

# **Closing the Gap: Investing in Youth**

**Draft Report**  
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**Minneapolis**  
**Park & Recreation Board**

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## Closing the Gap: Investing in Youth

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) is committed to serving the needs of Minneapolis youth. To do so, a minimum of an additional \$2 million annually is needed to close the gap in recreation funding for youth programming. This report highlights the MPRB's current investment of youth programming, the public's support for youth programming, and how the programming gap will be filled.

### Who are our youth?

Today's Minneapolis youth are more diverse racially and ethnically than the rest of the city and many are experiencing poverty. While many agencies, including the MPRB, engage youth in decision making, youth do not get to vote in elections and they are subject to the investments we do or don't choose to make for them. Here are a few things we know about our youth:

- Children and youth under 18 years old represent an estimated 19.9% of Minneapolis population or 81,899 youth in 2017. (American FactFinder)
- In 2017, an estimated 22.8% or 39,218 households had children. (American FactFinder)
- In 2017, children and youth under 18 were more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity than the Minneapolis population as a whole. An estimated 57.8% of children and youth were people of color and the total population was estimated to be 36.1% people of color.
  - Since 2010, this is an estimated increase of 5.3% for youth and children and a 4.3% increase for the total Minneapolis population. (American FactFinder)
- Nearly 25% of students in the Minneapolis Public Schools speak a language other than English as their first language. (Youth Coordinating Board – 2015 State of Youth)
- Children and youth under 18 years old represent an estimated 28.1% of the Minneapolis population that is experiencing poverty in 2017. This equates to 22,299 youth. (American FactFinder)
- From 2002 to 2011, homicide was the leading cause of death among Minneapolis residents age 15-24 years, accounting for 146 (39%) deaths in this age group. The rise in assaults and gun-related injuries is also a serious concern. (Minneapolis Blueprint for Action to Prevent Youth Violence, August 2013)

## What is the state of the MPRB's investment in youth programming?

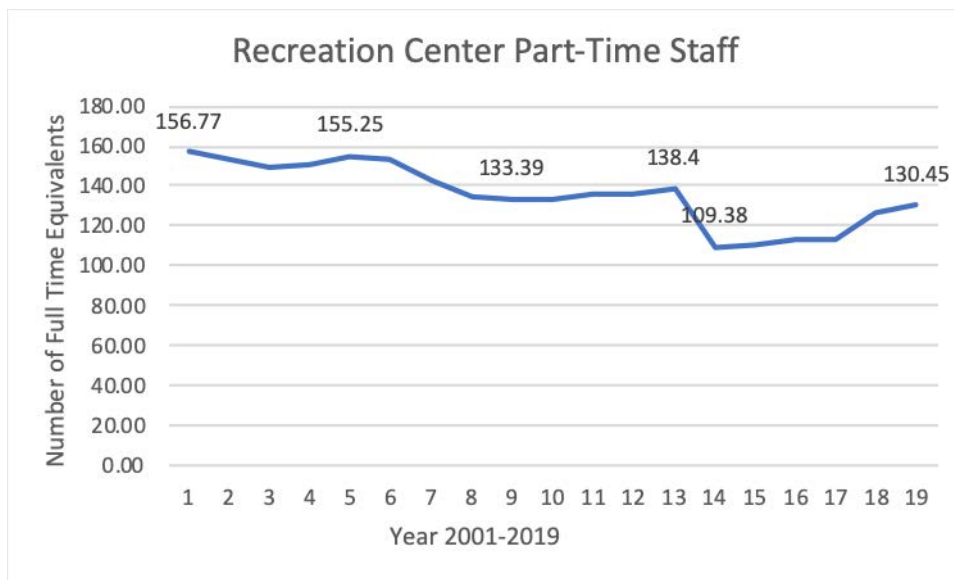
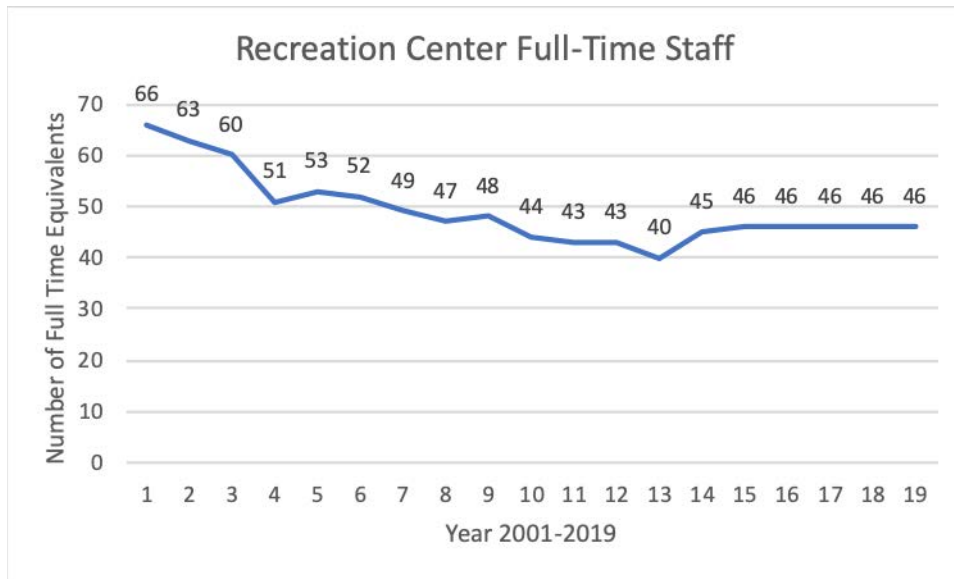
The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's investment in youth programming has grown slightly in the last couple of years, but lags well behind the investment required to move beyond keeping the lights on and searching for new user fees to sustain basic services. ***The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) seeks the opportunity to truly serve the youth of Minneapolis with quality, innovative programs, regardless of the youth's ability to pay for services.*** In today's model, new ideas are not developed and opportunities are not seized due to lack of resources. Recreation staff spend a lot of innovative energy working to stretch thin dollars and provide programs to youth who frequent the recreation centers – some on a daily basis. This level of basic survival is not nurturing our youth.

