that met residents exactly where they were.

Rather than a superficial check-the-box exercise, this deliberate process yields profound, long-term community benefits. By actively integrating the voices of underrepresented populations into local decision-making, the Parks and Trails Vision Plan reflects the needs, priorities, and aspirations of a broader cross-section of the community than traditional engagement efforts often achieve. The insights gathered through their work will shape Fort Lupton's Parks and Trails Vision Plan infrastructure, public spaces, and community programming for decades to come, ensuring a highly unified city where every neighbor can thrive for generations.

The project has become a model for how intentional, equitable engagement can strengthen community trust, expand participation, and improve planning outcomes. The City of Fort Lupton strongly endorses the Fort Lupton Parks and Trails Vision Plan for this prestigious honor. Please feel free to contact us directly should you require any additional details regarding the remarkable impact of their work.

We thank you in advance for considering this project, and ask that you look favorably upon this application.

Chris Ceretto, Mayor

COMMUNITY CO-CREATED PLAN FOR PARK & TRAILS

PARKS FOR EVERYONE:
BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH INCLUSIVE PLANNING



Together

We Plan for Parks

Fort Lupton's Parks & Trails Vision Plan

Community members participated in an inclusive planning process designed around accessibility, family engagement, and culturally responsive outreach.

CHALLENGES FOR ENGAGEMENT

OUR COMMUNITY CONTEXT	ENGAGEMENT NEEDS
56% Hispanic population	Need for bilingual engagement
High Diversity (81 Diversity Index)	Inclusive outreach essential
25% of residents under 18	Family and youth focused activities
55% of residents commute for work	Evening, weekend, and online engagement needed
1500+ residents age 65+	Accessible and age-friendly engagement methods
16% of households below poverty level	Free and accessible participation methods
Lower educational attainment than county/state average	Visual, interactive engagement tools
40% population growth since 2010	Engage both new and long-time residents

Fort Lupton's demographics required an engagement strategy that was bilingual, family-friendly, culturally responsive, geographically accessible, and designed to remove barriers related to language, work schedules, income, education, and age.

HOW WE HEARD

COMMUNITY SURVEY

Online and paper survey available in **English and Spanish**

898 survey responses (8.5% of Fort Lupton's population)

Nearly **9 times** the statistically significant sample size for a community this size

Advertised the survey with yards signs around Fort Lupton

POP-UPS & COMMUNITY EVENTS

13 community events and outreach activities

1,875 youth and adults participated

Conducted at schools, food banks, churches, senior programs, community events, and the recreation center

STAKEHOLDER & FOCUS GROUPS

Four focus groups with approximately **30 community leaders and organizations**

Helped shape survey questions and engagement priorities

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Made up of City staff, community leaders, coaches, lifelong residents, new residents, school board members, youth advisory, and more to provide ongoing project guidance

Reviewed findings and helped ensure recommendations reflected community priorities



POP-UP EVENT



COMMUNITY SURVEY



ADVISORY COMMITTEE

We brought engagement directly to the community, creating multiple opportunities for participation and reaching historically underrepresented voices.

HOW WE HEARD



Who We Heard From	What We Heard	How It Influenced the Plan
Hispanic & Latino Residents	Greater interest in sports fields, neighborhood parks, equitable access, shade, and facilities for families and children. Distance to parks was identified as a barrier.	Focus on equitable park access, family-oriented amenities, neighborhood parks, and culturally inclusive spaces.
Youth (1,120+ engaged)	Prioritized adventure play, water play, skate features, obstacle courses, hang-out spaces, and active recreation opportunities.	Expanded recommendations for youth-focused programming, active recreation, and teen gathering spaces.
Families	Wanted playgrounds, splash pads, gathering spaces, events, shade, and restrooms to support longer visits.	Emphasis on family-friendly parks, comfort amenities, and multigenerational spaces.
Older Adults & Seniors	Prioritized accessible trails, restrooms, gathering spaces, and passive recreation opportunities.	Increased focus on ADA accessibility, age-friendly amenities, and trail improvements.
Underrepresented Community Members	Requested parks that are welcoming to all abilities, income levels, cultures, and neighborhoods.	Equity became a core planning principle guiding investments and programming.
Community-Wide	Strong support for nature trails, fishing opportunities, river access, shade, maintenance, and connectivity	Led to recommendations for trail connections, river-focused recreation, and investment in existing parks.

The Parks and Trails Vision Plan was shaped not by a single community voice, but by the collective priorities of Fort Lupton’s families, youth, seniors, Hispanic residents, and historically underrepresented groups.

