


## Equitable Representation in Dakota County Parks

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Planning Commission

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## Agenda



1. What does representation mean and why do we want underrepresented populations in Dakota County Parks?
2. Potential reasons for underrepresentation
3. Dakota County Parks' current work and responsibility to encourage equity in the field of Parks and Recreation
4. Discussion

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**Park Access Defined**

NRPA (National Recreation and Park Association) defines Park Access as:  
*"The just and fair quantity, proximity and connections to quality parks, green spaces and recreation facilities, as well as programming that are safe, inclusive, culturally relevant and welcoming to everyone."*

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## Why Representation?

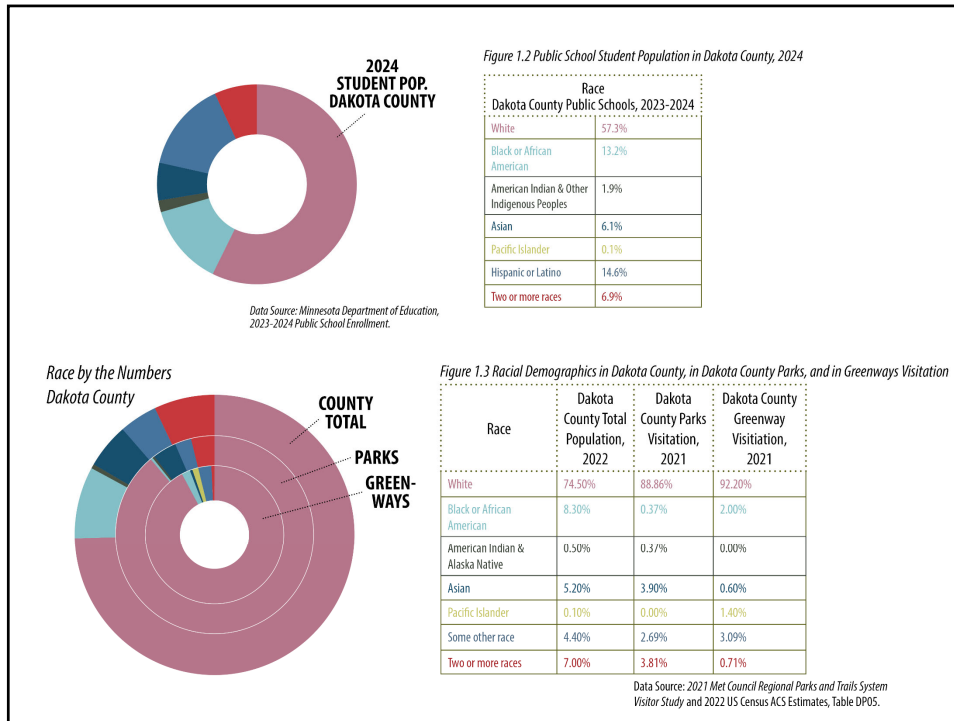
- The demographics of the county are changing
- We need to meet people where they are – their interests, experiences with parks
- People of color are not attending Dakota County Parks and Greenways in proportion to their representation in the county

**2021 Visitor Snap Shot**

AGE	PARKS		GREENWAYS		Under - Represented		On - Target		Over - Represented	
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12 - 17	✓	✓								
18 - 24	✓	✓			✓	✓				
25 - 34							✓	✓		
35 - 54									✓	✓
55 - 74									✓	✓
75 +	✓	✓								
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>										
Less than \$40,000	✓	✓								
\$40,000 - \$79,999	✓	✓								
\$80,000 +									✓	✓
<b>GENDER</b>										
Male									✓	✓
Female	✓	✓								
<b>RACE</b>										
People of Color	✓	✓								
White									✓	✓
<b>ETHNICITY</b>										
Hispanic/Latino	✓	✓								


Data from 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study and 2022 US Census ACS Estimates, Table DPOS.

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## Why Representation?



Outdoor recreation increases quality of life – measured health benefits

- Physical, mental social, emotional
- For adults: stress reduction, improved sleep quality, improved cognitive performance, reduced cancer risk
- For children: improved attention capacity, emotional and behavioral development, self-confidence and self-discipline, social skills



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## Why Representation?



