

OFFICE OF THE DANE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
Dane County Parks and Henry Vilas Zoo Program Evaluation

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY REPORT

Introduction	1
Recommendations	3

APPENDIX A. COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

Introduction and Methodology.....	A-1
Summary Matrix of Equity Initiatives for Parks	A-3
Summary Matrix of Equity Initiatives for Zoos.....	A-4
Safety and Belonging.....	A-5
Diverse Communities	A-6
Disability Resources	A-8
Multilingual Support	A-10
LGBTQIA+ Inclusivity	A-11
Programs for Families	A-12
Youth Leadership	A-13
Inclusive Food and Dining	A-14
Community Outreach.....	A-15
Power of Communications.....	A-17
Feedback and Accountability	A-18

APPENDIX B. INTERNAL INPUT

Introduction and Methodology	B-1
Overall Effectiveness Serving Diverse Audiences	B-2
Equity and Inclusion as a Priority.....	B-4
Impact of Limited Diversity Among Staff and Volunteers	B-6
Welcoming and Belonging	B-7
Safety and Incidents of Bias and Racism.....	B-9
Marketing, Communications and Outreach	B-11
Youth Programs	B-14
Financial Access	B-15
People with Disabilities.....	B-16
Transportation	B-17
Hours of Operation.....	B-18
Funding and Resource Constraints	B-19

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPENDIX C. COMMUNITY SURVEY

Introduction	C-1
Demographics of Respondents	C-2
Activities of Respondents.....	C-8
General Comments	C-10
Communications and Outreach to Diverse Communities.....	C-11
Information and Signage in Multiple Languages.....	C-12
Multicultural Programming and Events	C-13
Land Recognition.....	C-14
Events and Activities for Families.....	C-15
Restrictive Permits and Fees.....	C-16
Visitor Information	C-17
Representation.....	C-18
Gender Inclusive Bathrooms.....	C-19
Accessibility.....	C-20
Transportation and Parking	C-22
Extended Hours.....	C-23
Facility Maintenance	C-24
Survey Instrument.....	C-25

APPENDIX D. EQUITY PLANS

Introduction.....	D-1
Professional Associations	D-2
Municipalities and Other Entities	D-7

SUMMARY REPORT. Introduction



The Office of the Dane County Board of Supervisors seeks to further advance and strengthen equity, inclusion, access and belonging for current and future visitors to Dane County Parks and Henry Vilas Zoo. Keen Independent Research (Keen Independent) assessed the current state of equity and inclusion across these facilities and programs.¹

Keen Independent performed quantitative and qualitative research to help Dane County (County) better understand the characteristics of who is and who is not utilizing its Parks and Zoo facilities and programs.

Sharing thoughts about race, gender and other aspects of social equity is sensitive. County staff and external stakeholders had frank discussions with the Keen Independent team throughout this study. This evaluation incorporates diverse voices from across the community.²

This study launched in December 2021 with completion in August 2022.³ This report will help guide the County to enhance diverse community participation in its facilities and programs, ultimately becoming a more inclusive, equitable and racially just place for all.

¹ The 2018 Dane County Land and Water Resources Department's Equity and Inclusion Plan and Henry Vilas Zoo's 2018 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan guided this work.

² Throughout this report, "study" and "evaluation" (first used in the third paragraph) are interchangeable terms used to describe the work Keen Independent conducted for the Office of the Dane County Board of Supervisors.

Study Approach

Keen Independent collected and analyzed information through:

- Focus groups and interviews with internal and external stakeholders;
- On-site surveys;
- Public meetings;
- Analyses of County policies, programs and services;
- Dedicated study website, telephone hotline and email;
- Targeted communications in English, Spanish and Hmong;
- Literature review of industry best practices (national and international); and
- Other relevant research.

One study component alone (community surveys) obtained input from nearly 600 community members.

³ In March 2022, the County notified Keen Independent of an internal investigation at Henry Vilas Zoo. This study was initiated by the County Board Office in December 2021 as an external and public facing study of broad equity and access at Dane County Parks and Henry Vilas Zoo, and was not initiated in response to internal workforce concerns at the Zoo.

SUMMARY REPORT. Introduction

Study Participants

Keen Independent interviewed 30-plus internal stakeholders including:

- Dane County Office for Equity and Inclusion staff and Tamara D. Grigsby Office for Equity and Inclusion Advisory Board;
- Parks Managers;
- Parks Rangers;
- Parks Youth Career Pathways staff;
- Zoo Education staff;
- Zoo senior staff; and
- Dane County Board and Parks Commission members.

Local partners were also part of an ad-hoc advisory group convened by Keen Independent, including:

- Madison Children’s Museum;
- Ho-Chunk Nation;
- Operation Fresh Start;
- Access to Independence;
- Madison Public Library;
- Nehemia Center for Justice and Reconciliation;
- One City Schools;
- Goodman Center;
- Centro Hispano of Dane County;
- Color in the Outdoors;
- OutReach; and
- Madtown Mommas and Disability Advocates.