There are many variables to consider in programming that span both quality and quantity. Recognizing that quality is the function of accountability to available resources, the following is an account of the changes in the gap in resources that has evolved since 2001. 2001 is chosen for the comparison year because it reflects a time period where the MPRB was demonstrating a clear investment in youth that resulted from a historic agreement between the City of Minneapolis and MPRB in 2000. Based on this agreement the Recreation Division budget was increased and recreation services were enhanced. The levy for 2001 was increased by \$1.1 million above the base to enhance service hours and security in the parks.

The MPRB offers programs and services to youth through recreation centers across the city:

- In 2001 the following provided programming and services in recreation centers:
  - 66 full-time employees
  - 156.77 full-time equivalents (FTE) for part-time employees
- In 2019 the following provided programming and services in recreation centers:
  - 46 full-time employees
  - 130.45 FTE for part-time employees
- Gap
  - This represents a reduction in 20 full-time employees and 26.32 part-time FTEs in recreation centers (see Figures A and B).

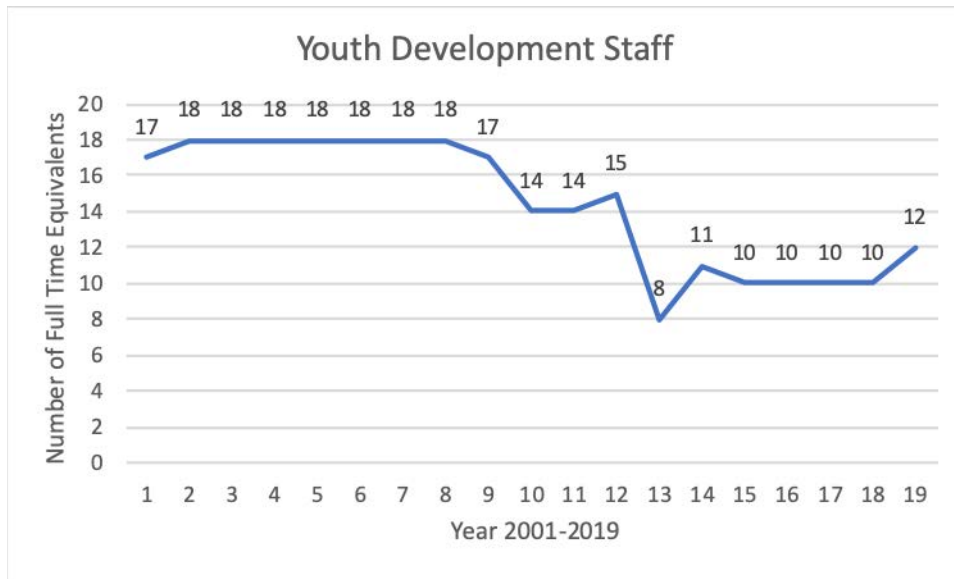
Figure A and B. Recreation Center Staffing