Public spaces = public ownership



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## Potential Reasons for Underrepresentation at Parks

- Historical Trauma
- Safety
- Experience

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## Historical Trauma



“There is a long-standing history of people living in Black and communities of color not being safe, feeling threatened, and losing their lives in or around our country’s parks.”

– NRPA’s Equity in Parks and Recreation StoryMap

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## Historical Trauma



### 1890’s – Jim Crow Laws

- Legalized racial segregation, including in public spaces and parks
- National Park Service created in 1916; racially restrictive codes at parks would remain in place through the end of WWII.
- People of color were legally barred from or segregated at public recreational sites until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, including at national and state parks.
- This meant a generation of people were not allowed to access these parks. This has been internalized and passed down by some.



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## Historical Trauma



### 1930's – Separate but Equal Laws

- Ensured that Blacks and whites went to separate but unequal facilities, including parks. Parks in the 1930's were segregated with separate entrances, campgrounds, bathrooms and picnic tables. "Whites only" and "coloreds only" signs were used as physical markers and reminders. (NRPA StoryMap)

### 1964 Civil Rights Act

- Prohibited discrimination in public accommodations and funded programs; ended legal application of Jim Crow laws

### Relevant Issues Today

- Gentrification, transportation equity, safety

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## Safety



- When people don't see others like them using parks, they feel unsafe and uncomfortable – increasing representation allows more users to feel safe and comfortable
- Requests for clear signage – what people are and aren't allowed to do
- Mixed feedback re. law enforcement presence

*Dakota County Parks Ordinance Update (2021) community engagement and the 2021 Met Council Regional Parks and Trails Visitor Study*

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## Experience in Parks and Rec



- People who haven't grown up with an introduction to outdoor recreation may need exciting and accessible programming as an introduction
  - Parks is already doing some of this – Parent/child canoe/kayak; intro to fly fishing; youth camps
  - Hennepin County Parks Ambassadors are exemplary
- Parks may need to offer facilities and activities that speak to cultural groups (gathering areas especially)



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## NRPA's framework for inclusion



- “Distributive – Who has physical access to local park and recreation spaces?”
- Procedural – Who decides the budget, operations, maintenance and programming?
- Interactional – How are people treated in local park and recreation spaces? Who feels welcomed? Who feels unwanted?
- Representational – Do people believe their experiences, culture and history are represented in local park and recreation spaces?
- Care – How do people steward local park and recreation spaces and the broader environment?”

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## Dakota County Parks' Current Equity Work

- Parks Awareness and Promotion Plan
- Outreach Programs
- Community Liaisons & Compensation



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## Parks Awareness and Promotion Plan

- In 2020, Parks conducted extensive community engagement reaching underrepresented populations, especially low-income and Latinx communities
- Activity Summary:
  - 6 dialogue groups
  - 41 stakeholder meetings
  - 7 interviews
  - Pop up surveys at 25 activities with a total of 424 respondents
  - A bilingual English/Spanish online survey with 710 responses.



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## Parks Awareness and Promotion Plan



### Audiences engaged:

- Latinx Communities
- African American Communities
- Somali Communities
- American Indian Communities
- Low-income households
- People with disabilities
- Southeast Asian Communities
- South Asian Indian Communities
- Youth
- Older adults

### Recommendations from feedback:

- Translate materials into Spanish, Somali, and Hmong.
- Host cultural activities in partnership with local community groups
- Add additional park security or police officers to increase a sense of safety.
- Add spaces for prayer and ceremony.
- Use parks as a space to educate the community about American Indian cultures.
- Provide opportunities for community members to be involved in decision making.
- Physical infrastructure improvements and making accessible equipment available.
- Transportation and financial assistance are two of the top 3 ways respondents suggested that would help them visit the parks more often.

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## Outreach Programs



- Partnership with Caminatas Domingueras
- District 196 Diversity in Skiing Program
- Nature Walks with Latino Families series
- Fiesta en la Nieve
- Somali Girls Leadership Group Day in the Park
- Variety of cultures performing at Music in the Park



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## Community Liaisons & Compensation



- Parks has consulted with community leaders representing Latinx, Black, Indigenous, and Communities of Color
- Parks has hired multilingual staff
- Dakota County Parks hired an Indigenous Liaison in 2023
- Parks compensates people for their time when working with community members on programming/partnerships.

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## Sources



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## Discussion



How do you think we should best engage with underrepresented populations in the Parks and Greenways?

