

* Indigenous Action Plan Initial Findings Report

*Final name to be determined in partnership with the Native American Parks Council

2024 Summary

June 2025



Minneapolis
Park & Recreation Board

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank and acknowledge the many voices who have contributed to this work to date.

- Indigenous Parks Liaison Carrie Day Aspinwall (Minnesota Chippewa Tribe Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Urban Band Member)
- Native American Parks Council members
- Indigenous Evaluation by Dr. Nicole MartinRogers (White Earth Nation descendant) from Advance Consulting LLC
- Facilitation of meetings by LeMoine LePointe
- MPRB Work group members
- American Indian community members
- MPRB Board of Commissioners
- MPRB Project Team members: Adam Arvidson, Carrie Christensen, Colleen O'Dell, Emma Pachuta, Jennifer Ringold

Greetings | Boozhoo | Hau | Hainipi

Always first, I'd like to thank our Creator for providing for the opportunity to share knowledge of our people, the land and what it has meant to many of the people to be of this place called Mni Sota Makoce, the original homelands of the Dakota peoples. To the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board for recognizing the significance of this original Dakota territory and requesting that the Dakota and all Indigenous peoples of this territory step forward to assist and support in the continued stewardship of the land.

As we sit on the traditional, ancestral lands of Indigenous peoples, Dakota, Anishinaabe/Ojibwe, Ho Chunk, we are offered an opportunity to realize that this land, holds great historical, spiritual and personal significance for its original stewards.

Our efforts across 2024, through the Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan have laid a foundation that builds/rebuilds relationships, shares our history and encourages trust, transparency and deeper listening, sharing in the development of processes which allows for this history to be told and live in this contemporary space.

Thank you to the Native American Parks Council for agreeing to serve as guides, as we re-open the original history, identifying and recognizing our sites of significance, guiding policy as well as sharing their life experiences and those of their ancestors.

This Indigenous Action Plan lays out a journey to share truth, along with paths to acknowledge that truth. A truth which will lead and support park policies, projects and stewardship into the future.

We stand here today in a better light, with our tobacco reconnecting to these sacred places, sharing knowledge and working to create a shared understanding through art, storytelling, and through laughter.

We look forward to continuing to foster the sense of belonging for our Dakota and all Indigenous relatives, to act on policies and processes which include the historical stewardship practices of our Indigenous peoples and reopening a path where all people will experience, acknowledge and share in the caretaking of this territory.

On behalf of my people, and all Indigenous peoples, we want to say thank you, ChiMiigwetch in my language, to the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board by honoring our culture, resilience and the contributions of our Indigenous peoples.



Carrie Day Aspinwall, MPRB Indigenous Parks Liaison (Minnesota Chippewa Tribe Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Urban Band Member)

MPRB is working to integrate truth, reconciliation, and acknowledgment of Indigenous land, people, and nations into our work, policies, procedures and spaces

Dakhóta Thamákhoche

Bde Óta Othúgwe & Imnížaska Othúgwe
Minneapolis & Saint Paul



Wíta Wašté

Owámniyomni

ta Othúgwe

Thabnókhopapi Oškád Makhóche

Othúgwe Remáni Thothó

Imnížaska

Ówag Thípi

Bde Óta Othúgwe
Wókaže
Owápazo
Thípi

Minisota
Wóungpe
Wakántuyo

Chahkazo
Thakpešizo Oškád Thípi

Ópa Bde

Bde Makhá Ska

Āheyáta Othúgwe

Wakpá Thánka

Kap'óža

Ehág

Bde Umán

Mní Iħpáyedag

Wakpá Thánka

Wakhág T

Mníħaħa Wakpádag

Bdóte

Mníówe Sní

Isághthangka Akíchita Thípi

Wíta Thánka

Oħéyawahe

Wakpá T

Wótakigyag Oínožig

Othúgwe Remáni Thó

Minisota Wakpá

hógka

Makhá Thó Otkéwíħayapi Wókiksuye

akhóche

Wamániħa Okášte Thípi

Ehágna Wičháħapi

Maħpiya Ĥ

Introduction

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) has embarked on a journey to create and implement an Indigenous Action Plan (IAP), which will set guidance for staff and commissioners on acknowledgment, truth, and actions for historical and contemporary Indigenous land, peoples, and nations. This work has included a range of approaches across park policies, projects, and land stewardship. MPRB will continue to work with Indigenous community members, Indigenous leaders, Tribal leadership, MPRB commissioners and staff, and the public to identify goals, strategies, priorities, and actions to ensure the work reflects the values and needs of the Native American community in Minneapolis.

This report outlines accomplishments, challenges, and learnings from 2024. It also includes recommendations and suggestions for what to build upon or change in 2025 and beyond. It's clear the work will continue to evolve as MPRB builds relationships, listens, learns, acts, and grapples with its role in dismantling historic inequities and elevating Indigenous worldviews and priorities in its policies, systems, and programs.

This report has been written for MPRB leadership, staff, Indigenous community members, and Tribal leaders as we learn and hold ourselves accountable on this important effort. This report is also for the general public to help ensure transparency in our work.

Building off the MPRB Parks for All 2021-2036 goals and policies, the creation of the Indigenous Action Plan has also been supported by the agency through a budgetary commitment in 2023-2024 and also in 2025.

Formation of the Native American Parks Council

In Quarter One 2024, the MPRB commissioners approved a 14-member slate of Dakota community leaders. The council advises staff on projects and policies which will ultimately be brought to the MPRB Board of Commissioners to consider. All Native American Parks council members are recognized leaders in their communities and tribes, bringing a wealth of expertise, perspectives, and knowledge to the MPRB. Though many also represent Indigenous organizations or Tribal nations, Parks council members represent their personal perspective and worldview at the meetings.

In 2024, three meetings were hosted with Parks Council members in April,

Several goals and strategies within the MPRB Parks for All 2021-2036 Comprehensive Plan guide the work:

Goal 1: Foster belonging and equity

***Strategy 3:** Amplify Indigenous stories, histories, cultural practices, and connections to land through employment, partnerships, reconciliation planning, programming, ceremony, foraging, land management, interpretation, and proactive community engagement across projects and programs.*

Goal 7: Connect through communications and technology

***Strategy 4:** Educate staff and the community on critical issues facing the city and region, specifically: ... Indigenous acknowledgment, history, rights, culture, and perspectives.*

Goal 8: Cultivate a thriving workforce

***Strategy 11:** Develop, evolve, and train staff and commissioners on Native acknowledgment practices that incorporate the complexities of treaties, tribal differences, personal experience, and layered place-based histories...*

