

SPOTLIGHT ON

Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, Minnesota

Before building out an initiative agency-wide, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) racial equity work team began with several pilot projects, experimenting with different approaches to applying a racial equity lens to MPRB's work. In this way, MPRB is developing a shared analysis, building capacity, and implementing tools simultaneously in order to test what works and determine what an agency-wide strategy should look like in their specific context. Three of these pilot projects—which highlight the implementation of racial equity tools—are described below.



Bossen Field Renovation

MPRB is planning a \$2 million renovation of this park, which is a dual use facility, including softball fields used by players across the city as well as recreational facilities that are used by the park's neighborhood residents. The project manager and Community Engagement staff made a plan to train project team staff in racial equity (about 10 individuals, including all functions related to the park, project managers as well as maintenance workers) and to use a tool adopted from model jurisdictions (Seattle and Multnomah County) to rethink how they make decisions related to the renovation with the goal of finding solutions that work for all. Bossen Field is located in a diverse neighborhood of Minneapolis. Residents include several immigrant groups and are predominantly renters. Because Bossen Field is one of the few locations where leagues can play softball, the park is heavily used by people from other parts of the city/suburbs who do not share the same demographics as residents of the neighborhood. Local residents, particularly immigrant families, prefer soccer to softball, and report the experience of being “kicked out” of their neighborhood park when outsiders arrive and explain that they have reserved the field. This means that in developing a renovation plan, MPRB is faced with decisions about how to serve multiple constituencies with different—and sometimes conflicting—interests.

The project team utilized a variety of outreach and engagement tools to ensure that the needs and interests of neighborhood residents are being heard in the process. Through reflective conversations among the staff team, members agreed that while Bossen Field currently serves a constituency that is city-wide, the needs of neighborhood residents—who face barriers to benefiting from the parks and do not necessarily have the ability to travel to parks in other parts of the city—should be given serious consideration in the process.

While the project is still in development, the project team has learned that there are areas of common interest—the softball groups don't like kicking neighborhood kids off of the fields any more than the kids enjoy getting kicked off. Together, they are working on solutions to notify everyone of when field space is reserved and when it is available. MPRB will also be making a plan for how to

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increase understanding among local families about how to register for park programs, expanding programs, and ensuring that instructions are accessible in a variety of languages.

South Service Area Master Plan

MPRB is conducting a master planning process for a quarter of the city's parks, including all parks in the south part of the city and their outdoor facilities, such as basketball courts, tennis courts, playgrounds, and wading pools. The project team responsible for the master plan participated in racial equity training in preparation for the process. The MPRB has taken a broader approach to applying a racial equity lens to this project. A key component of this approach has been in recruiting the Community Advisory Committee for the project. Because members of such city committees tend to be disproportionately white, middle class, and older residents, the project team made a concerted effort to recruit a diverse group of committee members, sending the application to join the committee to partner organizations that work in diverse parts of the city. The project team succeeded in recruiting a committee that reflects the demographics of the part of the city that the master plan will affect, which included Latina, Somali, African American, and Native American members. The Community Advisory Committee has been asked to hold the MPRB accountable to its racial equity goals, ensuring that no groups are left out of the process.

RecQuest

MPRB is conducting an assessment of its recreational centers and programs and develop a vision for the next 20 years. Because this is such a high impact process, which will impact recreation service delivery citywide, MPRB wanted to ensure that it incorporated a racial equity analysis. MPRB decided to contract with a local community organization, Voices for Racial Justice (VRJ), to conduct a racial equity assessment. This is an interesting moment in MPRB's relationship with the community, as VRJ has for the past 30 years organized from the outside—for over 30 years—to push for changes to MPRB and City of Minneapolis policy that they felt did not promote racial equity.

MPRB Community Outreach & Access Manager Michelle Kellogg began a series of conversations with VRJ, and over the course of several months, built a relationship of trust in which MPRB expressed its need for help in addressing equity issues. The assessment process will involve holding listening sessions in the community, a review by VRJ of the questions being asked in the process, assistance in developing the community engagement plan, and an evaluation of programming offered and demographics of whom is being served. When proposals are made in the MPRB vision, VRJ will assess whether any of the proposals will have a disproportionate impact on particular racial groups.

To Learn More

Michelle Kellogg, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MKellogg@minneapolisparcs.org)

Voices for Racial Justice (voicesforracialjustice.org)

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