

Outdoor Fitness Equipment Planning Guide

A Practical Guide for Local Councils

Supporting accessible, inclusive, and
well-used outdoor fitness environments.

June 2026



Foreword

Communities across Australia are increasingly looking for practical and accessible ways to support healthier, more active lifestyles.

Outdoor fitness equipment can play an important role by providing free, publicly accessible opportunities for movement, strength training, social connection, and active ageing within public open spaces.

However, successful outdoor fitness equipment environments require more than simply installing equipment within a park or reserve. Site selection, equipment choice, layout, accessibility, activation, and maintenance all influence whether these spaces become valued community assets or underused infrastructure.

The recommendations presented throughout this guide are based on a multi-method research program that examined how outdoor fitness equipment is used in real-world settings. By combining digital usage monitoring, in-person observations, community surveys and interviews, and industry perspectives, the research provides practical evidence to support council planning and investment decisions.

This guide is designed as a practical, visual, and decision-focused planning tool. The goal is to support councils in creating facilities that are welcoming, inclusive, and actively used by the community.



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Why Outdoor Fitness Equipment Matters

Australians Need to Be More Active

Across Australia, many adults are not achieving recommended levels of physical activity, particularly when it comes to strength-based exercise¹.

More than 70% of Australian adults do not undertake sufficient muscle-strengthening activity, despite the well-established benefits for physical health, mobility, balance, independence, and healthy ageing¹.

among people who may not otherwise engage in formal exercise settings.

Research has also shown that outdoor fitness equipment may support positive physical, psychological, and social health outcomes, including improved strength, balance, cardiovascular health, social participation, and wellbeing².

Accessible Exercise for Communities

Outdoor fitness equipment provides free and publicly accessible opportunities for movement and strength-based exercise within everyday community environments.

Unlike traditional gyms or structured sporting environments, outdoor fitness equipment sites may also support incidental movement, social interaction, active ageing, and participation

Gaps Between Goals and Execution

Councils across Australia are increasingly investing in outdoor fitness equipment as part of broader efforts to support healthier, more active, and more connected communities. However, research suggests that many outdoor fitness equipment sites are under-utilised, highlighting the importance of thoughtful planning, design, and activation to help these spaces achieve their full potential³.

Contents

Why Outdoor Fitness Equipment Matters	3
Defining Your Objectives	4
Planning Checklist	5
Keys to Site Selection & Design	6
Strategies for Successful Outdoor Fitness Sites	8
Aligning Equipment With Community Preferences	12
Site Layouts: Putting It All Together	16
Activation & Promoting Long-Term Use	18
Maintenance & Sustainability	22
Expert Advice & Support	23
Acknowledgements & References	23





Defining Your Objectives

Different community objectives require different approaches to equipment selection, site layout, and user experience.

Successful outdoor fitness sites are designed around clear community objectives. Most councils will be seeking to improve community health outcomes, particularly among people who may be less likely to engage with traditional gym environments.

Some councils may seek to create more performance-oriented environments suited to highly active recreational precincts, tourist hotspots, or foreshore locations.

Most councils will prioritise creating outdoor fitness spaces that feel welcoming, inclusive, and accessible to a wider cross-section of the community.

