

E-PARCC

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE

Syracuse University

Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs

Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration

Advancing Racial Equity in the Minneapolis Park System: How Could Organizations with Divergent Goals Work Together?

Minneapolis Park System in Context

Although the Twin Cities metro area is known for its bitter winters, leisure options are plentiful. The Minneapolis park system has been ranked the “Best in the Nation” by The Trust for Public Land’s ParkScore Index every year from 2013 to 2018. Also known as the City of Lakes, 14.9% of Minneapolis’ 34,543 acres of land is parkland that encircles the city’s thirteen lakes, adjoins the river’s edge, and preserves historically or ecologically significant areas.¹ Urban parks are abundant; there are 189 parks in Minneapolis. This number of parks amounts to 4.6

This case was written by Yuan Daniel Cheng and Brooke Dirtzu, of the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. It was a winning case in E-PARCC’s 2019-2020 Competition for Collaborative Public Management, Governance, and Problem-Solving Teaching Materials. The case is intended for classroom discussion and not to suggest either effective or ineffective responses to the situation depicted. It may be copied as many times as needed, provided that the authors and E-PARCC are given full credit. E-PARCC is a project of the Collaborative Governance Initiative, Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration- a research, teaching and practice center within Syracuse University’s Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

¹ Harnik, P., Martin, A., & Treat, M. (2016). 2016 City Park Facts. San Francisco, CA: The Trust for Public Land. Pg 5.

parks per 10,000 residents.² One of the city's 37 regional parks, the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park, is among the most visited city parks in the nation, with 5,476,400 visitors annually.³

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board is a democratically elected body governing over the city's park system. Every four years, Minneapolis voters elect nine commissioners: one from each of the six park districts, and three that serve at-large. Regional parks receive funding from state and public agencies to develop and maintain park amenities. Minneapolis' 160 smaller neighborhood parks are scattered across the city and rely on local tax dollars.⁴ In 2016, Minneapolis spent \$90,488,104 on parks and recreation, \$186 operating spending per resident, \$36 in capital spending per resident, for a total of \$222 per resident.⁵

Structural Racism in Minneapolis Parks

Despite the #1 ranking for its parks, racial disparities permeate the Park Board and disadvantage the Twin Cities' fastest-growing population: racial and ethnic minorities. In Minneapolis, minority populations constitute nearly 40 percent of the city; however, they only represent 3 percent of regional park-users. One of the leading explanations asserted by leisure scholars is that disparities in park usage by race is due to minorities' lack of physical access to parks. However, all Minneapolis residents have high physical access to parks. The Metropolitan Council, the regional planning agency, found in a 2016 park visitors study that 94% of all Minneapolis residents live within a 10-minute walk from a park.⁶ According to another study by the Council, white residents averaged 60 visit parks per year, and racial minority residents averaged 36 park visits.⁷ These findings point to obstacles beyond physical access and expose potential structural elements within the park system that lead to social constraints.

² Harnik, P., Martin, A., & Treat, M. (2016). 2016 City Park Facts. San Francisco, CA: The Trust for Public Land. Pg 12.

³ Harnik, P., Martin, A., & Treat, M. (2016). 2016 City Park Facts. San Francisco, CA: The Trust for Public Land. Pg 30.

⁴ Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board: Parks & Lakes. (n.d.). Retrieved March 17, 2018, from <https://www.minneapolis-parks.org/parks-destinations/parks-lakes/>

⁵ Harnik, P., Martin, A., & Treat, M. (2016). 2016 City Park Facts. San Francisco, CA: The Trust for Public Land. Pg 16.

⁶ Das, Fan, & French, 2016, p. 319.

⁷ Information Specialists Groups, 2009, p. 24.

The Metropolitan Council's *Park Use Among Communities of Color* study also sheds light on how structural racism may be impacting residents' visitation rates in Twin Cities metro. Black park goers named "getting jumped or shot" as a prominent barrier to park usage.⁸ While White respondents reported that they had no safety concerns during their park visits in the same study. Also, during a Metropolitan Council focus group for communities of color, an African American participant was skeptical about regional parks' willingness to accommodate the cultural preferences of Black park users. She stated, "Sometimes I wonder if people feel like the parks are culturally friendly. Like I know for me, the one thing I don't like is that they took the noise—the noise ordinance that they passed for the parks, like the ability to have music and play music in the park...So, if I want to do a celebration at the park, I don't feel like it's culturally friendly for some of the things that me as a culture would like to do at the park."⁹ In the Twin Cities, racial and ethnic minorities are the fastest-growing population and will be the future decision-makers on prioritizing public funds. Many park managers are aware that if park systems are not relevant to these populations, parks may lose funding, and some may cease to exist.