Keen Independent obtained input from:

- Parks users and Zoo visitors;
- Parks and Zoo non-users and non-visitors;
- Community leaders and others advocating for diverse communities, and their constituents;
- Faith-based leaders;
- Friends of the Parks and Zoo and other volunteers; and
- Other interested individuals.

The community survey was also distributed to about 90 community partners of the Dane County Parks and Henry Vilas Zoo to share among the groups they represent, as well as at several BIPOC and other Parks and Zoo community events.

Henry Vilas Zoo entrance



Source: Keen Independent.

SUMMARY REPORT. Recommendations



Keen Independent provides nine recommendations based on the results of this evaluation. Key themes driving these recommendations include the need for: (a) leadership to spearhead equity efforts and set clear expectations, and (b) a cultural shift from focusing solely on stewardship of the land and natural living world to welcoming diverse communities and individuals that use and experience them.

A summary of the nine recommendations is on the right. Supporting information and expanded recommendations can be found in Appendices A through D.

In some cases, the recommendations to the right include Parks and Zoo initiatives under consideration or in progress that could benefit from added leadership support and financial resources.

As context, Dane County Parks and Henry Vilas Zoo have assembled Diversity, Equity and Inclusion teams to set standards for equity planning and policymaking. This report highlights only some examples of the equity initiatives that the Parks and Zoo had underway when this study began.

1. Embed top-down equity plan
2. Offer information and signage in multiple languages
3. Improve experience for persons with disabilities
4. Strengthen inclusion for LGBTQIA+ community
5. Expand local partnerships
6. Strengthen family and youth programming
7. Embrace unique dietary choices
8. Celebrate diversity
9. Develop mechanisms to gather and respond to feedback and measure outcomes

In the following nine pages, each of the recommendations is explained in detail. Support for these recommendations is in the left column (results), followed by steps to move forward in the right column (potential actions).

SUMMARY REPORT. Recommendations

1. Embed top-down equity plan

Results. A “top-down” equity plan can provide a path forward to implement the recommendations in this report and further build internal buy-in and community engagement.

Learning from others. Dane County Parks and Zoo can learn from how similar organizations have embedded equity and inclusion across their planning and operations, using a top-down and community-inclusive approach. In Appendix D, Keen Independent provides examples of equity plans that draw from professional associations and industry best practices. A sample of these insights is provided below.

Describe the specific actions you would like your CEO/senior leaders to take in the first three months of your strategic DE&I management plan. These actions should, at a minimum, include participating in the creation of your vision, mission and strategy, and a commitment to put his or her name to all company-wide communication about the new plan.

Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Guide to Developing a Strategic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan, Commitment from the Top

Designating resources. Internal stakeholders of the Parks and Zoo described resources for equity and inclusion initiatives as requiring trade-offs akin to a “zero-sum game” (i.e., they can only get the resources they need to advance equity efforts by taking them from something else or some other audience). Along with the current reliance on individual initiative, the “zero-sum” dynamic has meant that Parks and Zoo efforts are often sporadic rather than ongoing and sustainable. There is a need for designated and sustainable resources for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access and Belonging (DEIAB) planning and implementation.

Potential actions. An equity plan should include the following.

- a. Leadership sets expectations for access and inclusion and builds internal and external buy-in.
- b. DEIAB is embedded in the organizational mission, vision and strategy, and operations of the Parks and Zoo.
- c. The “why” driving DEIAB initiatives is clearly conveyed.
- d. Organizational culture focuses on community use of lands, not just preserving and protecting lands.
- e. Ongoing input from and feedback to diverse and underrepresented groups is a priority (all groups feel safe, have a sense of belonging).
- f. Parks and Zoo initiatives are shared to strengthen support for DEIAB. (Parks and Zoo work together.)
- g. Management and staff are empowered with education, tools and financial resources. Additional resources dedicated to DEIAB might be, at a minimum, in the range of 1–2 FTEs each for Parks and for the Zoo plus additional annual budgets for communications, partnerships and programs in the range of \$200,000 to \$500,000 for each organization. Future capital improvements will need resources for improved language, physical accessibility, gender-neutral bathrooms and other equity investments.

I do struggle to imagine, how I can empower [staff] to do that extra program without having it negatively impact our existing users

Internal stakeholder

SUMMARY REPORT. Recommendations

Zoo for All, Woodland Park Zoo



Source: <https://twitter.com/woodlandparkzoo>.

2. Offer information and signage in multiple languages

Results. Dane County has a significant population who may be more comfortable listening to and reading information in Spanish, Hmong or other languages. Providing more universal communications in multiple languages can increase equity, inclusion, access and belonging for residents and visitors.

Instructional materials and signage in multiple languages.

Community survey results in Appendix C suggest that resources in multiple languages can welcome visitors who do not read or speak English well. Examples from other parks and zoos include multilingual site maps, brochures, event information and community resources, as well as ADA-compliant wayfinding and directional signage.

Multilingual exhibits. Some zoos have multilingual exhibits welcoming visitors who do not read or speak English well. (See Appendix A.)

Potential actions. The Parks and Zoo should reimagine communications to include languages that are most often spoken among diverse communities in the County (e.g., Spanish and Hmong).

