

RACIAL AND ETHNIC INCLUSION IN PARKS AND RECREATION

Public parks are the cornerstone of our communities. Parks have the power to strengthen our society and inspire civic engagement, they provide numerous physical, social and mental health benefits, they provide opportunities for cultural connections, they connect people to nature and green space, and they bring people of all backgrounds and ideologies together. Park and recreation agencies work daily to ensure that the unique power of parks is a reality in every community across the country, especially our most vulnerable and underserved populations, including racial and ethnic minorities, that are disproportionately affected by health disparities and environmental hazards that impact quality of life.

WHY PARKS NEED TO PRIORITIZE RACIAL AND ETHNIC INCLUSION

In the United States, significant health disparities exist between Caucasians and people of color who more commonly face obstacles to health such as poverty, lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education, housing and health care¹. It's also been found that people of color are more likely to have chronic diseases, such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, to have poorer mental health, and to be physically inactive compared with Caucasians². Parks have the power to address these disparities by ensuring that all community members have access to the benefits of parks and recreation.

Examples of programs in parks and recreation aimed at engaging multicultural, racial or ethnic community members include:

- Heritage and holiday celebrations
- Culturally-sensitive program hours (e.g., women-only pool time, female program leaders for female students, etc.)
- Health and wellness programs targeting specific cultures, races and ethnicities (e.g., GirlTrek, My Brother's Keeper)
- Opportunities for civic engagement
- Establishing community gardens that foster social connections, cultural awareness and connections to nature



¹ *What Is Health Equity? And What Difference Does a Definition Make?* 2017, https://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue_briefs/2017/rwjf437393

² *Vital Signs: Racial Disparities in Age-Specific Mortality Among Blacks or African Americans – United States, 1999–2015, 2017*, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/mm6617e1.htm>



ADDITIONAL WAYS TO PROMOTE RACIAL AND ETHNIC INCLUSION IN PARKS AND RECREATION

Creating a welcoming and safe environment in which all races and ethnicities can find trust and communication with community health providers is a great first step to promoting inclusion for people of color. Parks and recreation can promote racial and ethnic inclusion and address health disparities by:

- **Evaluating and Addressing Key Inequities:** Across the United States trail systems, sports complexes and state of the art recreation centers are commonly found in many Caucasian neighborhoods. Public parks have the power to fill this same need in low-income communities. Evaluating park systems to include the location of parks, services and amenities offered, the condition of facilities, how the community accesses park space, and historical context of the space and community are critical components to identifying areas of need. Addressing these inequalities both in investment and engagement of the community are an important way to establish more

equitable park systems and increase opportunities for healthy living.

- **Community Representation:** Programs, services and offerings should reflect the community's interests and needs. Engage the local community in this conversation to ensure they are represented in decision making processes. Additionally, ensure that park and recreation staff are representative of the community's diversity, especially when working with youth, so they can successfully establish relationships and have shared interests and priorities.
- **Messaging:** It's important to recognize that although spaces and programs may be open to all, people of color may feel more comfortable when that message is explicitly stated and supported. Consider adding messaging to promotional materials or on display in facilities that assures all community members that they are welcome.

Inclusive Efforts in Parks and Recreation:

GirlTrek is the largest public health nonprofit for African-American women and girls in the United States. With nearly 100,000 neighborhood walkers, GirlTrek encourages women to use walking as a practical first step to inspire healthy living, families, and communities. Active members support local and national policy to increase physical activity through walking, improve access to safe places to walk, protect and reclaim green spaces, and improve the walkability and built environments of 50 high-need communities across the United States. GirlTrek has developed a world-class training for African-American women to serve as health professionals in the areas of fitness, mental health, nutrition, and environmental stewardship, with a mission to inspire one million African-American women and girls to develop a daily habit of walking.

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](#)