Lack of Representation and Disinvestment in Parks in Communities of Color

During public debates regarding racial inequities in the Minneapolis park systems, members from communities of color expressed the following concerns to reporters: the need for electoral representation to achieve racial equity and the need to correct how past disinvestments in parks in majority communities of color negatively impacted property values. Communities of color were indeed underrepresented on the Park Board. In 2016, eight of the nine Commissioners were white. One African American resident said this of the almost all-white Park Board, "We look around the table, and every single one of you is white, how can you effectively represent the people of the city of Minneapolis when we're not at the table?" Lack of representation was magnified at public meetings in 2016 when Park Board commissioners

⁸ Salk, R. (2014). *Regional Park Use Among Select Communities of Color: A Qualitative Investigation* (pp. 1-19, Publication). Saint Paul, MN: Metropolitan Council. P. 7.

⁹ Salk, R. (2014). *Regional Park Use Among Select Communities of Color: A Qualitative Investigation* (pp. 1-19, Publication). Saint Paul, MN: Metropolitan Council. P. 7.

had members of the NAACP arrested when they voiced concerns over potential job losses due to privatization of Theodore Wirth Park services.¹⁰ Protesters continued to show up to meetings to voice their concerns over job losses that mostly impacted minority staff. However, the Commissioners took a “we know best” stance and suppressed community members from expressing concerns by having them arrested. These exchanges were particularly symbolic as Wirth Park is a community asset in North Minneapolis, a traditionally African American neighborhood. Additionally, the local government previously created mistrust with North residents when officials ignored the community’s input and built a highway between the park and the neighborhood. The lack of representation of persons of color on the Park Board may be a root cause of social injustices committed at Park Board public meetings and thereby impeding equitable community input and creating distrust.

In response to community concerns regarding disinvestment in parks located in communities of color, a Minneapolis Park and Recreation Commissioner explained to Minnesota Public Radio that the Board consistently equally distributes funds, and therefore, are in compliance with their political responsibilities.¹¹ Sandra Richardson, of the African American Legacy Council in the Twin Cities, summed up her perspective of the Boards’ claim of equality, “If people (Park Board Commissioners) say parks are all equal, the way I’ve heard it put is that equal is giving everyone a pair of shoes. Equity is making sure all the shoes fit.”¹²

Multiple Approaches for Park Equity Action

Local park equity advocate groups, such as the Minneapolis Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Parks and Power, have been critical in creating a platform for racially equitable policies within the Park Board. In 2016, then Minneapolis Chapter NAACP president, Nekima Levy Armstrong (formerly Levy-Pounds),

¹⁰ Best, E. (2016). Park Board moves forward with Wirth sports center despite union concerns. Retrieved March 31, 2017, from <http://www.southwestjournal.com/news/parks/2016/09/park-board-moves-forward-with-wirth-sports-center-despite-union-concerns/>

¹¹ Tim Nelson. (July 20, 2016). Racial issues forcing change in Minneapolis parks leadership. Retrieved February 27, 2017, from <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2016/07/19/racial-issues-force-change-minneapolis-parks-leaders>

¹² Boarini, C. (2016, August 18). Years of inequities lead to ‘extremely rare’ racial lens. Retrieved February 27, 2017, from <http://www.tcdailyplanet.net%2fyears-of-inequities-lead-to-extremely-rare-racial-lens-applied-to-minneapolis-parks-planning%2f&p=DevEx,5063.1>

reopened an earlier investigation into wrongful termination complaints filed by 60 employees and 100 park users regarding unequal discipline and “outright racial humiliation” by Minneapolis Park Board staff. The reopened investigation prompted Levy Armstrong and other advocates to start regularly attending Park Board meetings. The NAACP’s consistent requests for the Park Board to address racial equity issues culminated in a heated exchange between Levy Armstrong and then Park Board president, Liz Wielinski. This exchange went viral on social media and became a prominent local news story. During the exchange, Wielinski lost her temper when Levy Armstrong tried to make a statement outside of public comment time. The then board president called Levy Armstrong a “rude interrupting individual,” to which Levy Armstrong replied, “don’t talk to me like a slave.” This event increased media coverage of the NAACP’s involvement regarding inequitable park staffing policies and served as a call for the public support of racial equity in the parks.

