

# Racial Equity Evaluation: Community Gardens



**Minneapolis**  
Park & Recreation Board

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**2024**



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# Background

In 2018, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board approved a Community Garden Policy for plot-based gardens on park land, with the first garden established at Franklin Steele Square in spring 2019. By 2024, the program had grown to 12 locations, which included the Cepro Site, Sibley, Peavey and Powderhorn (South), Lovell and Sumner Field (North), Dickman and Bridal Veil (East of the River), Lyndale Farmstead and Whittier (Southwest) and Loring Park and Franklin Steele (Downtown).

Garden site selection considers community interest, partnerships, neighborhood needs, park Master Plans, and feasibility. Neighborhoods with high apartment density, public housing, ACP50s (Areas of Concentrated Poverty), limited community garden space, and food deserts have been and will continue to be prioritized. To establish a community garden in a park, the Master Plan must include a designated urban agriculture zone, which are limited and don't always allow for immediate implementation.

Racial equity is central to the MPRB plot application process. Community garden spaces are typically awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, which has led to issues where those with better access to information—often whiter and more affluent individuals—gain priority for land.

Instead, MPRB's application process prioritizes Minneapolis residents without land access who wish to grow food and have a connection to the park. The application also weighs open ended questions that can identify community members who have difficulty accessing fresh produce. Applications are promoted through various channels, including flyers, neighborhood newsletters, and community events. All applications are due in February and reviewed by MPRB staff and community members. Gardeners must reapply annually to ensure space for new participants.



# Introduction

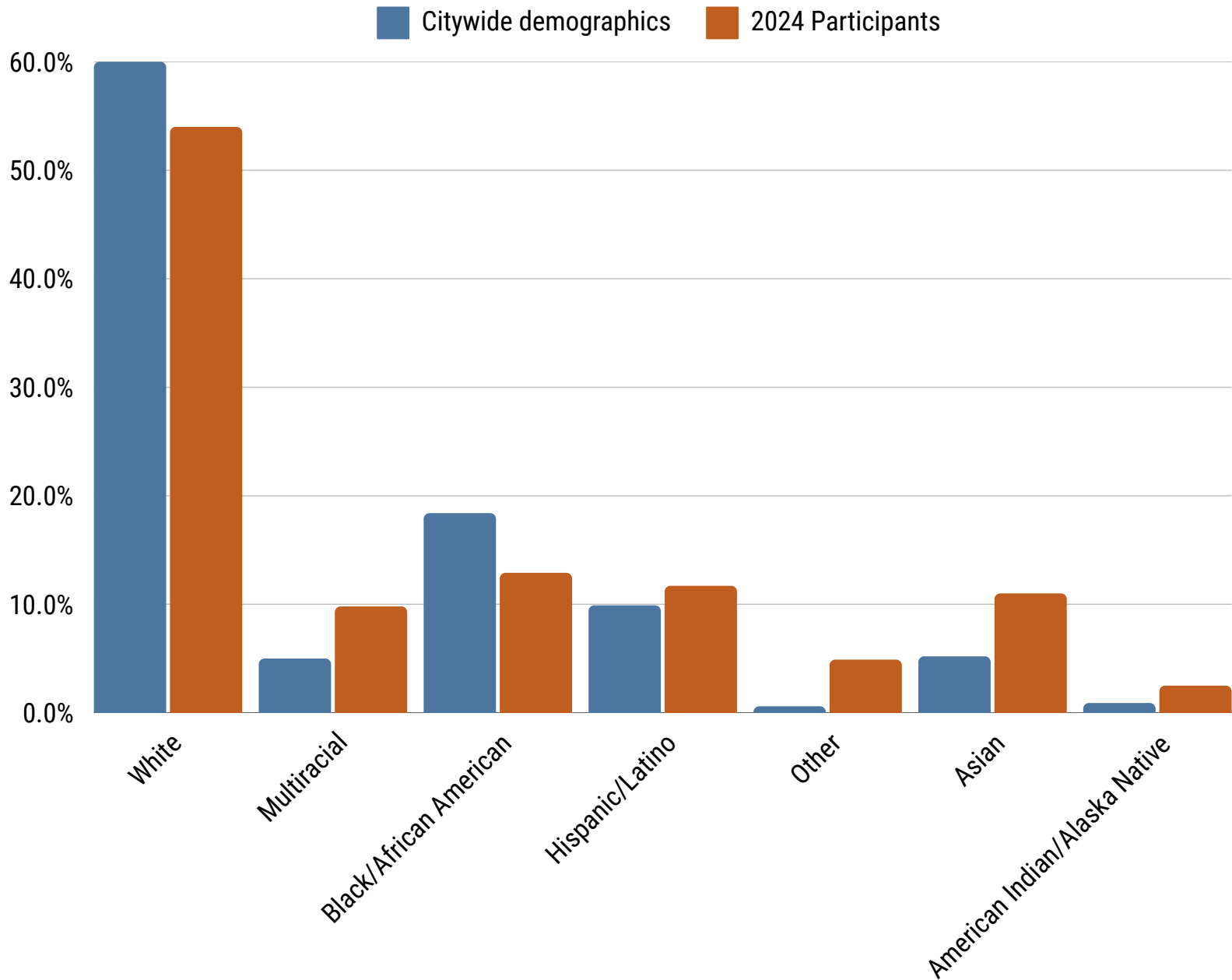
The annual Racial Equity Evaluation is essential to MPRB's Community Garden Policy. Its purpose is to assess the impact of the policy on various racial and ethnic groups by analyzing demographics of applicants and gardeners. The evaluation will identify barriers at each stage of participation, from application to gardening. Insights from participants will inform suggestions for program improvements.