The MPRB offers programs and services through youth dedicated initiatives like Youthline, which engages youth ages 12-16 in positive leadership experiences and recreational activities while connecting them to adult mentors in the parks.

- In 2001
  - 17 FTE youth program specialists in Youthline
- In 2019
  - 12 FTE youth program specialists in Youthline
- Gap
  - This represents a reduction in 5-6 full-time employees in youth development (Figure C).

Figure C. Youth Development Staff



The reduction in the investment in staffing had a direct impact on service levels. Below is a sample comparison of hours of service provided in five centers between 2001 and 2019 (Table 1). This sample demonstrates the impacts on centers of different sizes and scopes. In total, the gap of service for the sample of five centers totals 4,264 public hours per year.

**Table 1 – Example Recreation Center Service Level Changes – Five Comparison Sites**

Recreation Center Name	2001 Hours	2019 Hours	Difference
Powderhorn	57 Hours/Week Average	40 Hours/Week Average	17 Hours Week/ 884 Hours Per Year
Brackett	48 Hours/Week Average	28 Hours/Week Average	20 Hours Week/ 1040 Hours Per Year
Pershing	48 Hours/Week Average	37 Hours/Week Average	11 Hours Week/ 572 Hours Per Year
North Commons	57 Hours/Week Average	40 Hours/Week Average	17 Hours Week/ 884 Hours Per Year
Logan	57 Hours/Week Average	40 Hours/Week Average	17 Hours Week/ 884 Hours Per Year

### What investment is needed?

The MPRB budget allows for current level of service, neighborhood park capital improvements and rehabilitation, and reduced maintenance cycles, but it **does not allow for closing the youth investment gap**. For the MPRB, using 2019 dollars, the full gap in recreation services is approximately \$3.4 million. Of that amount, approximately \$2 million is the additional amount needed to close the gap for the investment in youth.

## What do we know about the needs and desires of Minneapolis residents to support youth programming?

The MPRB and City of Minneapolis provide several reports and documents that articulate the needs and desires for Minneapolis residents and leaders to support youth and youth programming:

- 2015 Close the Gap: Investing in Neighborhood Parks completed by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
- 2018 RecQuest Phase II: Validation Summary Report completed by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
- 2013 Minneapolis Blueprint for Action to Prevent Youth Violence completed by the City of Minneapolis

### Close the Gap: Investing in Neighborhood Parks

Closing the Gap: Investing in Neighborhood Parks was an initiative of the Superintendent and Commissioners to share information with Minneapolis residents and partners about the current condition and service level of neighborhood parks. It looked at the impacts that the age of the system and deferred maintenance – or delaying regular upkeep past the point of repair – had on the 157 neighborhood parks in Minneapolis. The project was conducted in collaboration with a recreation center-based programming and service initiative called RecQuest and master planning for neighborhood parks called Service Area Master Plans. The collaboration with these additional projects produced rich and robust data beyond the capital and rehabilitation needs of the park system that resulted in the 20 Year Neighborhood Park Plan.

### Community Outreach and Engagement

Below is an overview of the surveys, meetings and intercepts conducted extensively over a one-year period. A full description and materials can be viewed in the 2015 Close the Gap final report.

