

RACIAL EQUITY EVALUATION 2021



Community
Garden Program



Minneapolis
Park & Recreation Board



BACKGROUND



Franklin Steele Community Gardener

In 2018, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board passed a Community Garden Policy, allowing for plot-based community gardens on park land. The first garden was installed at Franklin Steele Square in the spring of 2019. By 2021, the program had grown to 8 locations, which included Sibley and Powderhorn (South), Lovell and Sumner Field (North), Dickman and Towerside (East of the River), and Loring Park and Franklin Steele (Downtown).

Garden site selection was based on community interest, partnership opportunities, neighborhood need, direction from park Master Plans, and feasibility. Neighborhoods with a high density of apartments, concentration of public housing, RCAP's (Racially Concentrated Areas of Poverty), lack of existing community garden space, and/or food deserts have and will continue to be prioritized. For a community garden to be established at a park, it's master plan (MP) must have a designated urban agriculture zone. Urban agriculture zones are limited, and immediate implementation of a garden is not always feasible.

BACKGROUND

The garden plot application was promoted through flyers at nearby businesses, schools, and apartment buildings, articles in neighborhood newsletters, community events, GovDelivery e-mails, signage, paper applications/drop boxes in garden spaces, and community partners.

Racial equity is at the heart of the plot application process at MPRB. It is common for community garden spaces to be awarded on a first come first served basis. This has been problematic at other community gardens in that too often, the folks with first access to information, and thus access to land, are older, whiter, and more affluent.

MPRB's application process attempts to alleviate this problem by prioritizing Minneapolis residents who don't have access to land outside the parks, plan to grow food, and have a connection to the park the garden resides in.

After the February 1st application deadline, applications are reviewed and scored to reflect these priorities by a group of MPRB staff and community members. Gardeners must reapply for a plot each year so that there is always space for new participants.



Volunteers at Towerside Garden

INTRODUCTION

This annual Racial Equity Evaluation is a key part of MPRB’s Community Garden Policy. The purpose of this evaluation is to “examine how different racial and ethnic groups may be affected by this policy and its corresponding program”. The assessment will examine the demographics of applicants and gardeners. It will identify potential barriers to success at each step of a person participating in the community garden program: from applying, to being awarded a plot, to getting your hands in the soil. This examination will be used to suggest program improvements. Qualitative information collected from participants will also be shared in this report.