The Community Garden Plot application includes voluntary demographics questions. The application also asks "Why do you want to garden in a Minneapolis Park?" and "What will you do with what you grow?". At the season's end, participants are asked for suggestions on engaging racially diverse communities. Responses, along with staff insights, inform the evaluation, using demographic data from Minnesota Compass for 2018-2022.



# Results: Racial Demographics of 2024 Community Gardeners

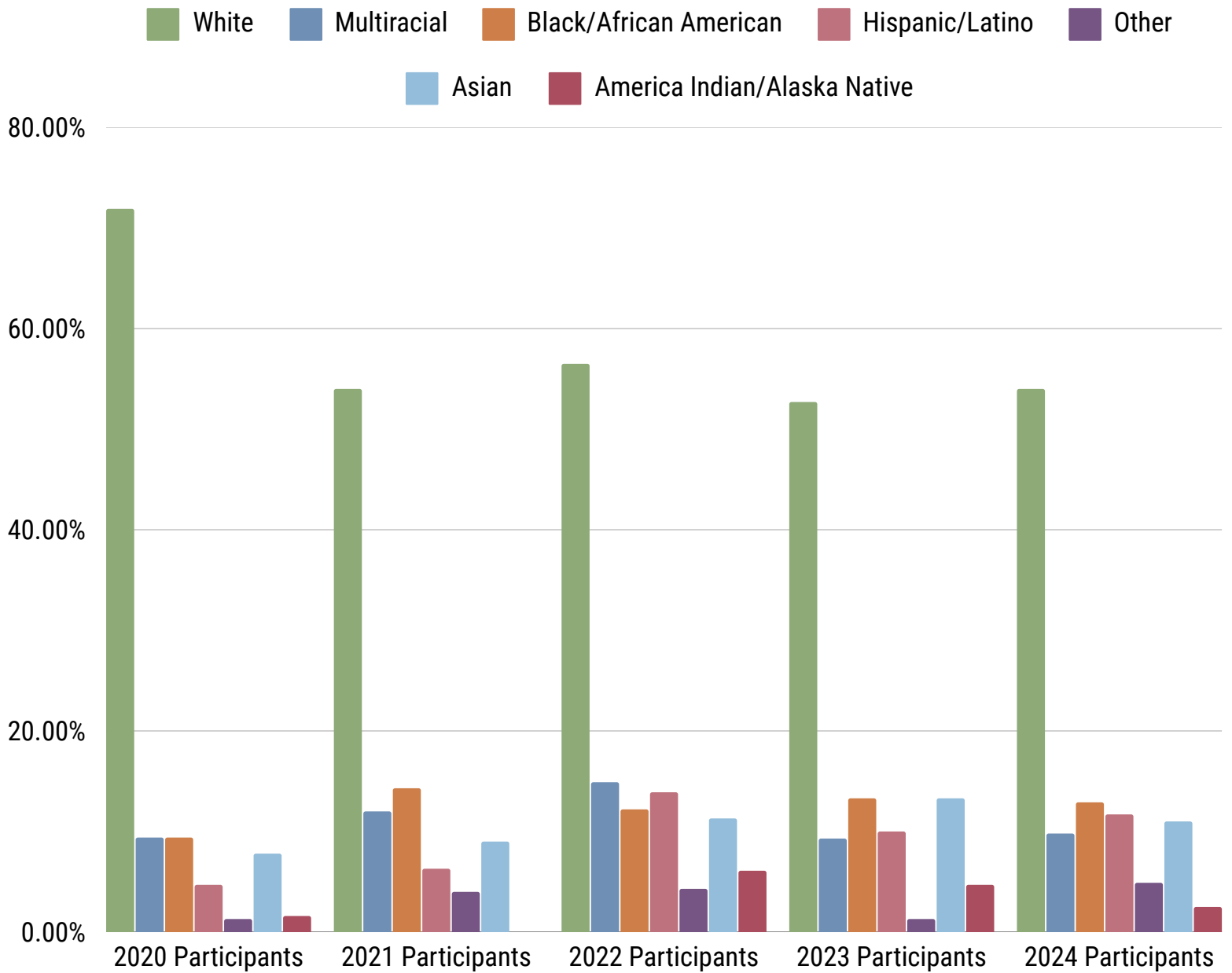
How do the racial demographics of Minneapolis Park Community Gardeners compare to the population of Minneapolis?



**Minneapolis Park Community Gardeners represent the city's diversity but show a gap in Black/African American participation. While 18.4% of Minneapolis residents are Black or African American, only 12.9% of community gardeners identify as such.**