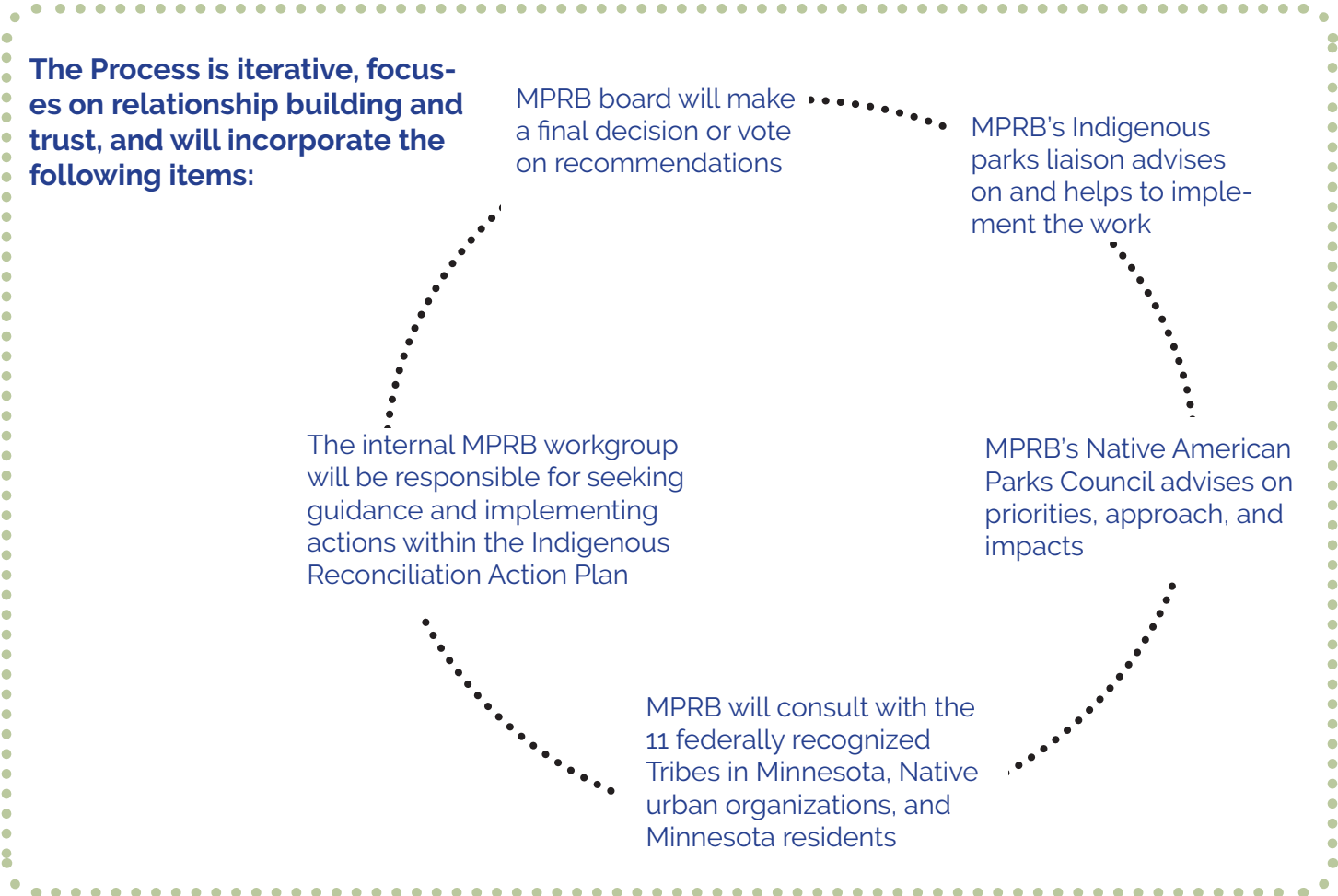


Photo 1: MPRB Workgroup staff attended the Mdewakanton: Dwellers of Spirit Lake exhibit in summer 2024 and received a guided tour at the Hočokata Ti Cultural Center to learn more about the culture and history of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community. (Photo source: Hočokata Ti)

July, and December 2024, as well as a special round table discussion hosted in October to discuss the renaming process for Sibley Park with Native American Parks Council members and Native American community members who had been participating in the MPRB renaming process to date.

Parks Council meetings have consisted of both informing Parks Council members about existing MPRB Indigenous Action Plan work and seeking guidance on current projects and policies. Topics that have received guidance from the council in initial meetings include:

- Next steps in the renaming of Sibley Park process
- Updates to the MPRB Naming policy
- Updates to the MPRB Tobacco policy
- Process for Indigenous consultation



Formation of Internal MPRB Workgroup

The MPRB internal staff workgroup was formed in early 2024 and is comprised of a majority of departments and divisions within the MPRB organization. Departments who participate were invited due to projects that overlapped with Indigenous Action Plan (IAP) priorities. The list of staff and departments continue to grow as more opt-in to participate and more projects begin. The list of departments who are involved include:

- Communications and Marketing
- Design and Project Management
- Strategic Planning
- Environmental Management
 - Natural Resources
 - Youth Employment
 - Environmental Education
- Youth and Recreation Center Programs
- Community Connections and Violence Prevention
- Human Resources
- Visitor Services
- Forestry
- Park Police
- Deputy Superintendent's Office
 - Archives

The purpose of the workgroup is to provide internal learning and coordination opportunities for work and trainings associated with the IAP.

Additionally, a number of trainings and educational opportunities were provided to the workgroup, MPRB staff, and the public in 2024 to help build education and awareness about the history of this land and its original peoples.

Pursuit of Organizational Acknowledgment Statement

The statement identified within the 2021-2036 Comprehensive Plan states:

"We collectively acknowledge that the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board system is located on the traditional, ancestral and contemporary lands of Indigenous people. This land holds great historical, spiritual and personal significance for its original stewards, the Native nations and peoples of this region, including the Dakota and Ojibwe people."

The comprehensive plan also outlines that "this commitment is intended to begin healing our relationship with the Indigenous community. Therefore, these words are seeds that should grow and change with time. MPRB will continue to explore and update acknowledgments and actions to show the organization's commitment of MPRB to the Indigenous peoples into the future."



Photo 2: MPRB hosted the "Why Treaties Matter" exhibit in the front lobby, open to staff and the general public for one month.

During 2024 evaluation interviews, MPRB staff members were asked what they think should be included in an acknowledgment statement for MPRB. Some staff members did not feel prepared to answer this question, but those who did offered a range of ideas related to Indigenous worldview of the interconnectedness of all living things and the land. A few offered specific suggestions regarding terms to be used or not including "nations" instead of "tribes," "American Indian" instead of "Indigenous," and not using the word "reconciliation" as it may be a "trigger word."

"I appreciated Tara's view of LandBack as actually being Land First which is something the MPRB should get behind -- our improved mission statement is part way there."

"I would try to acknowledge the interconnected nature of contemporary and historic peoples and how "place" includes history and the present human and natural occupants."

"The original view of the land and the notion of stewardship of the lands for future generations."

Public Communications and Transparency

MPRB staff engaged with the Native American community and general public about this work through a number of avenues in 2024, including hosting or attending a number of citywide events and meetings, including:

- MN Indian Affairs Council Urban Advisory Group
- Mother's Day Pow Wow
- Neighborhood events
- Owamni festival
- Community Connections conference
- Minneapolis American Indian Center grand opening
- Hosting the "Why Treaties Matter" exhibit at MPRB Headquarters

MPRB staff also shared information and elevated Indigenous voices and work through social media posts, email blasts, and a project page on the MPRB website.