Sumner Field Community Gardeners

INTRODUCTION

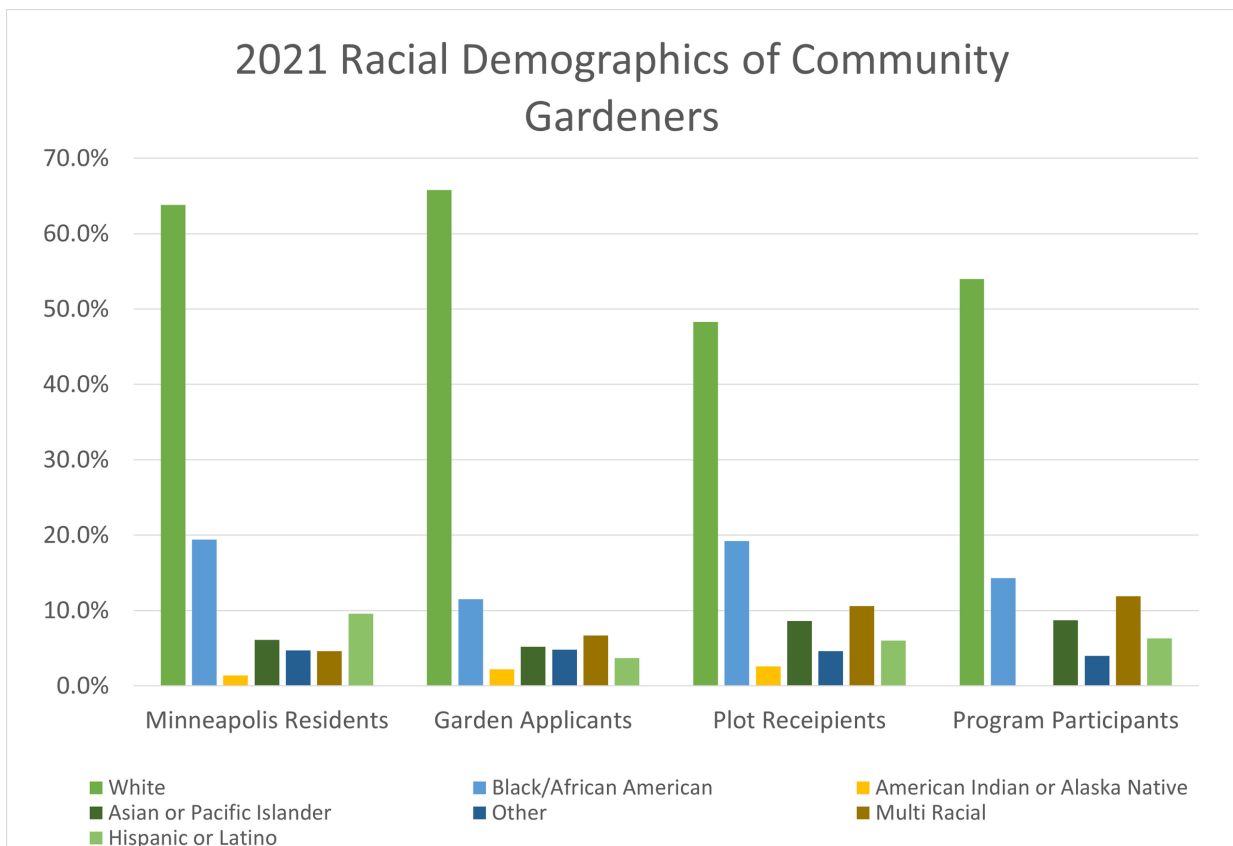


Teen Teamworks visits Towerside Gardens

The Community Garden Plot application asks applicants this voluntary question: “How do you identify your race or ethnicity?”. Applicants select from the following options: White, Black or African American, African, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Arab, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino, Multi-racial, or Other. At the end of the garden season, participants were asked “What can MPRB do to engage more racially diverse communities in our parks' community garden spaces?”. Answers to these questions provide the basis for this evaluation. Neighborhood and citywide demographics information is from Minnesota Compass, led by Wilder Research (mncompass.org) from 2014-2018.

RESULTS

Key Takeaways



- Percentage of applicants identifying as white is higher than the population of Minneapolis (66%, 64% respectively)
- Racial demographics of plot recipients more closely matches demographics of Minneapolis residents. For example, 19.2% of those awarded plots were Black or African American, while 19.4% of Minneapolis residents are Black or African American.
- If a plot recipient does not sign their use agreement, opts out of participating, or does not plant their plot by early June, that plot will be awarded to a waitlisted gardener. There was some drop off in participation of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) gardeners. For example, 19.2% of those awarded plots were Black or African American, but 14.3% of the people who actually gardened were Black or African American.
- Diversity of applicants and participants varied widely from site to site and was not always a reflection of the neighborhood the garden is located in. This is especially true for new gardens. Diversity generally increased for gardens in their second year.

RESULTS

Participant Feedback

At the end of the 2021 season, gardeners were asked "What can MPRB do to engage more racially diverse communities in our parks' community garden spaces?"

"There are a number of places in the community to place information about the gardens. The diversity of family owned **restaurants, markets, little stores** would be a great way to inform our neighborhoods."



"I think sharing with people that there are **tools (and seeds) to use in the toolbox** would encourage more BIPOC people to sign up, folks may be deterred from signing up if they didn't know how much money/resources they need to do this."

"Install gardens IN racially diverse neighborhoods.
Advertise in multi unit buildings, and advertise in schools."



"More classes in the garden!"



"Have an opening event and **welcome the neighbors** to take produce from the group plots."

IMPROVEMENT

Gardens as gathering spaces

Recommendation: Create gardens that function as gathering spaces for the community

Strategy: Garden layouts should encourage gathering and create a welcoming environment. When possible, add benches, picnic tables, grills, etc. to garden spaces.

Strategy: Collaborate with recreation staff, gardeners and community organizations to host more events (produce giveaways, volunteer days, community education) in the gardens. Invite the broader community.



Powderhorn Gardeners

IMPROVEMENT

Outreach



Recommendation: Continue improving on outreach strategies for the garden application process.

Strategy: Attend more outreach events hosted by community partners.

Strategy: Support and encourage volunteer community garden leads in their own outreach efforts.

Strategy: Start the application season one month earlier (August), when park usership is higher.

Strategy: Lead focused outreach in culturally specific spaces (i.e. Mercado Central, Karmel Mall, etc.)

IMPROVEMENT

Reducing barriers

Recommendation: Reduce drop off in participants from initial offering of a plot to actually gardening.

Strategy: Provide more varied lines of communication (texting, mail, phone calls) for easier access to use agreement.

Strategy: Facilitate more garden education opportunities, virtually and in person, through internal and external partners.

Strategy: Expand tool and plant sharing opportunities. Make sure gardeners know up front that these are available.



Dickman Gardener

CONCLUSION



Dickman Gardener

The MPRB Community Garden Policy provides a basic framework to create an equitable program connecting community with food, nature, and recreation. There was significant growth in the program from 2020 to 2021, including the addition of four new garden spaces and more than twice as many applicants. Both applicants and participants were more racially diverse in 2020.

Continued efforts should focus on creating welcoming garden spaces, expanding outreach efforts, and removing barriers that discourage people from gardening. This evaluation will be shared with MPRB's Board of Commissioners and published on the community garden webpage.