The Minneapolis Chapter of the NAACP was not the only advocacy group creating external pressure to address racial equity in the Minneapolis Park System. At the same time, Parks and Power began mounting protests of the Park Board with claims of racially biased park policies. Parks and Power is a grassroots movement aimed to build power with low wealth communities in Minneapolis through popular education and local political action. They believe parks are centers of neighborhood power.¹³ To them, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board’s lack of racial equity policies was a “tangible, challenging, entry point into local public and political life to training ground for grassroots leaders and a petri dish for people-driven, race-conscious public policy.”¹⁴

Taking a different angle on park equity than the NAACP, Parks and Power organizers were vocal about the Park Board’s lack of a racial equity evaluation metrics to guide infrastructure investments. The Minneapolis Park Board based their park assessment on whether an asset, bench or playground equipment, “exceeded its useful life.”¹⁵ Grassroots advocates wanted the assessment to consider the overall condition of the equipment. Summing

¹³ (Parks and Power, 2019)

¹⁴ (Virden, 2015)

¹⁵ (Brandt, 2016)

up one advocate, a playground slide with bullet holes in it should be replaced even if it “technically” is structurally sound.¹⁶ Jake Virden of Parks and Power was hopeful when Superintendent Jayne Miller, announced that the park board would add a metric to consider levels of poverty concentration and population density when allocating money, even though race was not explicitly mentioned. Virden remarked that “It’s the most race-conscious language that the Park Board has ever used.”¹⁷ Parks and Power continued to press on with activities, including hosting community trainings and organizing grassroots leaders to take political action in the parks.

Finally, the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council, the regional planning agency and major Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board funder, made their ongoing requests for park agencies to identify and address racial park usage gaps into a formal requirement to receive funding. One catalyst for this decision was a 2014 study completed by the Council’s Community Development Committee. The *Regional Park Use Among Select Communities of Color*¹⁸ report confirmed that communities of color experienced challenges to visiting parks and trail systems. In particular, the study revealed that “regional parks and trails visitors do not represent the overall population makeup of the region, specifically for communities of color.”¹⁹ This study sparked the Council to create a Park Equity Toolkit in 2016 that would formally gauge partners’ progress toward more equitable park use.²⁰

During meetings to develop the toolkit, tensions were high among regional park managers and park equity advocates. Some park managers resisted adding equity metrics being tied to park funding and explained away communities of color lower participation rates as a matter of cultural preference. In other words, some managers argued that communities of color did not go to parks because they would rather do something else in their free time. One grassroots park advocate pointed out that these explanations did not account for potential discrimination, nor did they address issues due to underlying structural racism that may prevent

¹⁶ (Brandt, 2016)

¹⁷ (Brandt, 2016)

¹⁸ (Salk, 2014)

¹⁹ (Metropolitan Council, 2016)

²⁰ (The Metropolitan Council, 2019)

communities of color from enjoying the outdoors. Park equity advocate groups insisted that these metrics did not go far enough. At one point, the Parks and Power representative stood up and called the meeting participants “racists.” Despite park managers’ pushback, the Metropolitan Council moved to require that park partners, including the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board, identify gaps in service to underserved communities to receive the Council’s funds. In addition, funding recipients must also dedicate five percent of funds to engage with communities of color to understand and improve disparities in service.

Next steps

The Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board is aware that carrying out a racial equity plan by itself is not likely to succeed as so many organizations take stake in this issue. However, organizations that have a key stake in this issue seem to have very different understandings about what racial equity means and how the problem should be solved. Now, as the representatives of the four key organizations involved in this issue (Twin Cities Metropolitan Council, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People of Minneapolis, Parks and Power), you are expected to stand by the position of your organization and address the following questions:

1. Define the core problem of racial equity in the Minneapolis Parks System. What are some of the structural elements underneath this issue?
2. What are the areas of consensus between your organization and other organizations? How can you build a consensus and common goal for this collaboration?
3. Should your organization collaborate with other organizations to address the racial equity problem in the Minneapolis Park System? If no, why not? What are your strategies to engage in addressing the racial equity problem in the Minneapolis Park System?
4. If you do decide to collaborate with each other, what should be the roles of each organization? What processes and rules should you follow for collaborative problem solving and decision-making?