Photos 3 & 4: Images from the Owamni Falling Water festival

MPRB Work that Overlaps with Indigenous Action Plan (AIP) Goals

Centering Native voices is becoming more and more integrated within MPRB's work. Below are some examples of projects that have overlapped with the Indigenous Action Plan or have received guidance from the Indigenous Parks Liaison and/or the Native American Parks Council since Fall of 2023:

Bde Maka Ska Pavilion

MPRB planning staff collaborated with Native American artists for the Bde Maka Ska Pavilion in two key ways that contributed to the cultural enrichment of the project site at the northeast corner of Bde Maka Ska. First, MPRB collaborated with Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI) through their "We Are Still Here" young artist mural program. In collaboration with the Hennepin Theater Trust, the new Pavilion hosted the final mural of this program with three emerging Native American artists (Jearica Fountain, Racquel Banaszak, and Summer Cohen) who worked to design and install the mural with help from their mentor, Thomasina Topbear. In addition to the mural, structural elements include decals with Indigenous place names and a "You Are On Dakota Land" designed by local Native American artist, Adrienne Zimiga-January.



Photos 5 & 6: Bde Maka Ska Pavilion

Tree Planting with Nawayee Center School

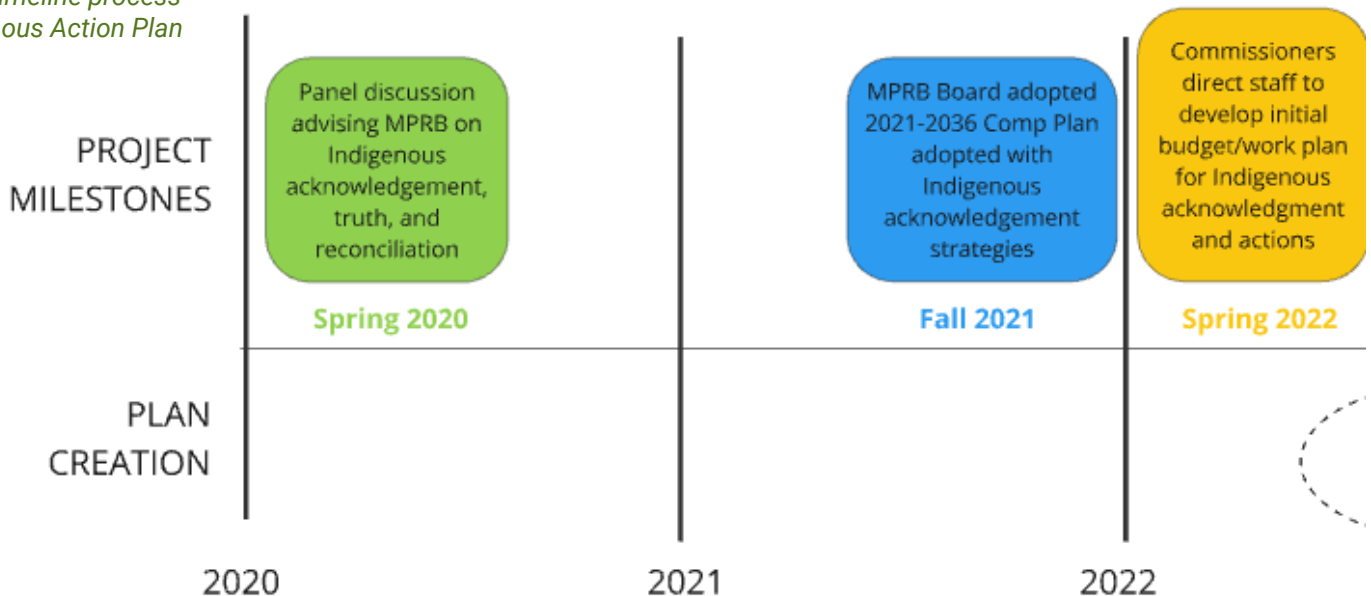
Youth from Nawayee Center School planted approximately 45 trees into the floodplain forests along the Mississippi River south of Kroening Nature Center. Those species were specifically selected for their climate-resistant characteristics and floodplain adaptability.

The youth listened to a tree planting demo, but it was clear they already knew exactly what they were doing once the trees and tools were handed over to them. A couple of youth decided to take planting to the next level, planting nearly a dozen trees each on their own. Planting wrapped up just as



Photos 7 & 8: Students from Nawayee Center School during the tree planting event

Figure 1: Timeline process for Indigenous Action Plan



CEDAR AVE FIELD PARK
DRAFT DESIGN 20-30 YEAR PARK DESIGN FOR CEDAR FIELD PARK
 BORRADOR DE DISEÑO BORRADOR DEL DISEÑO: DISEÑO DE PARQUE PARA 20-30 AÑOS EN CEDAR FIELD PARK



Figure 2: Image of Cedar Avenue Field design option

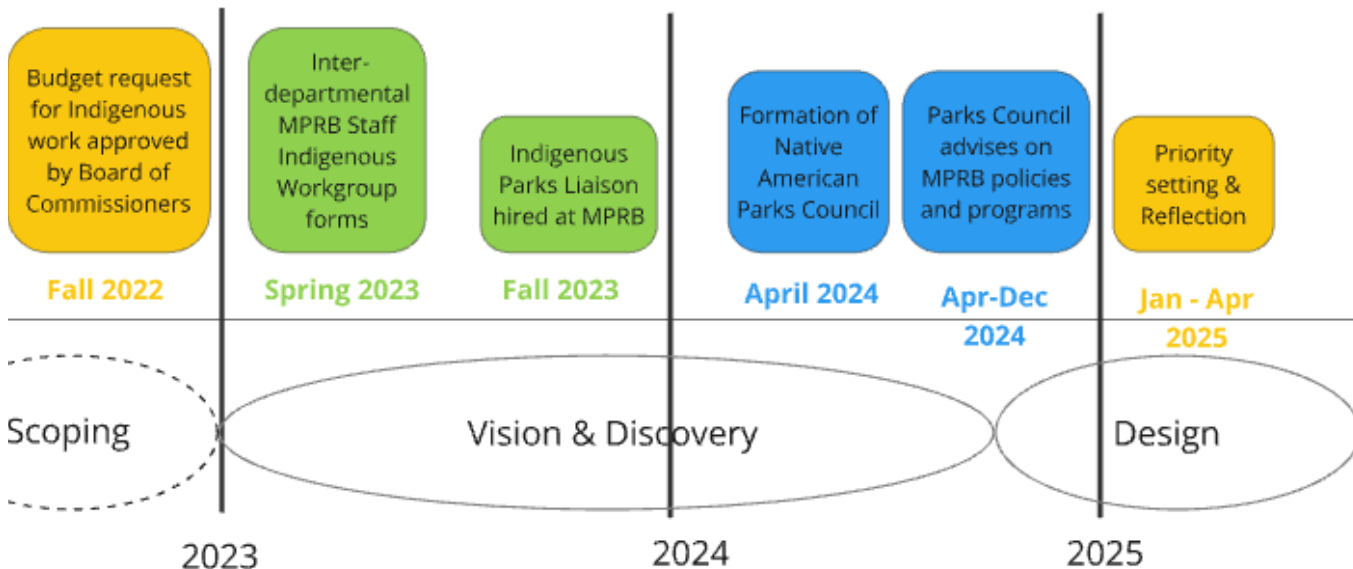


Photo 9: Engagement at Cedar Avenue Field Park

the sun was setting and the students made their way back to Kroening after a long day at North Mississippi Park.

