

# 2018 Recreation and Conservation Leadership Summit

Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society and  
Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

### **“Because Everyone Deserves a Great Park”**

“That is not just a slogan. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) works to ensure that every member of every community has access to the many great benefits that parks and recreation offer” (NRPA, 2018, p. 2).

“Reinforcing this belief, NRPA’s Social Equity pillar focuses on ensuring all people have safe access to quality park and recreation facilities and programming. NRPA is leading this effort by investing in park improvement projects for in-need communities, providing resources and tools to park and recreation professionals on developing equitable communities, and supporting programs and policies that protect and enhance our most vulnerable communities from environmental and health hazards” (NRPA, 2018, p. 2). Pennsylvania should be following the lead of NRPA.

Many times, when people hear the term social equity, they may think only of race or ethnicity. However, diversity and social equity are much broader than that. Diversity refers to individuals or groups from different demographic backgrounds and identities. The scope of diversity is very extensive, and includes race, ethnicity, culture, age, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, sexual orientation, religion, etc. Equity refers to providing fair access and opportunity, while also working toward eliminating barriers for diverse populations.

“NRPA defines inclusion as removing barriers, both physical and theoretical, so that all people have an equal opportunity to enjoy the benefits of parks and recreation. [The Parks for Inclusion] initiative emphasizes reaching the most vulnerable individuals and families—those who suffer from higher rates of health disparities and a diminished quality of life” (NRPA, 2018, p. 2). Moreover, inclusion means making our programs and facilities welcoming to diverse audiences, no matter their demographic background. In this white paper, challenges and strategies for diversity, equity, and inclusion are discussed at the broadest levels.

“While park and recreation agencies strive for greater inclusion, they face significant challenges in delivering on this promise. In some cases, agencies have limited financial and staffing resources that can make it difficult to serve those who may benefit the most from quality park and recreation services. In other cases, park and recreation agencies lack a clear understanding of the needs and desires of members of their city, town or county” (NRPA 2018, p.2).

In 2017, NRPA conducted a survey to gain greater insight into how agencies across the United States ensure that all members of their communities can enjoy parks and recreation” (p. 2-3). There was a wide response representing urban, suburban, and rural communities. The findings are presented in the *NRPA Park and Recreation Inclusion Report (2018)*. The report is a practitioner friendly document that includes

statistics as well as program examples. The *NRPA Park and Recreation Inclusion Report* served as the backdrop of the Leadership Summit's diversity, equity, and inclusion discussion topic.

## **Changing Demographics of Pennsylvania**

The changing demographics of the United States and more specifically of Pennsylvania suggest a need to consider the diverse recreation interests of various populations. Pennsylvania's racially and ethnically diverse population has grown by 33 percent, or 1.9 million people, since 2000 (Mowen, Graefe, Elmendorf, & Barrett, 2014). Moreover, older adults are our fastest growing segment of the population (Mowen et al., 2014) and more than 13 percent of Pennsylvanians live with a disability (Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2014). All of these populations have diverse recreation needs (NRPA, 2018). However, as Myrick (2018) noted in her editor's letter in *Parks & Recreation Magazine*, diversity does not equal inclusion. Inclusion of diverse populations requires intentional, culturally sensitive efforts which emphasize social equity among diverse individuals (NRPA Social Equity, n.d.).

## **Our Mission**

Central to the existence of public parks and recreation is the concept that all people—no matter their age, race, gender, sexual orientation, income level, ethnicity, beliefs, or physical or cognitive abilities—deserve access to opportunities, facilities, and places that enrich their lives. However, social, economic, political and cultural factors can often lead to uneven or unfair access to community resources and opportunities (Hughey et al., 2016; Rigolon & Németh, 2018). Where obstacles and differences divide us, park and recreation services can foster social equity, intercultural sensitivity, and racial, ethnic, and cultural inclusivity. We must work not only to address perceived needs, but also to identify and eliminate barriers that limit connections, access, and inclusivity.

Some park and recreation agencies already offer programming to address the diverse recreation needs of their communities. For example, most park and recreation agencies offer programs and activities specifically for people with physical or cognitive disabilities. Furthermore, some agencies have events and programs geared towards cultural and racial diversity as well as LGBTQ and refugee/immigrant communities. However, less than half of all recreation and park agencies have formal inclusion policies (NRPA, 2018). While taking steps to be more inclusive of the recreation needs of diverse populations may represent an initial financial and temporal investment, the resulting value of social equity should not be understated.

This Leadership Summit collaboration between DCNR and PRPS resulted in participants assessing the state of parks and recreation in Pennsylvania relative to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Listed below are the summarized results of the participant input at the Leadership Summit. Based on the dialogue from participants, several local/regional and statewide strategies for diversity, equity, and inclusion in Pennsylvania have been identified.