- **Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board 2015 Residential Survey:**  
This survey was completed in early 2015 by the Morris Leatherman Company, a research firm located in Minneapolis. A random sample of 500 residents shared their perspectives about current and future park needs and issues. Questions focused on perceptions of the entire park and recreation system, usage of the park and recreation system, demographic data and perceptions of different funding strategies. The results of this survey are statistically valid and can be considered representative of the city as a whole.
- **Community Meetings:**  
These meetings provided community members with the opportunity to learn about the neighborhood park funding gap, RecQuest and Service Area Master Planning; they also provided an opportunity for input into these projects. In total, 31 meetings were held with 322 attendees total. After the presentation, participants were asked a range of questions that focused on funding strategies and ideas, perceptions of parks and recreation centers, what does and doesn't work at parks and recreation centers, which programming and facilities are desired, investment priorities, and priorities for maintenance and care of the system.

- **Intercepts/Events:**

Intercepts take the engagement process to community events that are already occurring and to locations where people already gather. Using posters with questions, people can contribute feedback on the spot. Intercept events were held throughout the city and at several of the community meetings. Posters were brought out into the park to collect information from patrons that were engaged in activities within the park. In total, intercepts were conducted at 24 events (with 10-100 participants per event), including cultural events (Falling Water Festival, Monarch Festival), neighborhood-based events and festivals (MPRB movies in the park, Luxton Summer Celebration, West Bank Block Party, Corcoran neighborhood BBQ, Central Gym Family Fun Day), and broader community celebrations (Minneapolis Urban League Family Day, Battle of the Badges cook-off, multiple Open Streets events).

- **Online and Paper Survey:**

This survey was available online and by paper through September 30, 2015 and received 354 respondents. Like the resident phone survey, the questions focused on perceptions of the park and recreation system, usage of the park and recreation system, demographic data, and perceptions of different funding strategies. The survey was available on the Closing the Gap webpage, at community meetings for the initiative, and at recreation centers.

- **Stakeholder Meetings:**

Seven meetings focused on the MPRB's partners or underserved/under-represented populations. Each meeting was tailored for the needs of the organization or the MPRB's relationship with the organization, including Asian Media Access, Mujeres en Accion, Phillips Community Center tenants, YMCA, Phyllis Wheatley and Youth Coordinating Board.

## Findings

The most common theme that emerged across the engagement methods for Close the Gap was the support for **youth programming and sports**. Respondents of the resident survey and online/paper survey indicated that youth sports/programs and police protection in parks is important. Adventure recreation and adult programs/sports were typically least important among these respondents.

Community meeting and intercept respondents expressed the need for diversity in programming. Community meeting participants also articulated a need for more programming that is customized to the demographics of a community. When asked what would encourage more use of recreation centers or parks through intercepts and the online/paper survey, low cost or free programming rated the highest.

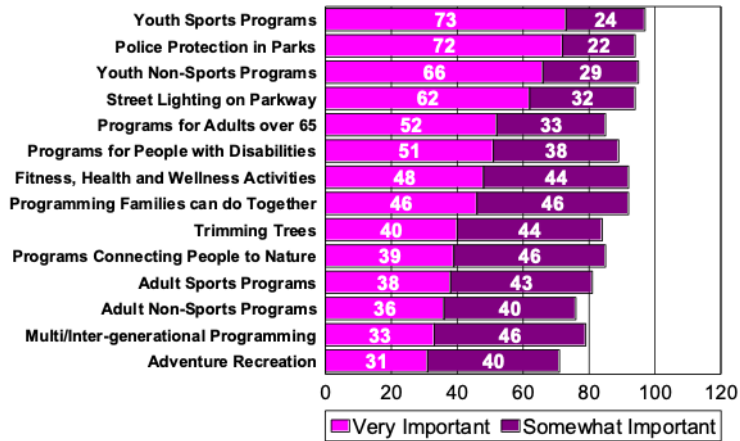
- **Resident Survey Results**

The resident survey revealed that Minneapolis residents found that all of the services specified in the survey were important to them and/or their household. Youth and safety services rated the highest.