Design of Cedar Avenue Field Park

The East Phillips Open Spaces project began community engagement in the East Phillips neighborhood in fall 2023 to create designs for Cedar Avenue Field Park and East Phillips Park. MPRB worked in close partnership with local Native community partners such as Little Earth Residents Association (LERA), Little Earth Protectors, American Indian Movement (AIM), and Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI) to engage Native residents about the design of both parks, with a primary focus on Cedar Avenue Field Park. A draft of the final design will be released in spring



When asked about the most important or impactful thing Parks Council members have addressed with the MPRB so far, four of the five Native American Parks Council members who answered this question mentioned naming of parks and spaces.

"The need to eradicate the names of abusive, power-hungry men from the green spaces of our city."

- Community Leader

2025. Following board approval, MPRB has funding to build the first phase of improvements.

Renaming Sibley Park

In 2016, residents around Sibley Park in South Minneapolis sent a formal request to MPRB to change the name of Sibley Field Park because of the history of violence and genocide that Henry Hasting Sibley perpetuated against the Dakota people.

In 2021, MPRB staff moved through the existing park naming process, which solicited feedback from the broader community and allowed them to identify and vote on a name. In 2023, staff brought forward a nomination for a Dakota word that was proposed and voted on by the general public. There were a number of Native American community members who were actively involved in the naming process through this time.

In 2024, MPRB staff and the Indigenous Parks Liaison requested feedback from the Native American Parks Council, who requested a round table conversation with the Native community members who had been involved with the process to date. This conversation was hosted in October 2024 and highlighted general consensus around removal of the existing name "Sibley" from the park, but noted differences between Parks Council members, who are interested in hosting a new naming process to identify the final name for the park, while some Native American community members still hoped to move ahead with the 2023 nominated name.

Looking ahead to 2025, MPRB staff will bring a resolution forward to remove the name "Sibley" from the park for MPRB Board approval and work to identify a process that will aim to honor the work of the Native American community members who have been involved in the naming of the park and involve the Native American Parks Council.

Note: The name "Sibley" was officially approved to be removed from the park, the park is now temporarily named 40th Street Park until a new Indigenous-led naming process can be implemented (June 2026)



Photo 10: Image from the MMIR March

Supporting March for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR) Parade

For the last 10 years, community partners hosted the annual MMIR movement, which includes a march, in south Minneapolis. The march falls on February 14, a day of remembrance for those in Indigenous communities who are missing or were murdered. For several years, members of the Park Police have supported the march. This is one of many ways MPRB strives to building and maintain relationships in the community.

Initial Priorities

Priority Baskets

Initial planning work identified 14 priority “baskets,” or approaches and areas, to prioritize. These baskets were identified through conversations with the Native American Parks Council, Indigenous leaders, stakeholders, staff, and MPRB commissioners. Priorities will continue to adapt and evolve as the Indigenous Action Plan is outlined further.



Increasing access and feeling of welcome to park land or natural resources for cultural or recreational uses for Indigenous community members.



Developing a land, people and nations acknowledgment for staff and leadership in the park system.



Creating agreements or MOUs with Native communities or organizations to further define and elevate MPRB partnerships and priorities.



Incorporating cultural practices, recreation, and uses into the planning and design of parks.



Supporting continued funding for the Indigenous Parks Liaison and through other financial resources needed for this work.



Highlighting Dakota and Ojibwe language and culture across the park system.



Implementing existing MPRB projects that overlap with one or more IRAP priority baskets. Can be system-wide or localized.



Identifying historical and contemporary Indigenous sites of significance in the park system.



Building long-term trust and relationships with Native leaders, Tribal Nations, and Indigenous community members.



Identifying and shifting processes that don't align or support Indigenous culture or inclusion.



Stewarding park land with guidance from regional Tribal and Indigenous community leadership.



Identifying consultation process by Indigenous leadership for policy and ordinance changes.



Educating staff and commissioners on the complexity of tribal relations and issues currently and historically faced by the Tribes.



Growing the Native workforce at MPRB across many different divisions.

Initial Native American Parks Council Priorities

Initial topics within the 14 priorities from the Native American Parks Council are outlined below. Topics were identified through an online survey and 2024 Parks Council meeting discussion:



- » Educational and community-based program ideas
- » Park access for cultural uses
- » Exploration of LandBack opportunities and/or collaborative land management



- » Land and Tribal Nations acknowledgement statement, processes, and use



- » Interpretation opportunities and system-wide protocols



- » Identify and honor Sacred and Significant Sites of the Dakota peoples within our jurisdiction
- » Complete initial sites-of-significance analysis to guide future park development



- » Process/policy for naming parks and facilities / reclaiming place names



- » Partnership protocols / Tribal Nations engagement protocol
- » Public art guidelines



- » Development of staff and commissioner trainings on the complexities of treaties, tribal differences, personal experience and layered place-based histories

Indigenous Evaluation

In 2024, MPRB contracted with an Indigenous evaluator (Dr. Nicole MartinRogers, White Earth Nations descendant, from Advance Consulting LLC) to help assess and increase the impact of the Indigenous Action Plan in achieving outcomes using an iterative and culturally responsive evaluation process described below.

Theory of Change Model

First, Dr. MartinRogers worked with MPRB Senior Planner Carrie Christensen, MPRB Indigenous Parks Liaison Carrie Day Aspinwall, and the MPRB staff work group to develop a “theory of change,” which highlights the impacts MPRB wants to achieve with the Indigenous Action Plan and how outcomes will be assessed.

The theory of change is framed in alignment with the Indigenous worldview about the importance of the seasons, and the different purposes and areas of focus in each season. There are two layers in the theory of change that emphasize seasonality. First, there is an annual cycle that follows MPRB’s planning and budgeting cycle and incorporates Indigenous evaluation and feedback from Indigenous community including the Native American Parks Council.

