



Racial Equity Evaluation: Community Gardens



Minneapolis
Park & Recreation Board
www.minneapolisparks.org

2023

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Background

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 2023, the program had grown to 11 locations, which included the Cepro Site, Sibley, Peavey and Powderhorn (South), Lovell and Sumner Field (North), Dickman and Towerside (East of the River), Lyndale Farmstead (Southwest) 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 must have a designated urban agriculture zone. Urban agriculture zones are limited, and immediate implementation is not always feasible.



Racial equity is at the heart of the plot application process at MPRB. It is common practice for community garden spaces to be awarded on a first come first served basis. This has been problematic at other community gardens in that 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 through an application process. Plot applications are promoted through flyers at nearby businesses, schools, and apartment buildings, articles in neighborhood newsletters, community events, GovDelivery e-mails, signage, paper applications and flyers at Recreation Centers, and community partners. All applications are due in February and 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.

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 their hands in the soil. This examination as well as included qualitative information collected from participants will be used to suggest program improvements.

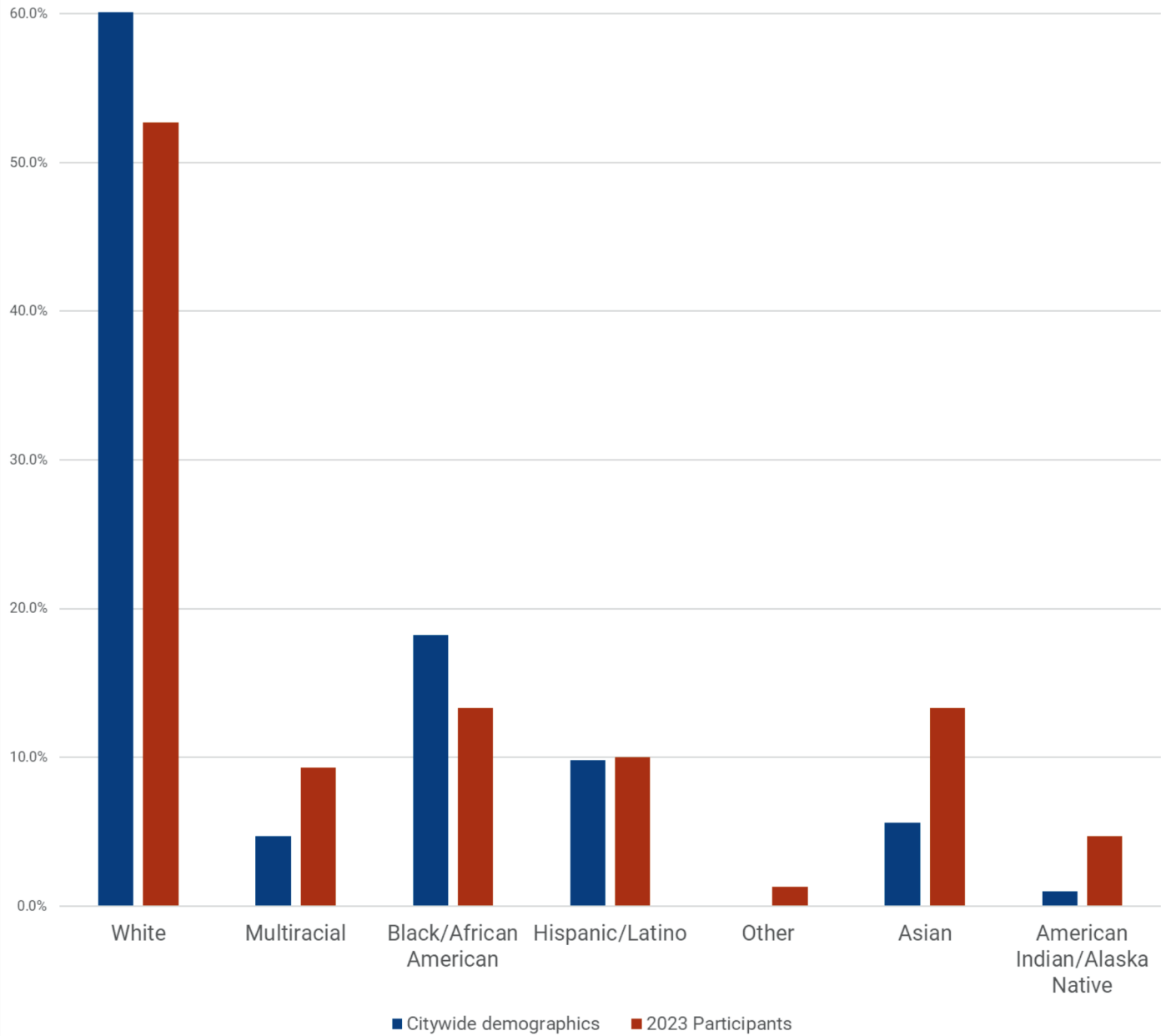


The Community Garden Plot application asks applicants this voluntary question: "How do you identify your race or ethnicity?". The application also asks "Why do you want to garden in a Minneapolis Park?" and "What will you do with what you grow?". At the end of the garden season, participants were asked "What can MPRB do to engage more racially diverse communities in our parks' community garden spaces?".

Answers to these questions as well as staff insight 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: RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF 2023 COMMUNITY GARDENERS

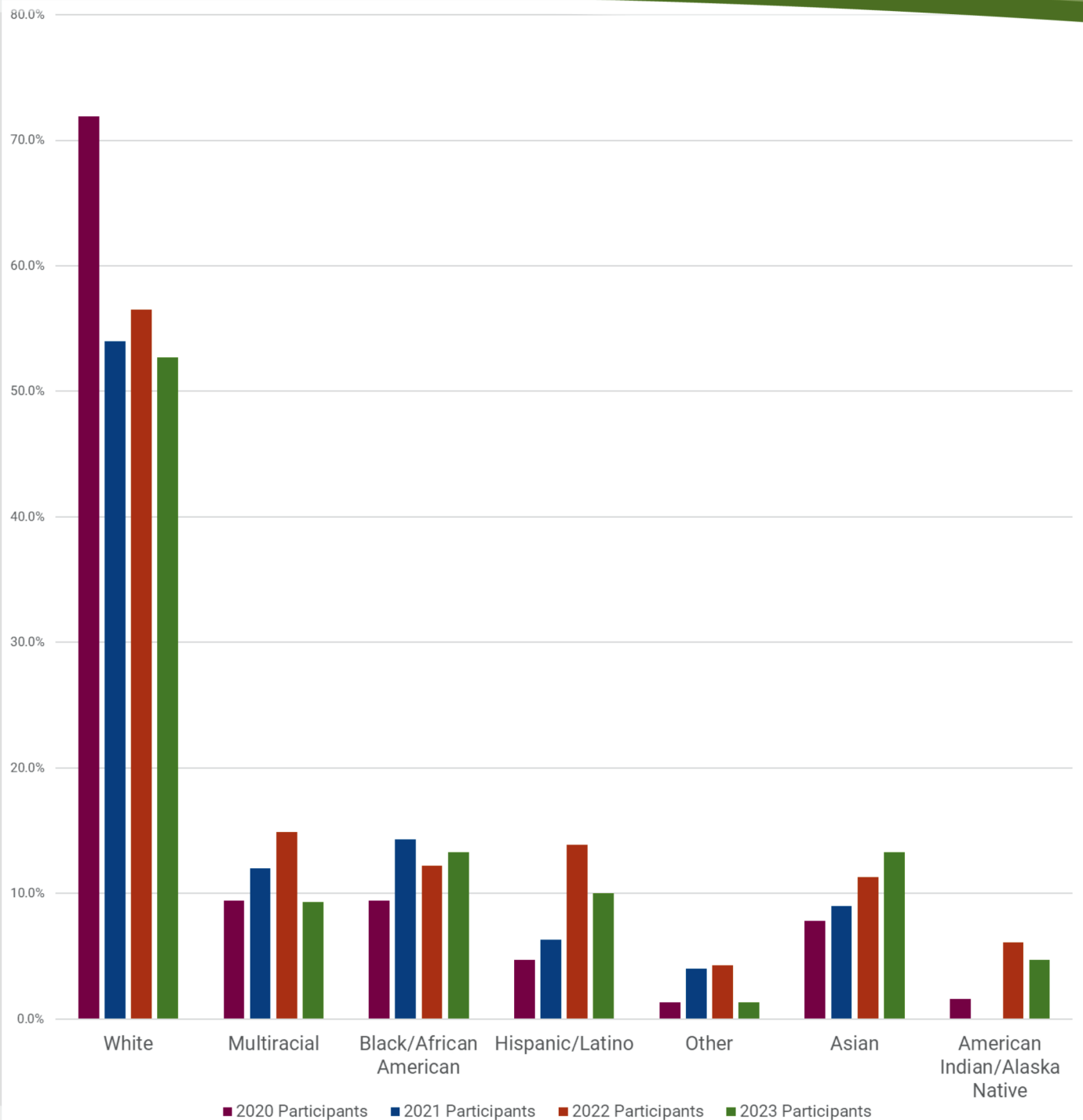
How do the racial demographics of Minneapolis Park Community Gardeners compare to the population of Minneapolis?