Appendix: Minneapolis Background

Minnesota is a place of opportunity. The state has had a strong economy driven by innovation that attracts and retains an educated workforce. Jobs are abundant in the metropolitan area surrounding Minneapolis; Target, U.S. Bancorp, General Mills, 3M, and Medtronic are headquartered in the Twin Cities.²¹ Minnesota ranks 3rd in highest educational attainment in the United States;²² 92.6 % of adults in Minnesota have completed at least a high school education.²³

On the other hand, Minnesota is a land of exclusion; nationally, the state is ranked second-worst in racial disparities according to a study done by 24/7 Wallstreet.²⁴ Take, for example, the adverse outcomes of structural racism for black Minnesotans, a population that is concentrated in the metropolitan area. The median income of a black household is \$30,306 compared to \$66,979 of a white household.²⁵ The unemployment rate for black Minnesotans (8.8%) was more than twice the rate of white (3.0%) and Hispanic (3.5%) Minnesotans.²⁶ Black Minnesotans' homeownership rate (21.7%) is over three times lower than white Minnesotans' rate (76.5%).²⁷ Worse yet, in 2017, black Minnesotans were more likely to die from premature death than any other racial or ethnic group in the state besides American Indians.²⁸ Although blacks account for 18.9% of Minneapolis residents, they make up less than three percent of the regional park and trail users.²⁹ In Minnesota, racial disparities are significant and permeate in

²¹ Minnesota Compass: Economy Overview. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2018, from <http://www.mncompass.org/economy/overview>

²² Forbes. (2017, November). Minnesota. Retrieved April 11, 2018, from <https://www.forbes.com/places/mn/>

²³ QuickFacts. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2018, from

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MN/PST045216#viewtop>

²⁴ Sauter, M. B. (2018, March 29). Black and White Inequality in All 50 States. Retrieved April 11, 2018, from <https://247wallst.com/special-report/2017/08/18/black-and-white-inequality-in-all-50-states-2/11/>

²⁵ Sauter, M. B. (2018, March 29). Black and White Inequality in All 50 States. Retrieved April 11, 2018, from <https://247wallst.com/special-report/2017/08/18/black-and-white-inequality-in-all-50-states-2/11/>

²⁶ Sauter, M. B. (2018, March 29). Black and White Inequality in All 50 States. Retrieved April 11, 2018, from <https://247wallst.com/special-report/2017/08/18/black-and-white-inequality-in-all-50-states-2/11/>

²⁷ Minnesota Compass (2). (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2018, from <http://www.mncompass.org/demographics/race#1-5523-g>

²⁸ Minnesota Department of Health. (2017). 2017 Minnesota Statewide Health Assessment. Produced in collaboration with the Healthy Minnesota Partnership. St. Paul, MN.

²⁹ Peterson, D. (2016, June 19). Racially equitable use of parks is the goal, with big dollars at stake. Retrieved from <http://www.startribune.com/racially-equitable-use-of-parks-is-the-goal-with-big-dollars-at-stake/383496171/>

the state's major institutions, disadvantaging the fastest growing population, racial and ethnic minorities.³⁰ Unaddressed and persistent historical experiences of oppression and exclusion, known as structural racism, are the source of these disparities.

The City of Minneapolis' population is relatively diverse and will become more diverse as persons of color continue to grow into the largest groups of the City's population. Presently, among the 411,452 Minneapolis residents, 18.9% are Black (77,778), 1.2% are American Indian and Alaskan Native (24,892), and 6% are Asian (24,892), per the American Community Survey.³¹ Persons of color make up about 36% of the City's population.³² White residents compose 63.9% of the City's population, compared to 84.1% of all Minnesota residents who identify as white.³³ Among the total population in Minneapolis, 40,147 individuals identify as Hispanic or Latino (of any race). Population growth trends in communities of color become apparent when population data is disaggregated by race and age; about 60% of Minneapolis' youngest residents (0-5) are of color while about 21% of residents 65 and up are of color.³⁴