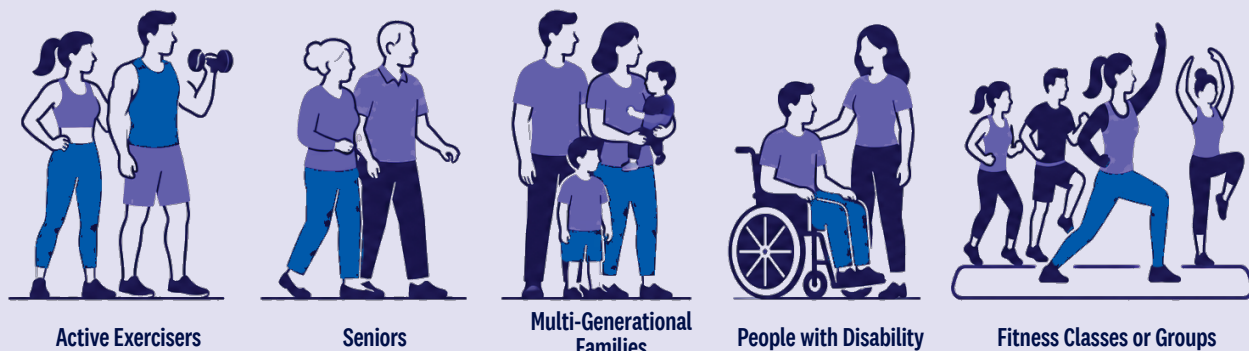
Defining these objectives early will significantly influence equipment selection, layouts, accessibility, and long-term participation outcomes.

Who are your intended users?

Councils should consider who is most likely to use the site, who may currently feel excluded from traditional fitness environments, and what spaces may feel welcoming and accessible to those users.

“As a pensioner, I just can’t afford gym fees.” - Colin

Intended users could include:



What Outcomes Are You Supporting?

The goals established early in the planning process will influence equipment selection, layout, accessibility, activation strategies, and ultimately who feels comfortable using the site.

Councils may seek to create outdoor fitness environments that support a wide range of ages, abilities, and fitness levels within the same site. Adjustable and progressive resistance equipment helps support broader participation by allowing users to exercise at an intensity appropriate to their individual capabilities.

“Instead of hiring equipment, the Sports Med physio said, ‘well, you’ve got equipment in parks down there’, and we’ve been coming and enjoying it.” - Judith

Harness Industry Expertise

Councils should work with industry experts when developing tenders for new outdoor fitness equipment. Councils should define intended community outcomes, target user groups, site constraints, and available budgets, while suppliers and industry experts can provide recommendations for the most appropriate equipment solutions.

This may help generate stronger tender submissions and identify suppliers that are able to provide equipment aligned with the intended site objectives.

Planning Checklist

Every outdoor fitness equipment project and tender process should clearly address the following questions before equipment selection begins:

- ☐ What members of the community are we primarily designing this site for?
- ☐ What health or community outcomes are we trying to support?
- ☐ Are we prioritising accessibility, performance, social connection, active ageing, or broad community participation?
- ☐ Will the site feel welcoming to people who would not normally attend a gym?
- ☐ How will people naturally encounter and use the site?
- ☐ Does the proposed location align with the intended audience and outcomes?
- ☐ What behaviours are we hoping to encourage over time?



Keys to Site Selection & Design

Successful sites are designed around participation and community preferences, rather than equipment installation.

Research undertaken by Adelaide University, combined with industry consultation and real-world implementation experience, suggests that the long-term success of outdoor fitness equipment is influenced by far more than the types and number of exercise stations installed within a space.⁴

Best Practice

Comfortable spacing and thoughtful equipment positioning may help create more accessible and socially comfortable exercise environments, particularly for beginners and less confident users.

“I think the layout is quite good because all the exercise equipment is spaced away from each other.” - Rodney

Surfacing choices are also very important as they affect accessibility, maintenance costs, usability, and long-term presentation of a site.

Painted concrete surfaces provide a less expensive, more practical, and more durable solution for many cardio and equipment areas.

Rubber surfacing can provide additional fall protection for elevated exercise equipment (e.g., pull up bars). Wood chip surfacing, grass, and loose gravel surfaces are not recommended due to accessibility, maintenance, and safety concerns.

In terms of selecting the right location for a site, research suggests that **hub-style layouts** often support stronger participation outcomes by:

- Improving visibility.
- Supporting social interaction and group-based training.
- Creating more scalable environments.

However, trail-based approaches may be effective in selected environments such as walking corridors, coastal paths, and linear recreation routes.