# Importance of Current Services

2015 Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board



The Morris Leatherman Company

Figure D. Resident Survey Responses to Importance of Current Services

## Community Meeting Results

Findings from the community meetings regarding programs and services are organized by service area and citywide. Some findings reflect the opinions of a few people, while others were shared by more participants. The findings provide qualitative, anecdotal evidence of priorities noted among community meeting respondents.

### DOWNTOWN

- *Expanded Services.* Identified gaps in services including the need for longer hours in park buildings, lifeguards at pools, improved communication about programs and events and racially equitable programming.
- *Other Recreation Opportunities.* Participants recommended keeping in mind that downtown workers have access to recreation programs and facilities provided by others. MPRB sites should be programmed accordingly.
- *Staffing Opportunities.* Participants noted the need for more staff and the potential for internships to help individuals build skills while staffing the park.
- *Outdoor Programs.* Participants noted the importance of having a wide range of programming options, such as fitness classes and sports, environmental education, meditation, gardening, ice skating, group picnicking, and singing.

### NORTH

- *Programs for All Age Groups.* In addition to recreation programs for youth and adults, participants noted the importance of social programs for populations such as seniors, families, and parents.
- *Popularity of Sports.* A wide range of athletic activities were identified as important, including tennis, soccer, basketball, swimming, ice skating, skiing, and walking.

## NORTHEAST/SOUTHEAST

- *Recreation Programming.* Several comments indicated the importance of or need for more recreation programming opportunities: toddler programs, childcare and out-of-school programs, health/fitness/sports, education or lifelong-learning, and community events such as movies in the park and community sings. Both indoor and outdoor facility programs were noted. Partnerships, such as with Community Education at the University of Minnesota, were noted as ways to extend recreation opportunities in the neighborhood.
- *Programs for All Age Groups.* Participants felt that programs and services should reflect the demographics of the surrounding neighborhood, including high numbers of toddlers and young children. Other respondents called out needed programs for adults, seniors, and teen girls.
- *Sports Programming.* Participants' comments about sports emphasized a desire for more flexible scheduling with expanded drop-in and weekend hours.
- *Additional Hours for Youth Services.* Some comments indicated a desire for expanded facility hours and better access to recreation centers for children and youth.

## SOUTH

- *Programming Focus.* Participants felt that more programs and services are needed for senior, immigrant and middle school youth populations. More events, non-sports recreation and activities (creative, educational, social, cultural, etc.) are needed in parks and recreation centers.
- *Expanded Services.* Participants desire a variety of services, including signage, staffing, marketing, communication about programs and coordination with program instructors.
- *Coordinated Programming.* Participants desire better coordination of programs between recreation centers, greater outreach to first-generation residents, and an evaluation of the value of certain program offerings (horseshoe pits, etc.).
- *Partnerships.* Participants suggested partnerships with student, school, and community groups, especially to increase programmatic options and train new coaches.
- *Costs and Fees.* Two conflicting comments were noted about costs and fees. There is a desire to keep costs low and programs affordable, while also considering ways to improve facilities for enhanced revenue generation.
- *Service Improvements Needed.* Comments suggested that improvements are desired in maintenance and sports field allocation.

## SOUTHWEST

- *Recreation Programs.* A desire was noted for continued, quality sports programs (especially soccer), as well as programs that respond to new trends in recreation (e.g. pickleball). Some participants supported having more staffing in recreation centers to support more fitness programming.
- *Popularity of Events.* Participants expressed general enthusiasm for festivals, movies, music, and other events held in parks.
- *Broader Service Provision.* Participants recognized that recreation centers are just one provider of services to residents, and should therefore seek greater efficiency by avoiding duplication.
- *Expanded Hours.* Participants expressed a need for expanded hours for greater access to recreation opportunities.
- *Programming Focus.* Participants felt that more programs and services are needed that reflect the ages and cultures of the surrounding community members.