## **Discussion Questions**

### **1. How inclusive are your parks? Are your parks accessible to all residents? Do people of different backgrounds feel welcome in your parks?**

Participants recognized that the landscapes of their communities are changing as well as the overall demographic profile of PA. As such, there were representatives from communities that engage a vast

array of diverse consumers in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age and disability, and others that see very little diversity. Given the nature of community/municipal recreation, the intent is to be as welcoming to everyone as possible, but most acknowledged that it could be better. There were a number of barriers identified that impacted full inclusion and how welcome a consumer may feel. Some of the issues impacting inclusion included: increasing language barriers, community boundary issues, limited transportation opportunities, inclusive marketing strategies, challenges of gentrification and transitioning communities, and innovative inclusive programming ideas that engage their various constituents. Because of these issues, there were challenges with full access and how welcomed a consumer perceives the environment to be. Many of the participants felt their facilities met accessibility standards. However, most acknowledged that they are struggling with aging facilities, limited resources for facility and infrastructure updates, and a lack the assessment tools to determine if their facilities meet current guidelines.

### **Local/Regional Strategies**

- Develop comprehensive marketing tools with best practices for language, imagery, and techniques for reaching diverse markets.
- Develop a network of organizations/partners to facilitate outreach to diverse consumers.
- Create “Best Practices” training with topics focusing on innovative programming, consumer insights, communicating across cultures, universal design, etc.

### **Statewide Strategies**

- Consider developing PRPS Connect (similar concept to NRPA SmartBrief) with bi-weekly or monthly online Open Forums where professionals across the state can share ideas and showcase success, happenings, etc.
- Provide language training/interpretation resources.
- Develop an updated accessibility assessment tool with accommodation strategies.

## **2. What programs/facilities does your organization offer that appeal to diverse audiences?**

### **What programs/facilities draw less interest/utilization?**

Participants identified programs appealing to diverse audiences as those which are inclusive to all or are targeted toward a subpopulation or interest group within the community. Moreover, events, programs, and activities which are free, low cost, or subsidized for individuals of low socioeconomic status and help to establish connections, trust, and positive relationships with diverse audiences have been successful. Examples of successful initiatives included renting facilities to ethnic minority groups for functions, bringing parks to the people (e.g., outreach to schools or urban communities), and specifically inviting diverse groups to participate in events and programs. Some programs or facilities intended to attract diverse audiences have had low attendance, but recreation leaders did not always know why. Leaders recognized that low attendance rates may not equate to a lack of interest, but rather a perceived lack of safety, sense of welcome and belonging, or accommodation of different languages.

### **Local/Regional Strategies**

- Agencies should work toward establishing communication and trust with diverse audiences through promoting engagement of diverse populations in master planning processes (e.g., policies, facilities, programs, evaluation criteria).
- Provide programming which is relevant to the community and their expressed needs.

- Establish partnerships with community groups and utilize multilingual communication (e.g., promotion, marketing) to engage with diverse audiences and convey a welcoming atmosphere in park and recreation facilities and programs.

### **Statewide Strategies**

- Create a toolkit/guidelines for ways to design, implement, and evaluate diversity, equity, and inclusion programs. Have specific criteria for assessment on multiple levels (e.g., policies, recruitment strategies, number of people attending programs, perceived sense of welcome and belonging, etc.).
- Develop a case study guide which describes successful diversity, equity, and inclusion programs or practices from rural, suburban, and urban agencies and organizations. Consider reviewing past and current PRPS award winners for this.

### **3. What are the challenges you face in your community/organization for promoting a diverse workforce? What are recruitment practices that have yielded increased diversity in your workforce?**

There was an overall frustration among participants to identify, recruit, and hire diverse workers. Civil Service was cited as a barrier to creating and promoting a diverse workforce. While the Civil Service system was developed to protect workers and provide fair access to employment, participants noted that the current system actually inhibits diversity. There was a perceived and often actual lack of qualified candidates for vacancies in recreation and conservation careers. Participants identified that exposure to the outdoors can positively influence youth and teens to pursue employment and careers in recreation and conservation.

### **Local/Regional Strategies**

- Provide diversity and unconscious bias training for local and regional staff.
- Connect with local schools, community colleges, universities, etc. to develop career pipelines through presence at career days and bringing awareness to park and recreation career opportunities.
- Create and promote paid internships to attract lower income college students. While internships serve as gateways to careers, many students cannot afford not to get paid.

