

## NEW AMERICAN INCLUSION IN PARKS AND RECREATION

Parks and recreation truly build communities—communities for all. They are the places and spaces where people from all walks of life come together to learn, to experience, to interact and to grow. A great park not only reflects the culture and spirit of its community; it serves all members of its community including New Americans—immigrants and refugees—who have made the United States their home. Parks are in a unique position to welcome new community members by providing programs and making culturally-sensitive accommodations so that everyone can enjoy the benefits that parks and recreation provide.

### WHY PARKS NEED TO PRIORITIZE NEW AMERICAN INCLUSION

Immigrants and refugees often experience intense feelings of loss after leaving their native country, and may go through a period of cultural bereavement and distress. This stress can be greatly reduced when certain favorable conditions exist, like park and recreation programming, that bolster self-esteem and belonging, enhance social support from the new community, provide education and employment opportunities and physical activity opportunities, offer increased understanding of a new language and culture, and present a high degree of tolerance for and acceptance of cultural diversity in their new community<sup>1</sup>.

Park and recreation agencies can help create environments that support community relationships, English-language education, respectful of cultural norms. Agencies can be sources of support, creating opportunity through volunteer positions, program participation, and social engagement. Inclusive practices have the power to break down segregated social groups, encouraging all in the neighborhood to take advantage of facilities, amenities and programmatic offerings.

Designing programming to address the needs of this population can support the well-being of these vulnerable families and children. Programs and offerings can include:

- Hosting and supporting multi-cultural community programs/events (e.g., festivals, celebrations)
- Providing opportunities for social engagement and hands-on learning experiences with community members from diverse backgrounds (e.g., community gardens)
- Connecting New Americans to job skills training, healthcare and social services

<sup>1</sup> *Healthcare for Immigrants and Refugees, Dimensions of Culture, 2011, <http://www.dimensionsofculture.com/2010/11/healthcare-for-immigrants-and-refugees/>*





## ADDITIONAL WAYS TO PROMOTE NEW AMERICAN INCLUSION IN PARKS AND RECREATION

Creating a welcoming and safe environment in which New Americans can find trust and communication within the community is a great first step to promoting inclusion. Park and recreation agencies can promote New American inclusion through:

- **Community Representation:** To ensure that voices from the whole community are represented when it comes to decision-making about programmatic offerings or facility improvements/expansion.
- **Messaging:** It's important to recognize that although spaces and programs may be open to all, New Americans may feel more comfortable when that message is explicitly stated and supported by staff. Consider adding messaging,

adapted to languages commonly spoken by community members, to promotional materials or on signage in facilities that assures all community members that they are welcome.

- **Cultural Accommodations:** To ensure that the community is benefiting from the programs and services, it's imperative to recognize and adapt to cultural differences. For example, many communities have different practices when it comes to women and men exercising together. Consider changing program/facility hours so all community members can engage in physical activity opportunities and benefit from parks and recreation.

### Inclusive Efforts in Parks and Recreation:

“Parks for New Portlanders” (PNP) is a program initiated by Portland (Oregon) Parks & Recreation with a goal of providing recreation opportunities for immigrant and refugee communities. PNP works with community partners and city leaders to design culturally relevant programs and makes sure services and spaces are welcoming and accessible to communities of color, new immigrants and refugees. With one in five Portlanders foreign-born, addressing the needs of this new and diverse population is crucial as they transition to Portland's community. The PNP program hosts sporting events such as Portland World Cup Soccer in the summer and InterculturThe PNP program hosts sporting events throughout the year including the Portland World Cup Soccer and Intercultural Basketball Tournaments to assist new Portlanders in developing a sense of belonging and accessing park and recreation services that promote greater integration into the Portland community.

Learn more at [www.portlandoregon.gov/parks](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks).

### TAKE ACTION NOW

- [Pledge your commitment](#) through Commit to Inclusion
- [Submit a success story](#) with your own Parks for Inclusion story to be featured on NRPA's Success Story database
- Share what your agency is working on through social media, using the hashtag **#ParksForInclusion**
- Check out more ways to get involved on the [Parks for Inclusion resource database](#)

**LEARN MORE AT [WWW.NRPA.ORG/PARKSFORINCLUSION](http://WWW.NRPA.ORG/PARKSFORINCLUSION)**