ENGAGING FORT LUTPON'S HISPANIC COMMUNITY

CHALLENGE

56%
of Fort Lupton residents are Hispanic or Latino, a community historically underrepresented in the planning process

OUR APPROACH

- Bilingual Materials
- Church Partnerships
- Food Bank & Community Outreach
- Community Events & Pop-Ups
- Spanish Interpreters
- Family & Immigration Support Programs
- School Engagement

COMMUNITY IMPACT

- Strong Hispanic and Latino participation
- Family-focused park recommendations
- Greater emphasis on equitable access
- More neighborhood-serving parks
- Shade, comfort amenities, and restrooms prioritized
- Safe routes and trail connections were elevated as priorities

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN ENGAGEMENT

CHURCH EVENTS

Partnered with St. William Catholic Church to reach families and build trust



FAMILY PROGRAMS

Connected through family and immigration support programs and youth activities



COMMUNITY EVENTS

Met residents where they already gather at celebrations, festivals, and local events



SCHOOLS

Engaged students and families through school events and youth-focused outreach



FOOD BANK OUTREACH

Partnered with the Food Bank and service organizations to increase reach and inclusion



OUTCOME

38%
HISPANIC/LATINO POPULATION

Helping ensure the Parks & Trails Vision Plan reflects the priorities of one of Fort Lupton's largest and fastest-growing populations

By partnering with trusted community organizations and providing bilingual engagement opportunities, the project ensured Hispanic voices meaningfully shaped the Parks and Trails Vision Plan.

ENGAGEMENT REIMAGINED

INCENTIVES & PARTICIPATION

Designed to reduce barriers and encourage participation





Bilingual banners, flyers, and yard signs

Community event partnerships





Food and family-friendly activities: Obstacle courses, Colorado Fish & Wildlife demonstrations, local Mariachi band, etc.

Kids activities and dot-voting exercises

Giveaways and project-branded shirts

Engagement timed with existing community events and celebrations: Little League Team Photos Day

Result: Reached residents who may not attend traditional public meetings.

COMMUNITY-CENTERED ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Designed with the community, not just for the community

Advisory Committee guidance throughout the process



Focus groups informed survey questions

Church, school, food bank, and family-service outreach





Spanish-language workshops and interpreters

Online, paper, and in-person participation options

Engagement conducted where residents already gather

Result: Broader participation from Hispanic residents, youth, families, and seniors.

SURVEY RESULTS = COMMUNITY WORKSHOP STATIONS

Survey Finding	Workshop Station
Need for more family amenities, shade, and gathering spaces	Build Your Own Park Station
Desire for nature trails, fishing, and river access	Build Your Own Park Station
Concerns about access, connectivity, and safe routes	Trail Connectivity Mapping Station
Interest in equitable investments and neighborhood improvements	Vision + Themes Station

Result: Community members refined, tested, and prioritized ideas generated from earlier engagement.

Community feedback informed every engagement phase, creating a continuous feedback loop from outreach to recommendations.

DESIGNING THROUGH PLAY

STATION 1 LEARN ····→ STATION 2 DESIGN ····→ STATION 3 CONNECT

PROJECT BACKGROUND, VISION + THEMES

- Reviewed project goals and previous engagement findings
- Rated draft vision and themes
- Shared community priorities and values



BUILD YOUR OWN PARK

- Designed parks using scaled program pieces
- Prioritized recreation and gathering spaces
- Explored equitable park access and amenities



SAFE TRAVEL TO PARKS AND PATHWAYS

- Identified trail gaps and unsafe crossings
- Mapped barriers and desired connections
- Shared connectivity priorities across the city



Interactive activities created opportunities for participation regardless of age, literacy, language proficiency, or planning experience.

FROM COMMUNITY INPUT TO COMMUNITY IMPACT



“Ampliar las actividades recreativas”
“Expand recreation”



“Más lugares para que los adolescentes pasen el rato”
“More places for teens to hang out”



“Nosotros necesitamos mas columpios”
“We need more swings”

“Mejorar los senderos”
“Improve trails”



“Aumentar las comodidades”
“Increase comfort amenities”

Community feedback directly informed plan future recommendations and implementation priorities.

FROM COMMUNITY INPUT TO COMMUNITY IMPACT

COMMUNITY INPUT
What We Heard

NATURE & RIVER ACCESS
- More trails
- South Platte River access
- Fishing opportunities



FAMILY RECREATION
- Playgrounds
- Splash pads
- Gathering spaces
- Multi-generational amenities



CONNECTIVITY & SAFETY
- Connected trail network
- Safe crossings
- Sidewalk gaps
- Better wayfinding



ACTIVE RECRATION
- Sports fields
- Pickleball courts
- Skate amenities
- Dog parks
- Disc Golf



COMMUNITY TRADEOFFS
Together We Considered

SPORTS FACILITIES VS NATURE & OPEN SPACE

BUILD NEW PARKS VS IMPROVE EXISTING PARKS

DESTINATION AMENITIES VS NEIGHBORHOOD ACCESS

NEW INVESTMENTS VS LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE

MORE PROGRAMMING VS MORE PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES
What Rose to the Top

1 CONNECTED COMMUNITY
- Complete trail networks
- Safe crossings
- Regional connections
- Multi-modal connectivity

2 PARKS FOR EVERYONE
- Inclusive design
- Multi-generational amenities
- Neighborhood access

3 NATURE & OUTDOOR RECREATION
- River access
- Fishing
- Shade and natural areas

4 ACTIVE & HEALTHY LIFESTYLES
- Sports facilities
- Recreation opportunities
- Programs and events

Community feedback informed every engagement phase, creating a continuous feedback loop from outreach to recommendations.

BUILDING COMMUNITY TRUST



The process established a model for equitable engagement that can be replicated by communities across Colorado.