### **Statewide Strategies**

- Develop career pathways in the recreation and conservation fields for people with disabilities, people of color, disconnected youth, and adults lacking necessary workforce skills.
- Develop a recruitment toolkit for local agencies to increase diverse candidates for both Civil Service and open competitive jobs/careers in the recreation and conservation industry.
- Convene a (brainstorming) forum to develop strategies to expose the next generation of youth to recreation and conservation employment. Invite representatives of non-profits who are conducting park, recreation and outdoor programming for DEI audiences, as well as statewide and local agencies' leadership.

#### **4. Given the current political climate, how can parks and recreation be more proactive in addressing the new crisis affecting immigrants or refugees in our communities?**

Participants frequently identified the need for recreation and conservation to adapt accordingly with population changes. They noted that recreation leaders need to be flexible and understanding of different cultural norms and practices. Many emphasized the need to reach out to diverse minority groups, including immigrant and refugee communities, in their native languages to let them know what their departments have to offer and that both the programs and facilities are available for their use. Some participants recognized that parks and other facilities can serve as safe havens and can offer a sense of normalcy for people experiencing turmoil. There was an overall consensus that parks should be safe for all individuals and we should encourage existing residents of the community to welcome diverse audiences in the parks. Participants suggested that a two-way street of education that is between immigrants and other community members, could help promote sharing of culture as well as educate newcomers on the laws as well as available offerings from the park and recreation agencies.

##### **Local/Regional Strategies**

- Strengthen community partnerships with social service agencies to determine needs of the community, establish open lines of communication, and assist immigrant communities in their adjustment to a new culture.
- Encourage representation of immigrant and refugee populations in advisory groups and planning processes.
- Utilize multilingual communication and signage to convey welcoming messages as well as to show when groups or individuals have reserved areas of the park to reinforce that they are welcome to be in the space.
- Provide opportunities for the sharing of culture to help foster positive intercultural interactions among diverse individuals and support the development of intercultural competencies across the community.

##### **Statewide Strategies**

- Provide guidelines for establishing a welcoming culture in parks, facilities, and programs, especially with regard to suggestions for addressing language barriers (translation systems, multilingual guides, etc.) and promoting a two-way system of cultural education between immigrants/refugees and other community members.

#### **5. Based on the above questions: how do you know? What are the challenges to achieving this in your community?**

Participants noted informal feedback in their communities, but in general, did not know how they were doing with diversity, equity, and inclusion, largely due to the lack of a structured evaluation method.

##### **Statewide Strategies**

- Convene educators, evaluators, and practitioners to develop an accessible, practitioner friendly evaluation tool and provide training on its use and implementation.

## Top Strategies and Recommendations for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

1. **Integrate Diversity in Planning.** Encourage agencies to work toward establishing communication and trust with diverse audiences through promoting engagement of diverse populations in master planning processes (e.g., policies, facilities, programs, evaluation criteria).
2. **DEI Toolkit.** Create a toolkit/guidelines for ways to design, market, implement, and evaluate diversity, equity, and inclusion programs. Have specific criteria for assessment on multiple levels (e.g., policies, recruitment strategies, number of people attending programs, perceived sense of welcome and belonging, etc.).
3. **Welcoming Culture.** Provide guidelines for establishing a welcoming culture in parks, facilities, and programs, especially with regard to suggestions for addressing language barriers (translation systems, multilingual guides, etc.) and promoting a two-way system of cultural education between immigrants/refugees and other community members.
4. **Career Pathways.** Develop career pathways in the recreation and conservation fields for people with disabilities, people of color, disconnected youth, and adults lacking necessary workforce skills.
5. **Evaluation Tool.** Convene educators, evaluators, and practitioners to develop an accessible, practitioner friendly evaluation tool and provide training on its use and implementation.

## Personal Strategies

1. **Inclusion Statement.** Create an Inclusion Statement for your agency OR revise your Inclusion Statement if it is more than five years old.
2. **Partnerships.** Bring to the table three (3) to five (5) new organizations that you can partner with and describe what that partnership would entail.
3. **Assess & Comply.** Commit to assessing your agency's philosophy, policies and procedures, staffing, partnerships, collaborations, and programming for individuals and groups of individuals within the NRPA inclusion definition.
4. **Implement.** Commit to implementing one strategy adopted in the 2018 Recreation and Conservation Leadership Summit within 6 months of the Summit.

## Further Reading/Viewing

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- Hughey, S. M., Walsemann, K. M., Child, S., Powers, A., Reed, J. A., & Kaczynski, A. T. (2016). Using an environmental justice approach to examine the relationships between park availability and quality indicators, neighborhood disadvantage, and racial/ethnic composition. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, *148*, 159-169.
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- Rigolon, A., & Németh, J. (2018). What shapes uneven access to urban amenities? Thick injustice and the legacy of racial discrimination in Denver's parks. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X18789251>

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