## CITYWIDE

- *Customized Programs and Services.* Across the city, comments illustrated a desire to tailor services to the demographics of nearby or local residents, creating opportunities for all ages and multi-cultural groups in the community.
- *Diverse Recreation Opportunities and Programs.* Comments illustrated an interest in a wide range of drop-in and organized activities and events. There is a clear interest in sports, health, and fitness, as well as a desire to balance these opportunities with social gatherings, educational programs, youth development/childcare programs, and other non-sports activities.
- *Support Amenities and Services.* There is an interest in services that support a more welcoming, comfortable recreation experience. These included better maintenance, enhanced staffing, and concessions.

### • **Intercept Results**

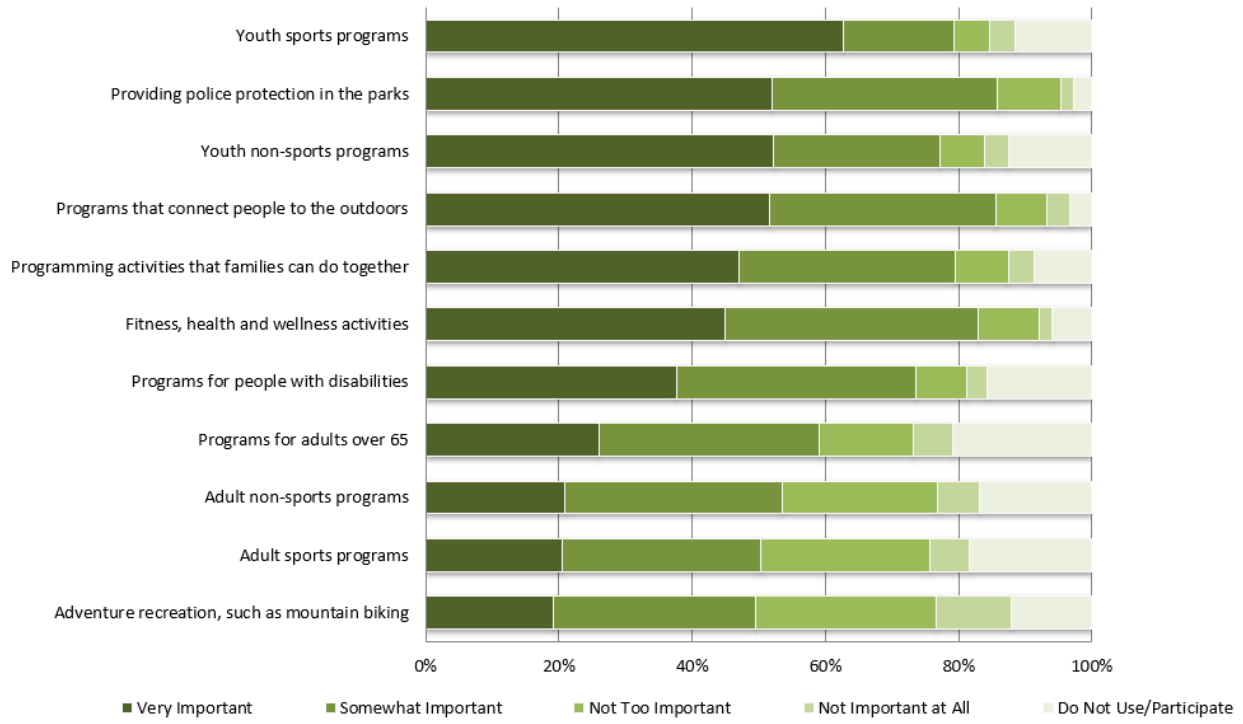
Eighty one percent (81%) of the respondents to the RecQuest intercepts indicated that they or a member of their household had participated in an organized program/event in a Minneapolis park in the last two years. When asked what would encourage them to use a recreation center and park more frequently, respondents selected low-cost or free programs and different types of programs (than those that are currently offered) most frequently. Of least importance to respondents were more reservable rooms and meeting spaces and programs closer to public transportation.

### • **Online and Paper Survey Results**

Online and paper survey respondents identified connecting people with the outdoors, providing police protection in parks, and youth sport and non-sport programs as the important program and services for neighborhood parks. Those programs and services that were identified as least important were adult sports/programs and adventure recreation. When asked what else was needed at recreation centers, the top program and service response was to be open during convenient times, more low cost or free programs, and more programs for children.