# Results: Racial Demographics of Minneapolis Park Community Gardeners (2020-2024)

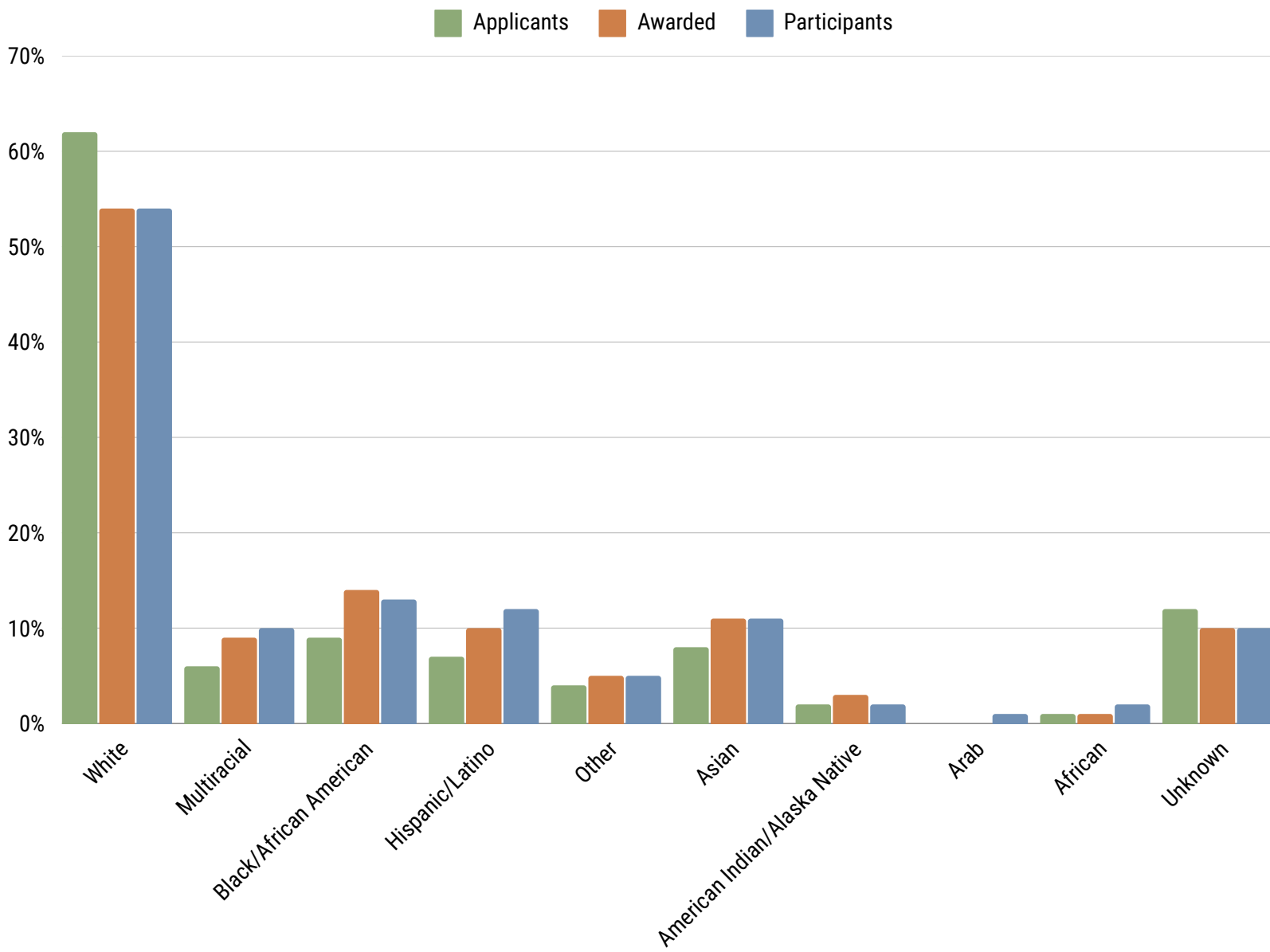
## How have the racial demographics changed over time?



**The racial composition of community gardeners in Minneapolis Park has changed over the past four seasons. Overall, the diversity among gardeners has increased in recent years when compared to the program's inaugural year.**

# Results: Racial demographics of 2024 Community Garden applicants, plot recipients, and participants.

What barriers limit participation in the Minneapolis Park Community Garden Program, particularly for BIPOC gardeners?



The percentage of white applicants (62%) aligns closely with Minneapolis residents (60%). Diversity among participants has increased, indicating the application process's effectiveness. However, there was a decline in Black/African American gardeners transitioning from being awarded plots to gardening. Participation may be hindered by factors like access to resources, transportation issues, communication barriers, and lack of gardening experience.

# Community Voice

What can MPRB do to engage more racially diverse communities in our parks' community garden spaces?



“...advertising the gardens in the neighborhoods with fliers, community events, pop-ups at the park would be excellent ways to get a more diverse community of gardeners that better reflects the neighborhoods these parks are in.”



“I'd love to see a designated 'community harvest' area where gardeners can share surplus produce with others. This would be a great way to foster a sense of community and reduce food waste.”