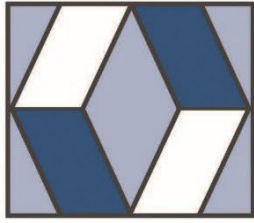
³⁰ Minnesota Compass (2). (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2018, from <http://www.mncompass.org/demographics/race#1-5523-g>

³¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

³² U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

³³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

³⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



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Role Description

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Twin Cities Metropolitan Council

Who We Are

The Metropolitan Council is the regional policy-making body, planning agency, and essential services provider for the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The Council provides essential services and infrastructure such as the Metro Transit's bus and rail system, Metro Mobility, Transit Link, wastewater treatment services, regional parks, planning, affordable housing, and more. These services support communities and businesses and ensure a high quality of life for Twin Cities residents. The Council is charged by the state to oversee the acquisition and development of regional parks and trails. However, partnering cities, counties, and special districts, like the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, operate the parks. Within the Council, the Community Development Committee addresses issues involving the development and implementation of regional park plans and grants.

Our Mission

The Council's mission is to foster efficient and economic growth for a prosperous region.

Summary of Position on Racial Equity and Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board

Metropolitan Council focuses on equity for the *park user*. The main goal is to strengthen *equitable usage* of regional parks and trails by all regional residents, across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability. Equitable usage is measurable and should be representative of the composition of the community. For example, if 19% of our regional population identifies as African American, then 19% of park users should identify as African American.

Documented Involvement with on Racial Equity and Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board

The Metropolitan Council's Community Development Committee 2014 study, *Regional Park Use Among Select Communities of Color*, confirmed that communities of color experienced challenges to visiting parks and trail systems. In particular, the study revealed that "regional

parks and trails visitors do not represent the overall population makeup of the region, specifically for communities of color.” This study sparked the Council to engage park managers and advocates in designing a *Park Equity Toolkit* in 2016. The toolkit would gauge partners’ progress toward more equitable park use. Now, grantees, including the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board, must identify gaps in service to underserved communities. For example, grantees must dedicate five percent of funds to engage with communities of color to understand and improve disparities in service to receive the Council’s funds.

Role Description: Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board

Who We Are

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board is a democratically elected body that governs the city's park system. Every four years, Minneapolis voters elect nine commissioners: one from each of the six park districts, and three that serve at-large. The Board appoints a Superintendent who guides the vision and direction to the Park Board's service areas and implements Board policy. The Board divides its \$90 million operating budget between two different categories of parks: regional parks and neighborhood parks. Regional parks draw visitors from inside and outside of Minneapolis. These parks receive funding from the state and public agencies to develop and maintain park amenities. Minneapolis' 160 smaller neighborhood parks are scattered across the city, serving mostly neighborhood residents. These parks rely on local tax dollars. Per the Park Board's website, "For many years, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board has focused on making capital, recreation, maintenance, and operations investments in parks that are in racially diverse and low-income neighborhoods."

Mission

To permanently preserve, protect, maintain, improve, and enhance its natural resources, parkland, and recreational opportunities for current and future generations. The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board exists to provide places and recreation opportunities for all people to gather, celebrate, contemplate, and engage in activities that promote health, wellbeing, community, and the environment.

Summary of Position on Racial Equity and Minneapolis Parks Board

Over the past twenty years, cultural and racial demographics have shifted in Minneapolis. Now that the city is more diverse regarding age, race, and ethnicity, so too are the recreational needs of its residents. *Parks play a vital role in the health and wellbeing of community members as well as the livability of our cities. Historically disadvantaged*

communities, including immigrants, experience poorer general health and shorter life spans than white community members. Research shows that the number one prescription for healing health and educational disparities is to provide access to parks and open space. Enhanced culturally informed programming with a focus on large community events will draw in more community members from diverse communities.

Documented Involvement with Racial Equity and Minneapolis Parks Board

Recognizing past organizational issues with racial bias, the Park Board drafted a *Racial Equity Action Plan* in 2016 that introduced an agency-wide strategy to address inequities. This plan was developed through the Board's participation in a yearlong training led by Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE). GARE is a national network of governments working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. This organization had previously worked with city, county, and state government agencies, such as the City of Seattle in Washington, Milwaukee County in Wisconsin, and the New York State Department of Health. Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board was the GARE's first park systems entity. Making the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board poised to be one of the first U.S. city park systems to address structural racial bias.