Figure E. Online and Paper Survey Responses to Importance of Programs and Services

**Of the programs and services the MPRB provides in neighborhood parks, how important are the following to you?**



**RecQuest Phase II: Validation Summary Report**

RecQuest is a large-scale effort by the MPRB to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to assure that facilities, programs and services align with community needs. The RecQuest Phase II Validation Summary Report presents priority program areas. Phase II utilized much of the data collected in collaboration with Close the Gap and Service Area Master Plans. The work resulted in four focus areas. Three of the identified areas focused on youth – Youth Development, Equitable Education Programs and Access to Equitable Athletics.

**Youth development**

Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand the Youth Development department and increase program access</li> </ul>
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thoughtful and intentional youth development programming benefits the city of Minneapolis by providing more opportunities for youth to be engaged in activities that develop skills, reinforce positive behaviors and expand the realm of possibilities for their future</li> </ul>

Note. Youth development is defined as classes, programs and activities targeted toward youth under the age of 18

## Equitable education programs

Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide school age programs that are stimulating, engaging and inspire creativity in spaces that are safe for learning, create positive environments and encourage peer support</li></ul>
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Engage children holistically in fun experiences that give them the opportunity to explore the world around them, develop a sense of wonder and stretch beyond what is familiar.</li></ul>

## Access to equitable athletics

Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide a range of athletic programs that support the current and future lifestyles, fitness and social needs of Minneapolis residents</li><li>• Expand access for athletic activities and allocate resources to provide equitable participation</li></ul>
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensuring that all residents have equitable access to the forms of athletic programming and facilities that are convenient, comfortable, appropriate and reflective of the span of residents within the city of Minneapolis.</li></ul>

## Minneapolis Blueprint for Action to Prevent Youth Violence

The City of Minneapolis partnered with local leaders, including the MPRB, to create a Blueprint for Action. The Blueprint is a community-driven, grassroots response to the issue of youth violence. The goals are a framework under which many programs, services, and efforts coalesce. It includes a list of existing and new activities informed by public health principles and aligned with the National Forum framework of prevention, early intervention, re-entry and enforcement. The ultimate success of the Blueprint is reliant on community stakeholders remaining a part of the process. Tremendous efforts are taking place throughout Minneapolis, and the Blueprint plays an important role in weaving together the broad network of stakeholders and committed parties working together toward one common goal: the eradication of youth violence.

The Blueprint sets out five goals that span prevention, intervention, restoration and enforcement. The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board likely has a role to play in each goal; however, it is specifically identified to assist with the following goals and objectives:

Goal 1: Foster violence-free social environments

*Objective 1.2: Improve institutional climates to promote welcoming and safe environments*

Goal 2: Promote positive opportunities and connections to trusted adults for all youth

*Objective 2.1: Enhance and improve out-of-school time opportunities through citywide Out-of-School Time (OST) system*

*Objective 2.2: Maintain employment opportunities and work readiness training for youth and young adults*

Goal 3: Intervene with youth and families at the first sign of risk

*Objective 3.4: Provide outreach and community-based programming for disconnected youth*

Goal 5: Protect children and youth from violence in the community

*Objective 5.1: Promote positive contacts between youth/the community and police*

## How will we fill the Gap?

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board will fill the gap with quality programming that inspires today's youth. We have six pillars of critical programming we want to provide across the park system:

**Ideation Spaces** - The MPRB intends to develop Ideations Labs at our recreation centers. We will engage and encourage youth to pursue active learning through Technology and Art focused on exploration, collaboration, technology and a peer to peer environment and community. Ideation Labs will motivate youth along active, not passive, learning paths and leverage technology and art to aid youth who are not aligned with traditional learning methods. MPRB can provide these new learning experiences for youth through technology focused facilities and programs, making them more capable and assured learners in other environments, preparing them for future opportunities in a competitive market with high demand skills, and exposing them to professions they might not know exist.