Second, there are phases of this work that metaphorically follow different seasons as described below, although the actual timeline for achieving the intended impacts across all seasons of this work is likely years or decades. It took hundreds of years for government agencies operating under certain principles and practices to produce the disparities, harms, and traumas experienced by Indigenous peoples today. Therefore, **it is going to require much more sustained effort and resources from MPRB than one annual budget cycle to address the deeply embedded beliefs, policies, and practices and to repair the harms that have been done to Indigenous communities and Tribal Nations.**

Theory of Change

MPRB is here



Short-term change and actions (Spring)

as the seeds of trust and relationships begin to grow

Mid-term change and actions (Summer)



as the new growth begins to blossom into noticeable impacts for the community

Long-term change or ultimate impact (Fall)



When we harvest the bounties of our efforts and stockpile for the winter ahead

Assessing and Planning (Winter)



Assessing whether we have achieved the desired outcomes

What MPRB aimed to evaluate in 2024



The seasonal metaphor is illustrated in the following statements of intended impacts for the Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan. If the Indigenous Action Plan is implemented, then the following things will happen in the short-term (spring):

- » 1. MPRB staff and leadership will have increased knowledge and awareness of the history and current issues facing the Indigenous community in Minneapolis and specifically with regard to MPRB spaces, policies, and programs.
- » 2. MPRB staff and leaders will have increased awareness of and connections within the local Indigenous community.
- » 3. Indigenous community leaders/tribal leaders will have increased awareness of MPRB spaces, policies, and programs, and will have increased connections to and trust with MPRB staff and leaders.
- » 4. Indigenous community members will have increased awareness of and access to MPRB spaces and programs.



Then, the following things will happen in the mid-term (summer):

- » MPRB has improved its representation of Indigenous community, culture, and history in its signage, maps, online resources, and programs.
- » MPRB has more Indigenous staff and leaders at all levels.
- » MPRB has incorporated more Indigenous community leadership into its policies and decision-making practices.
- » MPRB has institutionalized ongoing trainings and professional development opportunities about Indigenous community, culture, and history for all MPRB staff and leadership.
- » Indigenous community members and groups feel welcome and have access to and use MPRB spaces and programs, including for gathering of traditional medicines and cultural ceremonies and activities.



This will result in these ultimate impacts (autumn):

- » MPRB has secured funding and institutional commitment to implement the Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan and resulting recommendations.
- » Indigenous community members and leaders are equitably represented in MPRB spaces, policies, programs, and decisions.
- » Indigenous community has increased control or ownership of sacred sites and other spaces of significance for the community.

Indigenous Evaluation Methods and Data Sources

Information was gathered from several sources, mapping directly back to the Theory of Change Model and the outcomes we identified for the early phases of the work (spring season):



- » Do MPRB staff and leadership have increased knowledge and awareness of the history and current issues facing the Indigenous community in Minneapolis, specifically with regard to MPRB spaces, policies, and programs?
- » Do MPRB staff and leaders have increased awareness of and connections with the local Indigenous community?
- » Do Indigenous community leaders and tribal leaders have increased awareness of MPRB spaces, policies, and programs? Do they have increased connections to and trust with MPRB staff and leaders?
- » Do Indigenous community members have increased awareness of and access to MPRB spaces and programs?

Several methods for gathering data were implemented, including:

- » Conducting a survey of MPRB staff who have worked closely with a team to implement the Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan.
- » Conducting a survey of staff who participated in the Sacred Places tour at Bdote.
- » Conducting a survey with the Native American Parks Council.
- » Data gathering with Indigenous community members using “bead voting” at a MPRB event at East Phillips Park.

A total of twelve MPRB work group members completed a survey about their experiences to-date in summer 2024. And, 21 staff who attended the Bdote Sacred Places Tour in fall 2024 also completed a survey. Some of these staff members may be represented in both surveys.

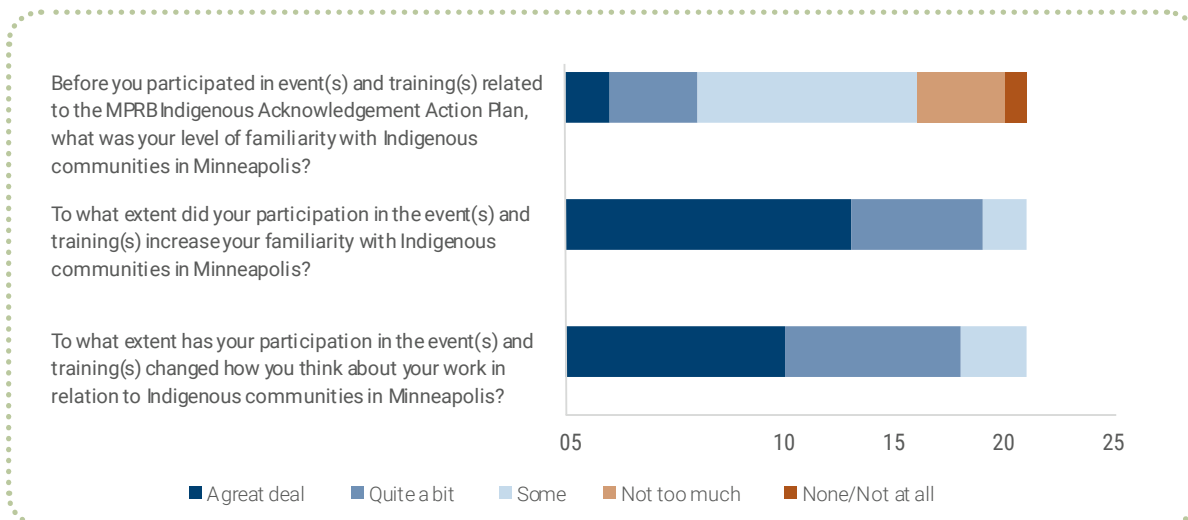


Figure 1: Staff member survey following Sacred Places Bdote tour

» Completing two interviews with Indigenous community leaders who have worked with MPRB in some way over the past year and completing interviews with three key MPRB staff.

Key findings

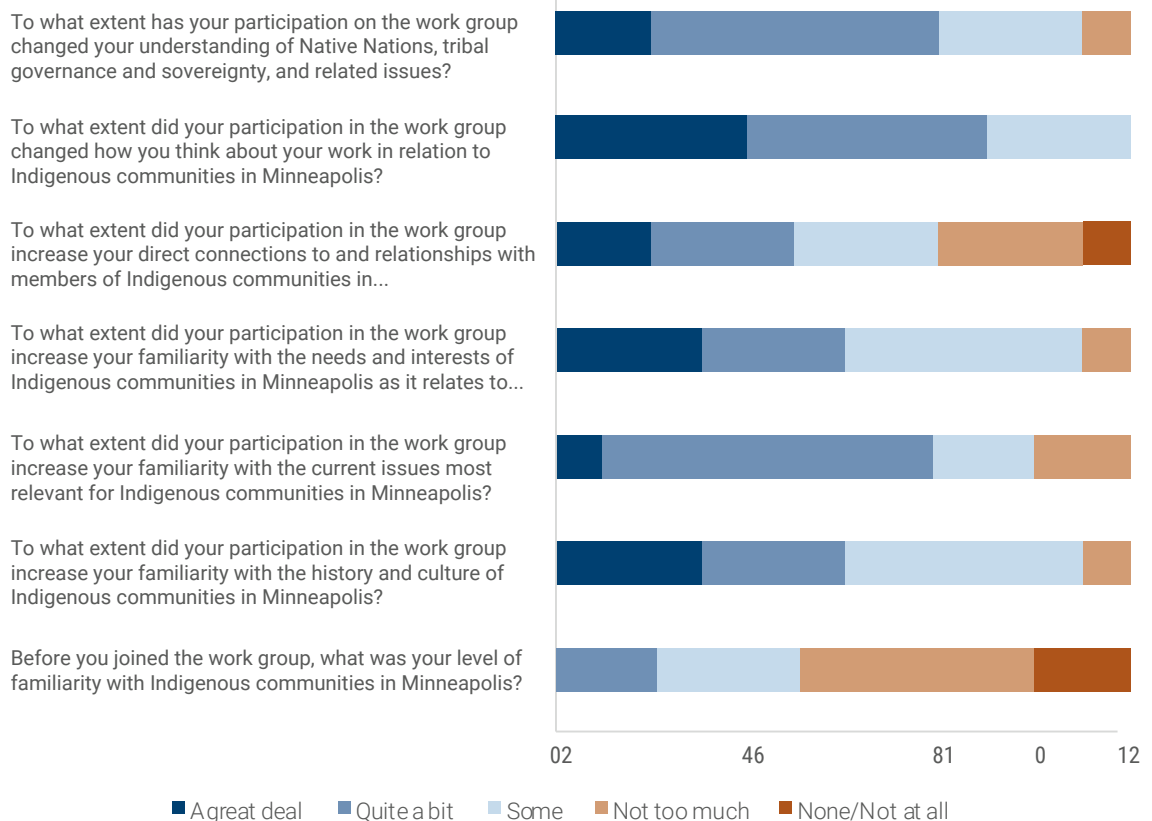
Outcome 1: MPRB staff and leadership will have increased knowledge and awareness of the history and current issues facing the Indigenous community in Minneapolis and specifically with regard to MPRB spaces, policies, and programs.