“Connecting the hyper local residents to the park in seed exchanges, a community donation bucket for neighboring apartments/houses, harvest fest etc. to include local non-gardeners to connect with the garden, the park, the community.”

# Community Voice

## Why do you want to garden in a Minneapolis park? What will you do with what you grow?

"Share with the community, harvest, and teach production to create self-care and healing with tinctures, and salves."

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"I come from a family where we have always grown our own foods (current generations and previous). I want to continue this tradition, especially since I no longer live at home with my parents and no longer have access to a garden. It is also more sustainable to grow my own food (which I care about) and an opportunity to share foods with my community. I plan to grow vegetables and herbs."

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"My ability to find connection to gardening has been an ongoing process that helps me to reclaim a connection to the land that I don't always have a good practice around. As an Oceti Sakowin citizen from the Sicangu Lakota Oyate, our farming and gardening traditions were interrupted through colonization and settlement. Being able to reclaim those traditions on our Dakota cousins' tradition territory is a moving opportunity that I'm excited to renew."

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"The first reason is that I believe growing some edible vegetables is very healthy. The second reason is that I hope to make a contribution to beautifying the community environment through gardening. The final reason is that I really want to showcase my achievements to other Chinese friends and introduce them to American community culture."

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"Gardening to me means Sharing and Change. I want to be able to share what I grow but also learn from growing myself so that I can help others who may want to begin gardening weather it's indoor or outdoors. I hope to help bring change to the environment."

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"We are a small Spanish-speaking faith community in South Minneapolis. We have had a large plot which has been such a blessing to us. The families love to garden with their children. We conduct activities near the plot in the summer time. Our summer urban camp for kids plans activities to include the garden. We love interacting with folks in the park as we tend the garden. Growing plants/veggies has helped us grow as people! We would love to be able to continue."

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"I grew up in Honduras and learned to grow produce with my family, share what we grew with community and remain healthy. I have not had the opportunity or space to grow any vegetables and build a relationship with the land. I just started my journey as a master gardener intern and would love to share my knowledge, meet other gardeners and learn from there to create a stronger sense of community that is rooted in organic produce that is culturally grown and shared with community."

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"This would be my third year of gardening @Powderhorn after trying to find how to join the program for more than 5 years previous. It helps my depression, is my primary spiritual outlet, and provides me fresh vegetables and herbs. Connecting with other gardeners and neighbors is a nice perk."

# Goal: Grow more culturally relevant foods

Incorporate more plants into shared garden plots that reflect the diverse food culture of Minneapolis residents. Plants and herbs like papaloquelite, okra, mustard greens, lemongrass, Thai chilis, poblanos, epazote and others can be difficult to access both in terms of availability and cost. Efforts should continue to make these available in community garden shared spaces for public consumption.

Explore ways to provide gardeners and community members more agency over the plants selected for shared spaces and plant giveaways at the gardens' annual kickoff events.

Research alternative plant suppliers that carry more specialty crops and herbs. This could include using alternative vendors or requesting custom orders from existing growers.



# Goal: Expand educational and social opportunities

Conduct individual gardener orientations during the gardens' kickoff events. Include information about utilizing shared resources in the gardens like tools and compost, assistance with garden layout and proper planting techniques, expectations around maintenance, and an overview of MPRB's equity goals for community gardening in the parks.

Create "Community Boards" where gardeners can note what they'd like to learn, what they have to share, and ideas for social gatherings. Support garden leads and individual gardeners in taking the lead on coordinating events that fulfill these objectives.

Support leads in hosting regularly scheduled monthly work days in the gardens. Work days are an opportunity to accomplish maintenance in the gardens and build community with fellow gardeners. Support from staff could include providing tools and gloves, event promotion and reminders, seeds and plants, and educational assistance.



# Thank you!



To the Minneapolis Park staff, volunteers, and gardeners who build, maintain, and nurture community garden spaces in Minneapolis Parks, thank you for your efforts.