Minneapolis Park Community Gardeners are diverse and largely reflect the demographics of the City of Minneapolis. The largest gap remains in the Black/African American Community. While 18.2% of Minneapolis residents identify as Black or African American, only 13.3% of Minneapolis Park Community Gardeners identify as Black or African American.

RESULTS: RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF COMMUNITY GARDENERS 2020-2023

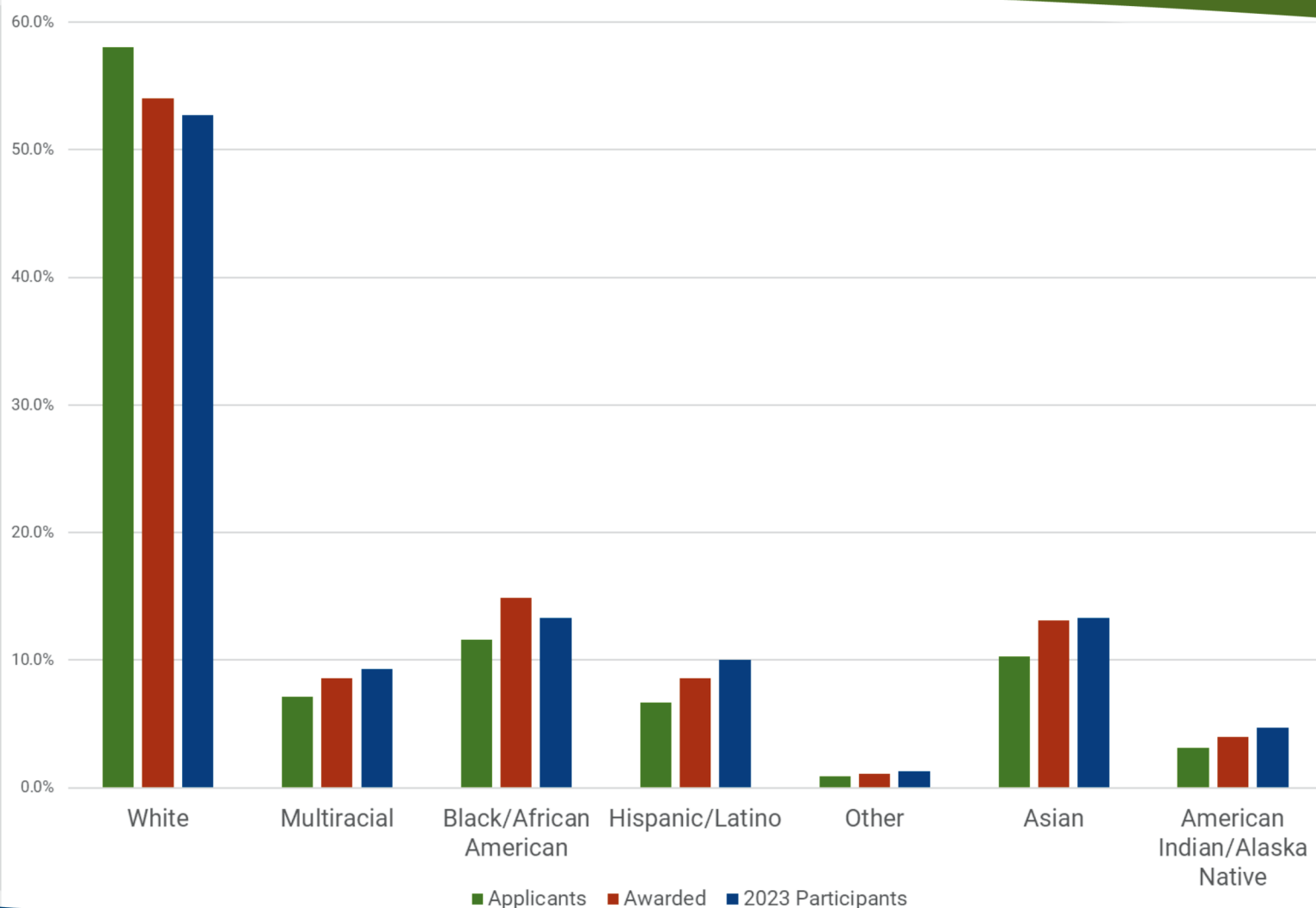
How have the racial demographics of Minneapolis Park community gardeners changed over time?



The racial makeup of community gardeners in Minneapolis Park has varied over the last four seasons. In general, gardeners have been more diverse in later years compared to the first year of the program.

RESULTS: RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF 2023 MINNEAPOLIS PARK COMMUNITY GARDEN APPLICANTS, PLOT RECIPIENTS, AND PARTICIPANTS

Where do barriers exist in the Minneapolis Park Community Garden Program that limit participation, especially for BIPOC gardeners?



The percentage of applicants identifying as white is comparable to the percentage of Minneapolis residents who identify as white (58.0%, 60.1% respectively). Diversity among participants increases from the diversity of applicants, showing that the application process is having its intended impact. There was some drop-off in participation of Black/African American gardeners from being awarded a plot to actually gardening in the space. Factors that could limit participation include access to plants and tools, transportation concerns, communication barriers, and/or lack of gardening experience.

Community Voice:

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

"I spoke while gardening to people of many races, in both English and Spanish, to explain what the garden was. I think big signs near the gardens in multiple languages will naturally engage the people who walk by them, and draw interest."



"Engage with diverse communities & have Cultural Days in the parks around cultural foods/activities."



"More gardens in more public spaces! Signs or flyers at grocery stores, corner stores etc. in more neighborhoods, at the library. Courses or events lead by members of the community."



"Hire and recruit volunteer BIPOC leaders and trainers."