Best Practice: Painted concrete with rubberised zones in higher fall risk areas.

Things to Avoid

Underused outdoor fitness equipment sites appear to share common issues, including:

- Equipment that feels intimidating or difficult to use.
- Layouts that create uncomfortable or intrusive exercise environments.
- Limited accommodation for a range of physical abilities.
- Limited shade, seating, or amenities.
- Little guidance on how equipment should be used.

Research findings and industry consultation suggest that participation is often influenced as much by site design and usability as by the equipment provided⁴.

Ultimately, successful outdoor fitness equipment environments are those that encourage physical activity by creating spaces that are welcoming, inclusive, accessible and safe for the communities they are intended to serve.



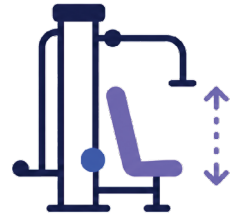
Wigley Reserve, Glenelg

Strategies for successful outdoor fitness sites



Clear Instructions

Signage, descriptions of exercises, and illustrations, including examples of modifications for different strengths and abilities.



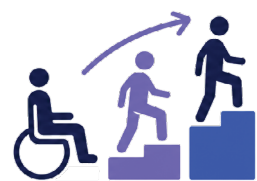
Adjustable

Adjustable resistance and equipment designs that suit different body sizes, mobility, and confidence levels.



Comfort & Amenities

Provide shade, seating, drinking water, nearby toilets, and adequate spacing between equipment.



Beginner & Experienced User Support

Include equipment and exercise options that allow people to start slowly and gradually increase the challenge over time.



Social & Community Use

Design layouts that allow people to exercise together, supervise children nearby, or participate in peer-led or group activities.



Communication & Site Promotion

Promote sites through local communication strategies, community partnerships and ongoing activation activities.



Aligning Equipment With Community Preferences

Successful installations prioritise equipment that feels intuitive, accessible, adaptable, and relevant to the everyday needs of the surrounding community.

Research observations, walk-along interviews, and industry consultation consistently suggested that highly specialised or intimidating equipment may often experience lower participation outcomes, particularly among beginners, older adults, and less active users⁵.

In contrast, equipment that supports simple movement patterns, adjustable resistance, social interaction, and progressive participation was associated with broader community use and stronger long-term engagement.

Prioritise Long-Term Outcomes

Councils demonstrate a strong commitment to improving health outcomes for local residents by providing outdoor fitness equipment sites.

When planning new outdoor fitness spaces, councils must balance budgetary constraints, community expectations, ongoing maintenance requirements, and accessibility considerations.

“It’s got a good range of equipment. It’s got some cardio and it’s got some resistance.” - Kylie

While councils are often seeking to provide a broad range of exercise equipment at a site, research findings and experience increasingly suggest that stronger participation outcomes are often achieved by selecting equipment that is⁵:

- Intuitive and easy to understand.
- Suitable for different ages and abilities.
- Capable of supporting users’ progression over time.

- Accessible to a broad range of users.
- Well integrated into social and functional site layouts.

Consider a Staged Approach

In many cases, a smaller number of preferred and well-signed pieces of equipment may deliver stronger long-term participation outcomes than equipment with limited adjustability, accessibility, or not easily understood.

Outdoor fitness equipment sites can be delivered in staged phases, allowing for flexible and responsive development over time.