**Youth Enrichment through Community-Focused Employment** - The MPRB is strategically positioned to offer high quality youth employment programs which provide unique and lifelong skill building opportunities. We offer employment opportunities in Teen Teamworks, Conservation Corps crews, Urban Scholars, Youth Design Team and new trades apprenticeships. More than a job, these MPRB employment opportunities offer work readiness training, professional development training, practice skills in leadership, hands on environmental stewardship and service learning, and guide MPRB in policy making recommendation through community ideas and feedback.

**Nature Programming** - Justification for nature-based programming is proven and the health benefits are clear and researched. Access to parks and green spaces lowers BMI and obesity rates. Increased outdoor play lowers anxiety and depression. Children who spend more time outdoors are less likely to develop near-sightedness. Children who spend 20 minutes in green space are five times more active than children who don't. Time in nature improves performance in reading, math, science and social studies. Nature programs improves functioning children with ADHD, fosters curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, helps improve self-esteem in teens, and improves participation educational settings. MPRB is positioned to expand nature programs at our facilities as a fundamental philosophy. We will explore a national program called Connecting Communities to Nature which gives guidance to facility programming.

Cycling connects to nature and supports nature programming. Richard Louv, recipient of the Audubon Medal and author of Last Child in the Woods said "As one scientist puts it, we can now assume that just as children need good nutrition and adequate sleep, they may very well need contact with nature. Reducing that deficit - healing the broken bond between our young and nature - is in our self-interest, not only because aesthetics demands it, but also our mental, physical, and spiritual health depends upon it." Creating these places in our recreation centers opens that possibility for our young people in all parts of our city to heal that bond and to heal one's soul.

The nature programming goals are:

- Increase participation in nature-based programs at MPRB facilities
- Increase awareness of natural resources and nature-based recreation opportunities in Minneapolis
- Promote environment-friendly attitudes and behaviors
- Promote health and wellbeing of Minneapolis residents through nature

**Cycling** - Imagine creating a city of cyclists through a variety of opportunities such as youth bike camps, earn a bike programs, bike safety camps, basic bike repair, learn to ride, cycling without age, interpretive nature-based bike rides, field trips to the Wirth Trailhead, Theodore Wirth mountain biking, and neighborhood and community rides. Imagine these being led by our youth with adult mentorship. Imagine our recreation centers becoming the known places where our community go to experience opportunities in cycling and nature. We believe this will open the world to our young people, who will learn access to opportunity is possible with two wheels, determination, and lung and leg power.

**Community Gardening** - "It's all about the future and planting the seed both figuratively and literally. The seed that we plant in youth and the seed that we help them plant; instills in them knowledge and passion that will drive their appreciation for and conservation of the earth. All it takes is a seed to affect the life of a child or teen, and the impact that they can then make," local farmer Stephanie Frisbee.

The goal is a creative approach utilizing recreation centers to:

- Address and effect childhood obesity rates in Minneapolis by educating youth on the benefits of eating fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Provide an agriculture entrepreneurship that will introduce youth to the field of agriculture, specifically vegetable production.

The MPRB will provide mentoring opportunities for the youth with local farmers, exposing them to both rural and urban agriculture. Cross-departmental staff will collaborate to create the garden spaces. Based on facility spaces, this may include raised planter beds or boxes, in ground gardens, planter tables, containers, vertical gardens or hydroponics. Youth will learn soil testing, soil amendments, proper site selection, soil preparation, tool selection for soil preparation, planting seasons, vegetables and fruits to be grown, choosing seeds versus plants, determining quantity, proper planting techniques for seed and plant, methods of irrigation, water schedule, and process for weeding as examples. We will also explore pollinators and their importance to agriculture, effects of pesticides, pest management and harvesting. At the end of the season we can imagine youth not only enjoying their vegetables but giving away their harvest and inspiring the community to grow their own vegetables.

**Intergenerational Centers of Excellence** - Creating intergenerational space(s) where youth and older adults can thrive and share together. These spaces in our recreation centers will focus on developing the whole person and passing on the history and life lessons of our most knowledgeable residents; our older adults. These locations will create spaces where older adults and young people learn through collaborative activities such as gardening, nature-based programs, technology, arts, music, games, exercise, storytelling, cycling and more. The MPRB will use the Senior Center Accreditation Standards through the National Council of Aging is a benchmark and guide.