Role Description: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) of Minneapolis

Who We Are

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in 1909 as a nonpartisan civil rights organization. The NAACP is a nationwide member organization with a constitution that each branch accepts when incorporated. This constitution outlines objectives that focus on equality for all citizens through democratic and legal processes. The Minneapolis NAACP Branch is a local advocate for civil rights aimed at achieving justice and dismantling white supremacy.

Mission

The mission of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination.

Summary of position on Racial Equity and Minneapolis Parks Board

As a legal-focused organization, NAACP representatives are concerned about fairness and representation in the democratic process and park staffing. They feel the need for bold action to address racist structures built into the park systems, which only benefit those with privilege. Bold action includes boycotting the park system until their members feel heard. In addition, the organization has advocated for fairness in the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation staffing, in particular for black staff members. Many black staff members reported being demoted or let go without reason or documentation. Organization members take issues with a lack of diverse staff on the frontlines in parks, which does not represent the surrounding community. Members have asserted that racial equity can be achieved by rectifying past injustices as well as securing fair processes in the future.

Documented Involvement with Racial Equity and Minneapolis Parks Board

In 2011, the Minneapolis NAACP received over 160 complaints from park employees and users concerning racial discrimination; complaint topics ranged from “wrongful termination” to “outright racial humiliation of employees and customers.” The Minneapolis NAACP continued receiving numerous complaints of the unfair discipline of Black employees and other discriminatory concerns in 2012 and wrote an open letter to then Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board Superintendent Jayne Miller. Park Superintendent Miller conceded to inconsistent treatment of employees and racial issues. In 2016, Levy Armstrong reopened the investigations into unfair staffing processes in the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board and began disrupting meetings when the Board did not address racial bias in the park system.

Role Description: Parks and Power

Who We Are

Parks and Power is a grassroots movement that aims to advance racial equity within the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation system “by engaging everyday people to come together and articulate common values, find common ground and build solutions together.” Concerned with equitable investments and participation, Parks and Power focused on shifting power dynamics across the municipal government. Parks and Power organizers work on the ground with community members and at the policy level to address racial equity in Minneapolis Parks.

Stated Mission

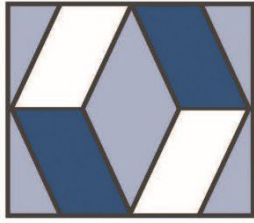
The work of our campaign is to build power with low wealth communities around Minneapolis Parks through popular education and local political action. Our aim is to bring the policies to the people and the people’s policies to the seat of power.

Summary of Position on Racial Equity and Minneapolis Parks Board

Parks and Power, a grassroots organization, believes “parks can be centers of neighborhood power.” They view the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board as an entry point into local public and political life, which is a training ground for grassroots leaders and race-conscious public policy. They believe that Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board leadership should own up to the racist structures and disproportionate capital investments in parks situated in majority communities of color. The lack of investments by the Park Board has economically disadvantaged these communities. For example, park asset losses accumulated over time and contributed to the devaluation of a neighborhood, such as housing values. Past interactions with Minneapolis Parks have left the community of color feeling marginalized within the park system. Programming alone to increase park usage will not solve park equity disparities. The Park Board’s commitment to racial equity can be demonstrated by their direct investment in communities of color.

Documented Involvement with Racial Equity and Minneapolis Parks Board

Parks and Power grew out of the work of Hope Community in Minneapolis to address residents' concerns about Peavey Park around 2005. Parks and Power training cohorts investigated and discovered disparities in resources between parks in affluent and low wealth neighbors in Minneapolis. The cohorts presented their findings in a report to the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board called "The Broken Promise." In 2013, Parks and Power organizers hosted a forum focused on racial equity for park commissioner candidates in the Phillips neighborhood. Over 250 people gathered for the forum, which aimed to communicate to candidates that "Communities of Color will no longer accept being an afterthought of policymakers." In 2014, Parks and Power partnered with the Land Stewardship Project, to incorporate and implement racial justice goals into the Park Board's Urban Agriculture Master Plan. Finally, in 2015, organizers worked with Voices for Racial Justice and Park Board Staff on a listening project to inform Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board's "Rec Quest" evaluation of recreation centers and programs across the system.