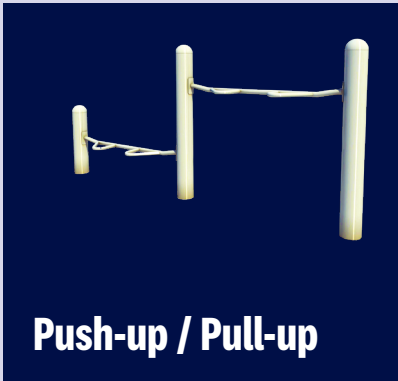
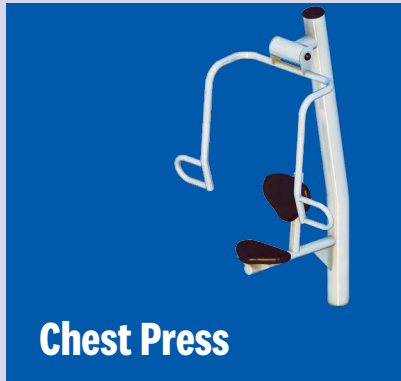
Even with limited budgets, councils may achieve stronger long-term outcomes by establishing a smaller foundation of a targeted set of equipment initially, then expanding the site over time as usage patterns, community demand, and available budgets become clearer.

This staged approach may allow councils to:

- Identify equipment which is most popular.
- Respond to different user groups as demand changes over time.
- Reduce the risk of underused infrastructure.
- Spread capital and maintenance costs with greater sustainability.
- Progressively expand successful hub-style environments as participation grows.

“The only drawback is everything works on body weight and there’s no way to increase it if you want to work a bit harder.” - Colin

Most Frequently Used Equipment⁵



Emerging Direction: Adjustable Equipment



Note: Adjustable and adaptable equipment was less represented across monitored South Australian outdoor fitness equipment sites, but emerged strongly through industry consultation, walk-along interviews, and accessibility discussions as an important direction for future outdoor fitness equipment planning.

Cardio & Stretching Equipment

Cardio and stretching equipment provides some of the most accessible and consistent entry points within outdoor fitness environments.

These equipment types may appeal to older adults, beginners, incidental users, people recovering from injury, and users seeking low-impact movement opportunities.

Importantly, cardio and stretching equipment may also help support social participation, particularly when two pieces of equipment are arranged side-by-side, encouraging socialising and conversation.

Cardio equipment, such as bikes and cross trainers, was consistently identified among the most frequently used equipment types across monitored outdoor fitness equipment sites⁵.

Stretching Stations

Stretching stations and step platforms may help create entry points for people seeking lower-intensity movement, warm-up, recovery, flexibility, and mobility activities.

These equipment types are generally low-cost, space-efficient, multi-purpose, and easy to integrate into broader outdoor fitness equipment layouts.



Low-cost and space-efficient warm-up equipment may help support broader participation outcomes when integrated thoughtfully into highly usable site layouts.

Cardio Bike



Dynamic Cardio

Dynamic cardio equipment, such as bikes and cross trainers, are often among the most intuitive and consistently used equipment types within outdoor fitness equipment environments⁵.

These equipment types may support low-impact cardiovascular exercise, warm-up activity, social participation, and accessible

movement opportunities across a broad range of ages and abilities.

“If I was designing it, first thing I’d put in is a bike because everyone understands an exercise bike.” - Trevor

Rower



Elliptical / Cross Trainer



Arm Bike



Recumbent Bike



Where possible, councils should prioritise equipment with adjustable resistance and adaptability for different body sizes, strength levels, and physical abilities.

Strength Training Equipment

Strength training equipment plays an important role in helping people maintain muscle strength, mobility, balance, bone health, and long-term physical independence.

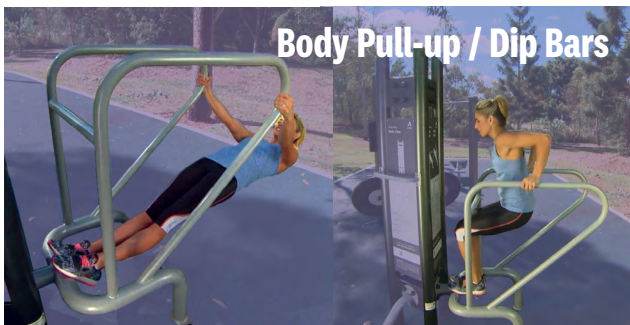
Importantly, this equipment should feel accessible and intuitive for a broad range of users, from beginners to experienced exercisers, with simple movement patterns and adjustable resistance to support engagement across different ages, abilities, and confidence levels.