Across multiple data sources, many of the MPRB staff involved in this work felt increased awareness of key issues facing the Indigenous community. Staff were most likely to report changes in the areas of how they think about their work in relation to the Indigenous communities in Minneapolis, their understanding of Native Nations, and their familiarity with current issues facing Indigenous communities in Minneapolis (Figure 1).

None of these staff members felt they had “a great deal” of familiarity with Indigenous communities in Minneapolis before their time on the work group, and many felt their familiarity was “not too much” or “none.”

Figure 2: Self reported changes from staff following work group meeting/training attendance



When asked what they learned that is directly relevant to their work, a few staff members who participated in the work group mentioned that MPRB has a long way to go, and one staff member learned about gaps in history and storytelling related to MPRB and Indigenous communities.

Staff also noted their increased awareness of Indigenous communities, including how decision-making is done in the community and the significance of the land to Indigenous communities. One staff member said they learned that supporting Indigenous communities is important to MPRB, and another staff member learned more about foraging and harvesting ordinances that impact Indigenous community members' ability to practice their lifeways. One staff member mentioned learning about the importance of youth employment and another noted the importance of interdepartmental awareness and collaboration around this work.

"That the organization [MPRB] has a long way to go to build meaningful relationships that go beyond individual staff or commissioners."

"I learned that supporting Indigenous cultures and cultural perspectives is important to the MPRB."

Staff members who attended the Sacred Places tour described their learnings as it more specifically relates to the spiritual significance of the site they visited and the history of the Dakota communities in Minnesota. Several staff also mentioned learning about the way Dakota peoples were treated by settlers and the U.S. government.

"This was awesome! It is my favorite thing I have done (so far) in my career in Minneapolis. Thank you! It seems like this tour is something everyone at MPRB (and other government agencies) should do."

"These aren't just robotic policy decisions, this is land, and place, and community – things that are deep and personal. You can't just be a bureaucratic government person, you need to think about the meaning of the land."

Overall, these findings **indicate increased knowledge and awareness among MPRB staff.**

Outcome 2: MPRB staff and leaders will have increased awareness of and connections within the local Indigenous community.



When asked what they are doing differently as a result of what they have learned, staff members who participated in the workgroup noted things

"The first year was about the MPRB gaining some confidence and wrapping their mind around learning something new, and they did that."

- MPRB staff member

"I could see people I have worked with a long time, who were hard nuts to crack, having light bulb moments. Minds may not be changed overnight, but with every step you can see layers sluffing off. It's the consistency, need to keep peeling the onion."

- MPRB staff member

Staff quotes about the tour:

"How flimsy western claims to this land is and how we have a duty to steward it for generations much later down the line."

"How [Dakota] communities managed conflict, outsiders, family, understanding and learning from the land. The whole perspective of the land and all creation as relatives, but on a much deeper and impactful level. How hurtful it can be to look at / manage land from a 'western' perspective."

"About the river's importance in Indigenous culture."

"I was not aware of the concentration camp type experience the Dakota people had at Fort Snelling."

like being more thoughtful about how their work impacts Indigenous communities or taking time to learn more, knowing who to contact in Indigenous communities, looking for opportunities to connect with Indigenous communities around projects or actually working with Indigenous community members.

"An intense mindfulness of Indigenous communities has been borne from interaction and involvement with Indigenous communities/related projects and events at the MPRB. I'd say this changes almost everything about how I navigate projects, especially as they related to Indigenous peoples and communities."

- MPRB staff member

When asked about changes in how MPRB as an institution is approaching work with Indigenous communities and Native Nations, a couple of staff members from the work group did not observe any changes whereas others noted an increase in Indigenous representation, MPRB being willing to listen to Indigenous communities, and MPRB working with Indigenous community leaders.

"Bringing on Carrie Day Aspinwall as a liaison has been huge in guiding MPRB's approach to work. Between that and convening a workgroup to increase communication between staff and providing cultural experiences, I see the effectiveness of approaching Indigenous communities growing."

"A work in progress - but more nuanced and intentional."

"I have noticed that folks [from the Indigenous community] don't come to me, they go to Carrie Day because they have a relationship with her and trust her. I have reflected on all the missed opportunities in our system if someone doesn't feel comfortable going to someone in MPRB because they don't have the relationship, even if that staff person would be happy to talk to them. That level of cultural competence still isn't there."

When Native American Parks Council members were asked the same question, only four members provided a response. One member noted the creation of the Council as a positive change within MPRB and the other member noted the land acknowledgment as a change within MPRB.

"I now have a better lens for viewing the interests and histories of the Park Board as they connect to the city. I am better informed, and I now know who to contact should I have questions or want to make a connection."

- MPRB staff member

In general, Indigenous folks who were interviewed talked about how long it took to get to the place we are in now and therefore how it's going to take time and effort and patience to do this work in a good way. One community leader who we interviewed said:

"Is the MPRB aware of how much healing needs to happen before jumping into this?"

"I have looked for more opportunities to work with Indigenous community members for programming related work, knowing that the MPRB supports these efforts."

- MPRB staff member

This leader went on to express concerns of tokenism and questioned the intentions and commitment of MPRB (and other large institutions) to allow the Indigenous Parks Liaison and Native American Parks Council to direct changes that may require significant work for MPRB. Another community leader questioned if MPRB is really open to taking the time needed to form

authentic relationships and partnership with the Indigenous community vs. just checking a box by visiting with the community to share things that have already been decided within MPRB. A community leader noted:

"The way folks [from MPRB] presented who were working with Carrie Day, we [Metro Urban Indian Directors] would have rather just talked to Carrie. It felt like we were expecting to braid in feedback from MUID, but they [MPRB] had the plan already sketched out. They came up with a plan, then they hired a Native expert to implement it. But they should have hired Carrie at the onset to lead them in that planning process, to support more community engagement in the process."