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Teaching Note

“Advancing Racial Equity in the Minneapolis Park System” is a role-play simulation designed to help students understand the challenges in creating a collaborative governance regime when actors involved have different understandings of the core issue. It also helps students understand how complex structural elements underpin systemic inequalities, and then learn strategies to advance racial equity in public service provisions. This simulation is relevant for classes dealing with collaborative governance, public engagement processes, stakeholder involvement, collaborative problem solving, and increasing diversity and inclusion in public policy making.

This case was written by Yuan Daniel Cheng and Brooke Dirtzu, of the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. It was a winning case in E-PARCC’s 2019-2020 Competition for Collaborative Public Management, Governance, and Problem-Solving Teaching Materials. The case is intended for classroom discussion and not to suggest either effective or ineffective responses to the situation depicted. It may be copied as many times as needed, provided that the authors and E-PARCC are given full credit. [E-PARCC is a project of the Collaborative Governance Initiative](#), Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration- a research, teaching and practice center within Syracuse University’s Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

The simulation includes four different roles from the government and nonprofit sectors, which have very different understandings of what racial equity means for the parks system. The goal of the simulation is to ask students to work collaboratively with other roles to figure out key initiatives to increase and advance racial equity in the Minneapolis Parks System. By going through this simulation practice, students are expected to take a critical approach to view racial equity from the lens of different stakeholders and grasp basic design principles for developing collaborative governance regimes.

Setting up the role play

The instructor should provide a short lecture and presentation about the Minneapolis Parks System, which is included in the background of the teaching simulation. This process should take 10 to 15 minutes. From this historical overview, students will learn the unique features and inherent racial equity problems in the Minneapolis Parks System. The links below provide additional context to the teaching simulation, which can be assigned to students in preparation for this simulation:

- Here is a 10 minute YouTube video about the Minneapolis Parks System's history:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nSjZQHNz8w>
- The Park Board published their documentation of racial equity issues documentation on their webpage:
https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/about_us/racial_equity/
- Parks and Power's host organization, Hope Community, produced this one-minute YouTube to highlight the mission of Parks and Power:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyogC2_XsnM

Being one of the nation's best park systems (Trust for Public Land, 2019) is a unique advantage of using Minneapolis as the setting of this simulation. The objective is that students understand that even for a high-performing parks system, racial equity problems still prevail. Additionally, systemic issues need effective public engagement processes to bring together different types of stakeholders and jointly design multifaceted racial equity goals. In addition,

the students will experience the complexity of reaching an agreement on how to advance racial equity, a broad and permeating issue, in a group of stakeholders who have important stakes but are committed to different goals and priorities.

Facilitating the In-class Role Play

The instructor should divide the students into collaborative work teams so that each group has at least one representative from each of the four organizations listed below. Each student will have a detailed two-page description of the organization they represent, including their mission, position on racial equity, and documented involvement related to racial equity and the Minneapolis Parks & Recreation Board.

The following are the groups included in the role descriptions:

- 1) Twin Cities Metropolitan Council
- 2) Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
- 3) National Association for the Advancement of Colored People of Minneapolis
- 4) Parks and Power

After the role descriptions are handed out and students have read them, the instructor should ask the students with the same role to gather and briefly clarify their group's mission and position on racial equity. After this brief discussion, the instructor should ask the students to form groups with the four distinct roles to perform the key task.

This simulation's key task is to ask students to discuss in their group the following four questions:

1. Define the core problem of racial equity in the Minneapolis Parks System. What are some of the structural elements underneath this issue?
2. What are the areas of consensus between your organization and other organizations? How can you build a consensus and common goal for this collaboration?

3. Should your organization collaborate with other organizations to address the racial equity problem in the Minneapolis Park System? If no, why not? What are your strategies to engage in addressing racial equity problems in the Minneapolis Park System without collaborating?
4. If you decide to collaborate, what should be the roles of each organization? What processes and rules should you follow for collaborative problem solving and decision-making?

Based on the focus of the class, the instructor should highlight different questions for the students to discuss. The instructor should leave sufficient in-class time for students to address these questions. If there is not enough time to present their discussion results, the class can be extended to two class periods. Students can also work in-between two class periods to develop a formal presentation about their solutions. Students are expected to operate on their own to design their decision-making processes and discussion rules in their small groups.