Community Voice:

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

- I want to garden in a Minneapolis park because I am passionate about and committed to herb and food cultivation in the city and for low-income residents (I am a low-income Minneapolis resident). I believe community gardens are a wonderful use of public green space. I also feel strongly about building relationships with my neighbors, which feels more possible by gardening in a park.
- I have access to window boxes for herbs or smaller plants, but would like to grow chemical free food. I have a chronic illness and eating fresh organically grown food is a huge part of my health regimen.
- I used to be part of a communal vegetable garden with neighbors but have not had opportunity to garden for 8 years. I miss tending plants, growing food, eating fresh garden produce. Gardening helped my mental & physical health; I need that again. I'd rather garden in community with or around neighbors and as a renter don't have ability to garden at home.
- It was a great experience growing produce and as a student it always helps to cut down on grocery budget and have a hobby outside school work! Also loved meeting new people in my community!
- I grew up in a family of gardeners- all of the women in my family have embraced growing inside and outside. I haven't ever had access to growing space and have always lived in small apartments, though it's my dream to follow in my family footsteps. I truly believe in the healing powers of soil and connection to the land, and I want to contribute to beauty in my community.
- We are a small Hispanic church. Most families live in apartment buildings and don't have access to garden space apart from the plot at Powderhorn. Many of the parents of the families come from rural roots. Tending a garden and sharing that with their families has been a healing experience for families. We have enjoyed the interaction with other gardeners, and appreciated the different learning experiences provided by Minneapolis Parks.
- I would like to normalize land back by normalizing indigenous gardening.
- I got a plot for summer 2022. It was my first time gardening, and it was absolutely amazing. Gardening was not only relaxing but it saved me some money as I grew my own produce.
- I've wanted a garden space since I moved here in 2018! I have a strong desire to get down into the earth. To me, having a garden means being to be a part of the community, contributing to the livelihood and health of yourself and others as well as giving back and living in harmony with the land. I have chronic illnesses and live in poverty. Having a garden will be able to contribute to restoring and managing my health and mental health. Something that I struggle to afford as it is.
- I absolutely love gardening but as a renter, I don't have yard space if my own. I find digging in the dirt incredibly therapeutic and value feeling connected to the earth. The added bonus is being able to feed myself and loved ones with what I grow.

Goals and Strategies

Cultivate relationships with gardeners and volunteer leads

The MPRB's Community Garden Program relies on program participants and volunteer community garden leads to maintain and nurture the garden spaces, foster relationships with each other, promote the program to other park visitors, and create vibrant community spaces. The volunteer lead role varies from site to site, based on the interests of leads and their capacity for the work. How can MPRB further enhance these connections and encourage more active participation from gardeners and volunteer leads?



Strategies

- 1 Support leads in organizing social, cultural and educational gatherings in community garden spaces
- 2 Expand volunteer opportunities within garden spaces for both gardeners and community members
- 3 Develop and implement communication guidelines and systems to allow easier electronic communication between gardeners

Goals and Strategies

Improve Racial Equity Training for leads



To ensure equity considerations are incorporated into this work, volunteer Community Garden Leads receive annual racial equity training through MPRB in advance of beginning their work. This training has been led by facilitators from various partners, including racial justice organizations and community food activists. Training topics have included food justice, cultural bias, microaggressions and food story sharing. How can this training opportunity be enhanced to help staff and leads meet the program's Racial Equity Goals?

Strategies

- 1 Work with MPRB's new Racial Equity and Inclusion Partner to determine ideal facilitation partner for 2024 training
- 2 Work with facilitator to ensure new leads receive foundational training and returning leads have a chance for continued development
- 3 Collect post-training participant feedback



Goals and Strategies

Engage youth in the garden

Community Gardening was identified as one of the Six Pillars of Critical Programs for Minneapolis Park Youth. There are many ways for young people to get involved with MPRB community garden spaces. They can help their families take care of a plot, participate in MPRB or partner programs that use the space, harvest from communal areas as a park visitor, or learn about the program through Teen Teamworks. Community garden spaces in turn benefit from the presence of our diverse young people. How can community gardens further encourage youth involvement in gardening?



Strategies

- 1 Ensure Recreation Directors have access to space in existing community gardens for youth programs
- 2 Partner with citywide program specialists to bring more MPRB youth to the gardens
- 3 Partner with Environmental Education and Recreation staff to provide youth activities at events