A couple quotes from key staff:

"I am learning a lot from Carrie Day about moving at the speed of trust. Moving slower than what we're used to doing. That's where the cultural competence comes in, our systems aren't set up to move at the speed of trust and this unintentionally creates divides in the Native community and other communities too."

"I don't believe this work should be done quickly, just to get it done.... The IRAP [Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan] work, we need to break it down a bit, slow it down."

Overall, these findings indicate some change in awareness from staff about the local indigenous community.

Outcome 3: Indigenous community leaders/tribal leaders will have increased awareness of MPRB spaces, policies, and programs, and will have increased connections to and trust with MPRB staff and leaders.



Figure 3 (page 20) shows the feedback from the Native American Parks Council survey. Not all respondents answered every question. Not surprisingly, since this group just recently formed and has only met three times, there is less self-reported changes in knowledge, awareness, and attitude toward MPRB although most Council members who completed the survey did acknowledge changes in how they think about MPRB's relationship with Indigenous communities in Minneapolis.

When asked what they want to change or improve about the Native American Parks Council, one member suggested:

"There needs to be a way to make the Council feel more invested. As it is, the experience feels very transactional. It would likely increase participation if efforts were made to create a sense of a team and do some relationship-building. Perhaps have a lunch gathering where we learn a bit about the Parks history in a fun context."

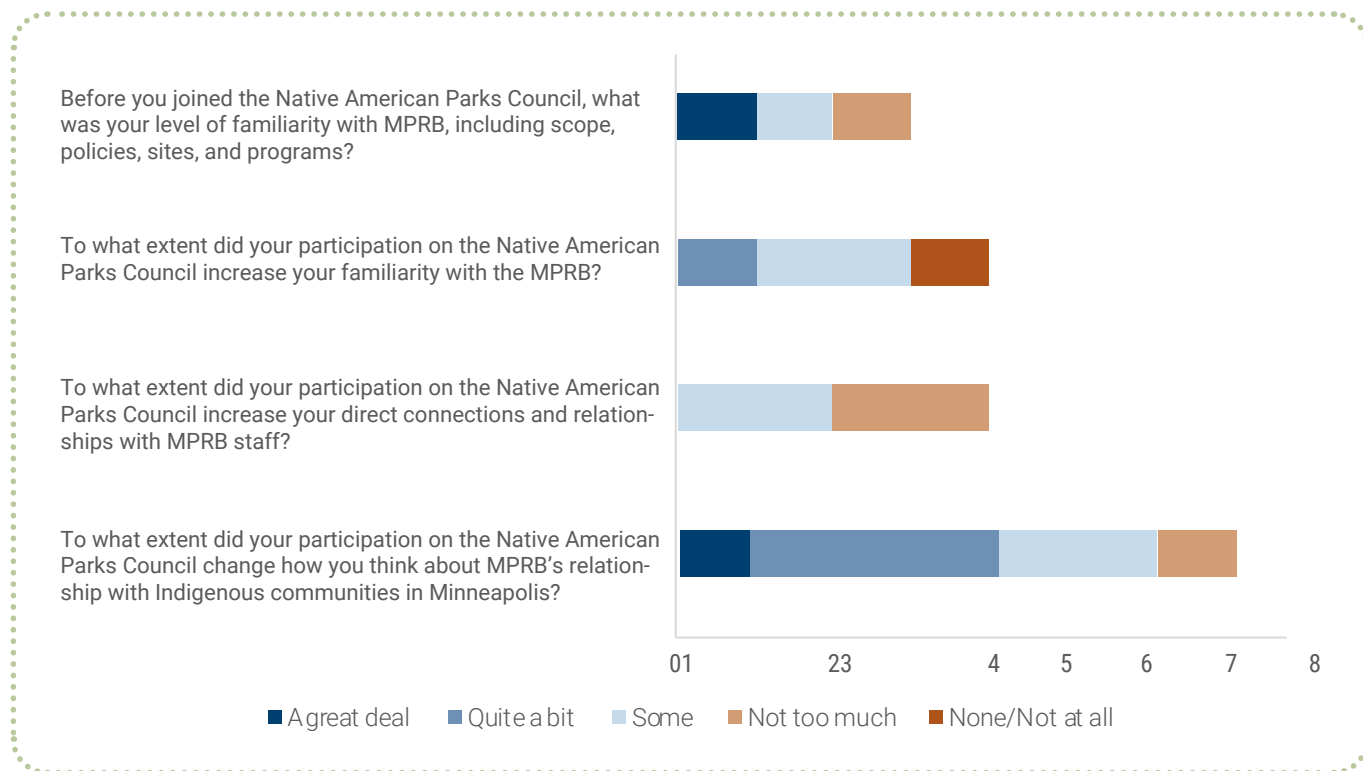
"For the work to happen you can't just keep convening without someone making the solid commitment to do the stuff that needs to be done in between meetings."

- Community Leader

"How can you have truth and reconciliation without a recounting of the hard and inconvenient truth?! Reconciliation is years off likely. Let's start with truth first and then healing will start."

- Community Leader

Figure 3: Native American Parks Council online survey



Also emphasizing the importance of building relationships as the first phase of the work, one community leader stated:

“Unless we understand each other and the connective tissue that brings us together we’ll just keep circling the drain around these issues. You need to understand the other people and what’s driving the collective work.”

Overall, the findings indicate that **MPRB has more long-term work to do in building trust and relationships with Tribal and Community leaders.**



Outcome 4: Indigenous community members will have increased awareness of and access to MPRB spaces and programs.

In July 2024, MPRB engaged Indigenous and other community members at a community event related to potential changes to East Phillips Park and Cedar Field, which are located in close proximity to Little Earth and the heart of the American Indian community in Minneapolis. Approximately 63 people were engaged through bead voting to indicate their primary barriers to accessing this park space; each participant got 3 votes/beads.

The most commonly selected barriers were:

- » I don't feel safe at the park 34 votes
- » My neighborhood feels unsafe 30 votes
- » I don't know what is happening at the parks 26 votes
- » Getting to the park feels unsafe 23 votes
- » I'm not interested in park programs 23 votes

Overall, **staff were able to get initial feedback from Indigenous community members about barriers to accessing park space**, however, the evaluation was not able to measure an increase in awareness at this time.



Photo 12: Bean jar engagement with Indigenous residents, Summer 2024.

Role of the Indigenous Parks Liaison

When they were asked about the impacts of the Indigenous Parks Liaison (Carrie Day Aspinwall) role, staff were unanimously positive about the position. One staff member felt that Carrie's role makes the work "more personable, less bureaucratic." Several staff members mentioned the increased connection to community that she has brought to MPRB and another staff member noted that Carrie has been able to bridge communication gaps.