After the simulation, the instructors should ask each group to report out their shared definition, designed collaborative processes, and how they reached the consensus (or not). Then the class can be engaged in a large meta-discussion about what happened in the simulation process and what students learned.

The following questions can be used to help lead the large group discussion.

- 1) What were some of the major challenges in your group when designing a collaborative governance process to advance racial equity in the park system?
- 2) Where did these conflicts come from?
- 3) What are some of the implicit biases when discussing racial equity?
- 4) Was it possible to design a collaborative governance process when different stakeholders hold such different views of racial equity?
- 5) If so, what decision-making or team working rules had your group used?

- 6) What are your experiences of working with stakeholders in different sectors or different levels of government?
- 7) What is YOUR understanding of racial equity?
- 8) What seem to be the most crucial factors in designing effective collaborative governance processes to advance racial equity?
- 9) Who else should also be at the table?

Suggested Readings before the simulation

Collaborative Governance

Ansell, Chris, and Alison Gash. "Collaborative governance in theory and practice." *Journal of public administration research and theory* 18.4 (2008): 543-571.

Bryson, John M., Barbara C. Crosby, and Melissa Middleton Stone. "The design and implementation of Cross-Sector collaborations: Propositions from the literature." *Public administration review* 66 (2006): 44-55.

Emerson, Kirk, Tina Nabatchi, and Stephen Balogh. "An integrative framework for collaborative governance." *Journal of public administration research and theory* 22.1 (2012): 1-29.

Vangen, Siv. "Developing practice-oriented theory on collaboration: a paradox lens." *Public Administration Review* 77, no. 2 (2017): 263-272.

Citizen Participation and Engagement

Bryson, John M., Kathryn S. Quick, Carissa Schively Slotterback, and Barbara C. Crosby. "Designing public participation processes." *Public Administration Review* 73, no. 1 (2013): 23-34.

Clark, Jill K. "Designing public participation: Managing problem settings and social equity." *Public Administration Review* 78, no.3 (2018): 362-374.

Forester, John. "Planning in the face of power." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 48, no. 1 (1982): 67-80.

Fung, Archon. "Varieties of participation in complex governance." *Public Administration Review* 66 (2006): 66-75.

Hardy, Cynthia, and Nelson Phillips. "Strategies of engagement: Lessons from the critical examination of collaboration and conflict in an interorganizational domain." *Organization Science* 9, no. 2 (1998): 217-230.

Nabatchi, Tina. "Putting the "public" back in public values research: Designing participation to identify and respond to values." *Public Administration Review* 72, no. 5 (2012): 699-708.

Social Equity and Public Service Access

Frederickson, George. "The state of social equity in American public administration." *National Civic Review* 94, no. 4 (2005): 31-38.

Guy, Mary E., and Sean A. McCandless. "Social equity: Its legacy, its promise." *Public Administration Review* 72, no. s1 (2012): S5-S13.

Prottas, Jeffrey Manditch. "The cost of free services: Organizational impediments to access to public services." *Public Administration Review* (1981): 526-534.

Rigolon, Alessandro. "A complex landscape of inequity in access to urban parks: A literature review." *Landscape and Urban Planning* 153 (2016): 160-169.

Consensus Building

Innes, Judith E. "Planning through consensus building: A new view of the comprehensive planning ideal." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 62, no. 4 (1996): 460-472.

Innes, Judith E., and David E. Booher. "Consensus building as role playing and bricolage: Toward a theory of collaborative planning." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 65, no. 1 (1999): 9-26.

Innes, Judith E., and David E. Booher. "Consensus building and complex adaptive systems: A framework for evaluating collaborative planning." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 65, no. 4 (1999): 412-423.

Vangen, Siv, and Chris Huxham. "The tangled web: Unraveling the principle of common goals in collaborations." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 22, no. 4 (2012): 731-760

Tools and Resources for Finding Root Causes and Consensus Building

Fishbone Diagram: <https://asq.org/quality-resources/fishbone>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Guide for Consensus Building and Agreement Seeking: <https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/public-participation-guide-tools-consensus-building-and-agreement-seeking>

Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment Tool Kit for Consensus Building: <https://www.ccme.ca/files/About/Consensus%20Building%20Toolkit.pdf>