Static Strength Equipment

Static strength equipment may still support valuable strength and functional movement opportunities when designed and integrated thoughtfully into broader site layouts.

Importantly, static equipment should support different confidence and ability levels wherever possible through multiple grip heights, beginner-friendly exercise examples, progression-focused design, and clear instructional signage.

“I love the step up, because you can do that as a bit of cardio or you can use it for your push ups.” - Claire



Dynamic Strength Equipment

Dynamic strength equipment provides safe and accessible strength training options for a broad range of users, including older adults, beginners, people returning to exercise, and those seeking to progressively build strength and confidence over time.

The intuitive design of dynamic equipment provides simple yet effective strength exercises that are easy to learn and suitable for a wide range of users.

“I quite like the leg press... you can vary your resistance on it by doing single leg or double leg.” - Kylie



Site Layouts

Putting It All Together

Successful outdoor fitness equipment environments are influenced as much by layout, spacing, and social usability as by the equipment itself. Well-planned layouts may help support participation, accessibility, confidence, comfort, and long-term community use.

Fitness Hub Layouts

Hub-style layouts, where the equipment is clustered in one area, help to create a welcoming, social and scalable outdoor fitness environment within a clearly connected activity space.

Hub layouts may help support:

- Social participation and conversation.
- Easier navigation and circuit training.
- Greater visibility and passive activation.
- Simpler instruction and signage.
- Stronger community presence and activity.

Clustering the equipment in one location may also help councils to progressively expand successful sites over time as participation and community demand grows.

Duplicate Popular Equipment

Providing multiple stations of highly used equipment encourages social interaction. Duplicate stations may also help improve equipment availability during busier times.

Facilitate Future Expansion

Leave space to add equipment, seating, signage, or activation elements as participation grows and budgets allow.



Create Comfortable Spacing

Allow people to exercise without feeling crowded, observed, or intimidated. Avoid positioning stations directly facing one another where possible.

Group Equipment by Activity

Grouping cardio, strength, and warm-up equipment into logical zones may help create more intuitive and accessible participation pathways for users.

Use Rubber Surfaces Sparingly

Utilise rubber surfaces in warm up zones and where activities are elevated or ground based, such as chin-up bars, pull up bars, step ups, and push up bars.



Activation & Promoting Long-Term Use

A well-designed OFE site requires supporting activation measures to encourage long-term community engagement.

Simple strategies, including clear instructional signage, beginner-friendly exercise guidance, community partnerships, and ongoing promotion, may help councils increase community awareness, participation, and long-term use.

Signage and Instruction

For many people, particularly beginners or less active users, uncertainty around how to use outdoor fitness equipment can become a major barrier to participation.

Signage at the Site

Clear signage, simple exercise guidance, and instructional content are required and will help people feel more comfortable trying equipment for the first time and encourage ongoing participation over time.

Instructional signage should include: simple diagrams, beginner-friendly exercise suggestions, and how exercises can be modified for different ability levels.

“There’s instructions on how to use the different bits of equipment on there, but to really get use out of it, it would be good if they had a decent sign that was, okay, do a circuit this way.” - Alex

Exercise Modifications

Demonstrating easier and more challenging variations of the same movement may help users continue building confidence and strength over time, and accommodate setbacks due to injury or illness.



Equipment that supports progressive levels of challenge, along with signage that communicates exercise modifications, helps create inclusive environments and ongoing participation over time.



QR Codes

QR codes linked to short instructional videos may provide a simple way for users to explore correct exercise technique, improve confidence, and support safer equipment use at their own pace.

However, QR codes should complement, not replace, clear on-site instructional signage, as not all users will carry or have access to smartphones while exercising.