Similarly, Native American Parks Council members expressed positive sentiments about the Indigenous Parks Liaison role. They noted relation-

"Carrie has really been able to bridge what I believe to be a huge gap in communication. Having someone with the ability to understand cultural and social differences is immeasurably valuable for building a strong relationship between Indigenous communities and the Park Board."

- MPRB staff member

"I could see that making the liaison role a permanent position could bring benefit to the community and the MPRB."

- MPRB staff member

"I feel a mutual respect and understanding in my work with Carrie Day Aspinwall and enjoy every project I get to collaborate with her on. She is a wealth of connections and history, and I appreciate how she is able to respectfully correct and educate."

- MPRB staff member

ship management, voice and representation, and clarifying expectations as positive impacts of the role:

"Carrie is an invaluable asset to this project. Her perspective needs to be respected and underscored."

When they were asked to suggest improvements or changes to the position, most of the staff members who were surveyed said the position should be continued, made into a permanent position, and/or that more liaison positions should be created. One staff member felt that Carrie is too busy to attend to everything MPRB needs to do regarding Indigenous reconciliation, and another staff member thought the role and responsibilities needs to be clarified. One staff member wanted more access to Carrie's role across MPRB and another hoped to provide input on projects that impact Indigenous communities.

Looking Ahead

For 2025, MPRB Board of Commissioners adopted a budget that will sustain the MPRB Indigenous Parks Liaison as a part-time temporary position. Limited funding was also provided in the 2025 MPRB budget (reduced from 2024 funding amounts) to continue implementing the Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan and addressing these commitments.

"Reinstatement of treaty rights like access to ceremony sites and foraging, development of foraging and ceremony areas, fully funding the Indigenous liaison position as a full-time permanent position."

- MPRB staff member

When they were asked about priorities for moving forward with this work, several MPRB staff said they want to increase community engagement on projects, and another staff member hoped for more Indigenous-led or -informed decision-making. One staff member suggested having a list and guidance of who within Indigenous communities can and should be contacted for what types of questions. One staff member wants to prioritize employment programs at MPRB, another suggested MPRB learn more about and honor Indigenous worldviews regarding land stewardship, and finally, another staff member wants MPRB to honor treaty rights regarding foraging and harvesting within MPRB spaces:

"I think that the MPRB would benefit from learning more about how Indigenous communities relate to the land, water, air and the myriad beings who live in these spaces. Learning more could allow for new understandings to guide important aspects of the work carried out by the MPRB that is inclusive and restorative. The frameworks with which we view the world impact how we behave. Understanding indigenous worldviews/frameworks, in terms of how to relate to the environment, could lead to new ways of engaging the community and caring for our parks and natural areas. This could lead to many good things for Indigenous people, non-Indigenous people, and the environment."

When asked about what they think should be prioritized moving forward, the Native American Parks Council members were most likely to prioritize park/place names (4 of 5 members who answered this question), interpretation (3 of 5 members), and current employment and leadership training (3 of 5 members).

One community leader emphasized how MPRB should proceed with working with Indigenous communities:

"It's important how they are caretaking their own staff and selves in the process... Healing isn't a thing that we can check off a list. It's important to think less about being overly formalized. That will kill the actual truth telling if you put too many parameters on it. That has the potential to stifle it."

And finally, a MPRB staff member said,

"If we're starting this relationship with Native leaders, we need to commit to it indefinitely across all layers of the org. How can we make it feel not transactional? Our systems are set up for transactional relationships. How do we think outside of the box, outside of our own systems."

Recommendations and Ideas for Consideration

Based on the initial evaluation findings from 2024, **MPRB should continue the Indigenous parks liaison role, as well as continue and expand the staff work group focused on implementing the Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan.** Sharing the responsibility across staff rather than expecting one person to do it all will demonstrate institutional commitment and impact across various areas within MPRB. Therefore, MPRB should also continue the staff workgroup and/or find other ways to ensure that work across the institution that impacts the Indigenous community is being done in a coordinated manner.

MPRB should continue with staff training across levels and departments to ensure staff and leadership have a good understanding of Dakota and Indigenous community history and current issues. Also, MPRB should provide training and set expectations about cultural competence regarding work with Indigenous communities and Native Nations. One community leader said:

"Case in point, by the parks board staff not being aware of...a history that's been shoved under the rug. Not knowing how emotional our relatives are when talking about these topics. Has the MPRB staff been through cultural competency training?" MPRB should also continue its work to create job opportunities and career pathways for Indigenous community members

"Maintaining strong communication is critical!"

- MPRB staff member

"If planning is the only division carrying this it won't be effective. It needs to be adopted by everyone... I am so happy we're all talking so the right hand knows what the left hand is doing... As an organization we need to share the info we have so we make it easier on the community members who work with us."

- MPRB staff member

“One thing is consistently showing up. Don’t just come when you have something on your to-do list, how are you showing up not just in a crisis or when there is a project? How are you showing up when we are celebrating, not just in crisis? How are you here when something is going well?”

- Community Leader

“As time has gone on, I personally feel like an acknowledgment statement is less important and what’s really important is relationships and the listening we’re going to do to adjust our work in community.”

- MPRB staff member

MPRB should take time to maintain and continue to build relationships, and find more ways to continue to engage with Indigenous community leaders (MUID, MIAC Urban Advisory Council), the Native American Parks Council, and Native Nation leaders. MPRB should show up to community events and in community spaces to provide updates, learn about the community’s issues and priorities, and get to know each other.

MPRB staff and leadership should also continue to engage with community members and leaders to increase their knowledge and awareness of MPRB’s work and to create authentic opportunities for Indigenous communities to provide feedback and make decisions about MPRB policies, programs, and places. MPRB should also clarify the process for and role of tribal consultation and consultation of Minneapolis-based Indigenous community leaders (e.g., Metro Urban Indian Directors) in decision-making regarding MPRB places, policies, and programs, alongside the guidance received from the Native American Parks Council and the Indigenous Parks Liaison. One key MPRB staff member said,

“A lot of MPRB leadership is trying to make space and step out of the way, which I think is the right approach.”

MPRB should continue to use multiple formats and approaches to gathering feedback from Dakota, Ojibwe, and Ho-Chunk communities. MPRB should also consider ways to facilitate youth and elder involvement.

“I think there needs to be a clear representation from all of the tribes... I come from working with tribes so I see in order for that to be clear at least the tribes were involved. If the [tribal] council doesn’t want to be involved, at least tribal representation from tribal offices, right? I get concerned about people using somebody’s name to say we have our one token person.”

MPRB should carefully prioritize the work. The Native American Parks Council feels place names, interpretation, and staff training are most important, whereas staff work group members want to increase Indigenous community engagement and decision-making and also want to focus on land stewardship and foraging issues. Safety concerns rise to the top for community members at least at and around Cedar Field and East Phillips Park. Issues related to homeless encampments and helping unhoused relatives continue to be pressing issues for Indigenous communities in Minneapolis. MPRB should consider how and when to address these concerns in addition to the issues described above related to place names, interpretation, land acknowledgment, employment, staff training, and other areas that were included in the Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan.

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Photos 13: Art -- BDE MAKKA SKA (name)



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