“I don’t have the facility on my phone to scan QR codes.” - Barbara

Community Engagement and Promotion

It is important that local communities are made aware of the existence of local outdoor fitness equipment sites, and that these spaces are intended for broad community use, offering welcoming environments for people of all ages, abilities and confidence levels.

Simple community engagement and promotion strategies may help councils build awareness, encourage participation, and support long-term community use, often through low-cost and practical initiatives.

Engage Local Community Groups

One of the simplest ways to build awareness and participation may be engaging local community organisations and encouraging them to help promote the site among their members.

This could include groups such as:

- Men's Sheds
- National Seniors Australia
- Rotary Foundation Australia
- Lions Clubs Australia
- COTA Australia, and
- Country Women's Association.

Councils can also reach out to local GP practices, physiotherapists, exercise physiologists, recreation providers, Strength for Life programs, walking groups, and recreation clubs.

Providing these groups with posters for community noticeboards and information for newsletters, as well as encouraging walking groups to visit an outdoor fitness equipment site within their route, will be simple, yet effective engagement strategies.

These organisations often have strong local relationships and trusted community networks that may help councils connect with people who could benefit from using the site.

Peer-Led Participation

Councils may benefit from identifying local volunteers or community champions interested in supporting informal peer-led activities at outdoor fitness equipment sites.

This does not necessarily require formal fitness instruction. Even casual demonstration sessions may help people feel more comfortable using the equipment and encourage repeat participation over time.

Site Launch and Demo Days

Simple launch events may help introduce local communities to new outdoor fitness equipment sites in a welcoming and low-pressure way.

Small community events and guided walks may be enough to build initial awareness and encourage participation.



Launch of the City of Salisbury Peer-Led Community Exercise Program

Adelaide University Peer-Led Study

Adelaide University researchers and community partners have explored peer-led approaches designed to help people feel more comfortable using outdoor fitness equipment for the first time.

In May 2026, Channel 9 News ran a story highlighting this work and the role guided group participation may play in supporting confidence and community engagement within outdoor fitness equipment environments.



Courtesy of Channel 9

<https://www.facebook.com/reel/1276553724618979>



"I'd never actually used it before until Salisbury Council put an ad up on their Facebook page stating that they were doing a five-week free program." - Barbara

Local volunteers, recreation staff, physiotherapists, exercise providers, or community champions may also help demonstrate exercises and introduce people to the equipment in a supportive way.

Ongoing Promotion

After installation of a new outdoor fitness equipment site, an ongoing promotional campaign should be initiated.

Long-term community participation may be strengthened when councils continue working with local health care providers and exercise groups to help promote the benefits of regular movement, strength training, and social participation within outdoor fitness equipment environments.

These partnerships may help connect people with accessible physical activities that help them to feel more confident, active, and engaged within their local community over time.



Maintenance & Sustainability

When planning your sites, councils should consider how maintenance, service, and repairs will be managed over time. Damaged equipment, poor drainage, and degraded surfacing may quickly discourage community use.

Procurement Considerations

Maintenance response expectations should be clearly defined within procurement processes. Tender documents should clearly establish:

- Expected repair response times.
- Local spare part availability.
- Warranty processes.
- Equipment should be compliant with relevant Australian Standards (AS16630).
- Vandalism replacement arrangements.
- Supplier responsibilities when equipment faults are reported.
- Ongoing servicing support.

Fault Reporting and Maintenance

Install QR-code reporting plates on all equipment to provide users with a simple way to report faults, vandalism, damaged surfacing, or other safety concerns directly from the site.

QR codes should link to a simple online reporting form within the council web environment that allows users to upload photos and provide details about an issue.

Submissions should be automatically directed to a designated council team responsible for assessing damage, engaging manufacturers or contractors where required, coordinating repairs, and isolating unsafe equipment if necessary.

“Maybe some way of saying ‘if you find any broken equipment, please send a text to this number at Council.’” - Rodney

Expert Advice & Support

Outdoor fitness environments are community spaces designed to support healthier, more active, and more connected lifestyles. While community needs vary, thoughtful planning will help create spaces that are welcoming, better used, and capable of delivering stronger long-term community outcomes.

Adelaide University Advisory and Support Services

Councils are welcome to contact our School of Allied Health & Human Performance for expert advice on site design, equipment selection, accessibility, and participation-focused outcomes.

1. Consultation & Feedback

Early-stage advisory support, which typically includes:

- Advisory meetings.
- Plan and concept review.
- Brief recommendation report.

2. Planning Integration

More detailed support, including:

- Planning and design review.
- Strategic planning input.
- Site and layout considerations.

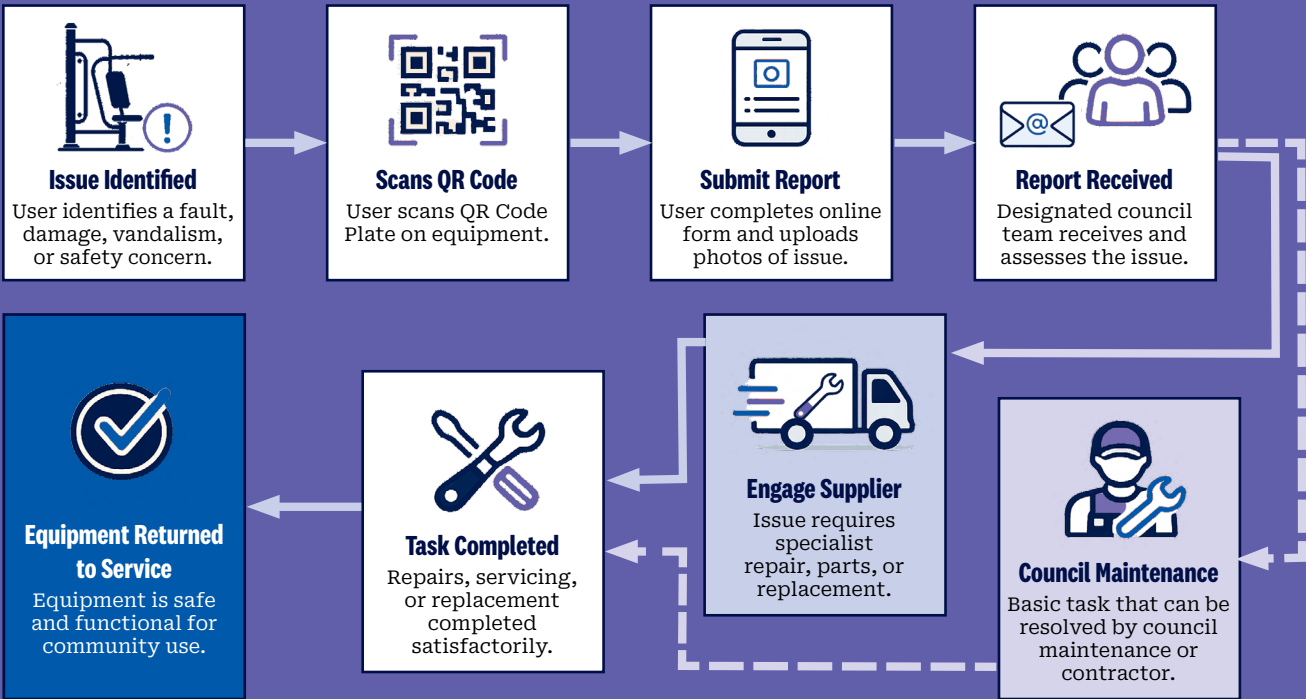
3. End-to-End Planning

Comprehensive support, including:

- Team meetings (up to 6).
- Site assessment review.
- Equipment selection and layout planning.
- Procurement and tender planning.
- Activation strategies.

For further information regarding advice or collaboration, email alyson.crozier@adelaide.edu.au.

Recommended Outdoor Fitness Equipment Maintenance Workflow



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