- a. Create targeted communications in multiple languages including:
 - Promotional and outreach materials;
 - Welcome signs and wayfinding; and
 - Translations for exhibits and historical markers.
- b. Provide website translation function. (Note: the Parks website offers this function; the Zoo does not currently offer website translation.)
- c. Support bilingual staff and engage volunteers for live translations.

“It’s one of our priorities ... different welcome signage in multiple languages, having important notices in Spanish and English, or ... like if you have a map of the Park, maybe ‘You are here’ in multiple languages ... but currently we don’t have a whole lot. Our website [can] be translated into virtually any language ... but any of our PDFs we have to do on a case-by-case basis”

Internal stakeholder

They should advertise in multiple languages. I only see signs in English.

Hispanic American man

SUMMARY REPORT. Recommendations

3. Improve experience for persons with disabilities

Results. Study results in Appendices A, B and C demonstrate that the community expects the Parks and Zoo to do more to enhance experiences for persons with disabilities.

Physical environment. Parks and Zoo staff and others reported access issues at certain Zoo entrances, as well as the need for signage in the Parks to notify users when terrain and paths are not wheelchair friendly or may be challenging for persons with mobility issues. Community survey respondents mentioned the need for improved ramps, level and smooth walkways, wayfinding signage, accessible trails, accessible viewing areas for persons using wheelchairs or other mobility devices, free or rentable motorized scooters and larger wheelchair sizes.

Other parks and zoos across the country are adapting current programs as well as creating new programs for persons with disabilities. For example, some offer equipment such as adaptive rowing equipment that increases accessibility for individuals who cannot otherwise participate.

Sensory experience. Many zoos are providing stickers, buttons, free sensory kits or bags for families to pick up at the start of their visits.⁴ Other zoos have designated quiet zones or headphone zones, smell zones and cold zones on their digital and physical maps. Henry Vilas Zoo certified as a sensory-friendly zoo through KultureCity,⁵ but has opportunities to expand on its successes as do the Parks.

Option for self-identification. Staff reported that persons with hidden disabilities could benefit from staff awareness to improve experiences.

Potential actions. To improve disability access and inclusion, the Parks and Zoo should:

- a. Create welcoming physical environment.
 - Build resources for state-of-the-art adaptive equipment.
 - Add rest stops and benches.
 - Provide accessible viewing around Zoo exhibits and scenic areas at the Parks.
 - Maintain smooth, even and level pavement.
 - Include signage about rough terrain or strenuous slopes.
- b. Create sensory-friendly environments.
 - Designate quiet or sensory-supportive inclusion zones.
 - Develop and promote low-sensory events.
- c. Offer optional wearable identifiers such as stickers, buttons or backpacks that can enhance positive experiences.

.... we have needed assistive devices to access your zoo ... either didn't exist, or couldn't fit a larger body, and so we had to leave.

Person identifying with a disability

⁴ See the Fresno Chaffee Zoo "George's Pass" optional sticker program (Appendix A).

⁵ <https://www.kulturecity.org/>.

SUMMARY REPORT. Recommendations

4. Strengthen inclusion for LGBTQIA+ community

Results. Study results in Appendices A and C demonstrate that the Parks and Zoo have an opportunity to better foster belonging for members of the LGBTQIA+ community and provide safe and welcoming environments.

Inclusive experiences, design and artwork. The comparative exercise and survey research show that inclusive experiences, design and art can be a welcoming gesture for members of the LGBTQIA+ community. For example, Oregon Metro features Pride and Transgender Pride flags painted on benches throughout one Portland Park. Some zoos are showcasing gender diversity in the animal world.

LGBTQIA+ events and programs. Another show of inclusivity is celebrating Pride week or month through in-person events and social media posts. Oklahoma City Zoo, for example, offers Pride Date Night to provide a safe environment for gathering.

Example of Pride park bench



Source: Adobe Stock.

Potential actions. To communicate that the Parks and Zoo are inclusive of all gender identities, they should build resources to:

- a. Incorporate inclusive and welcoming experiences.
- b. Seek LGBTQIA+ community input for inclusive storytelling and art.
- c. Host pride celebrations and events.
- d. Communicate that gender-neutral bathrooms are offered.
- e. Avoid binary pronouns in communications.

Gender inclusive bathrooms would be huge — my spouse is trans and no matter what bathroom he chooses, he may still be at risk of bigotry and hate if it's assigned to a gender. Even just having a few bathrooms in the Zoo that aren't assigned to a specific gender would help a lot.

Person identifying as with a disability

Gender inclusive bathrooms that feel safe for people of any gender.

Non-Hispanic white woman

SUMMARY REPORT. Recommendations

5. Expand local partnerships

Results. Dane County Parks and Zoo staff and survey respondents reported the need for continual outreach and relationship building to improve programming and provide authentic experiences.

Partnerships. As noted in Appendix D, industry standards for DEIAB encourage building equity plans with community participation, including input from underrepresented groups. Although Dane County Parks and Zoo reported partnerships with upwards of 90 area community organizations, service providers, libraries, educators and others, sustaining these relationships requires designated resources to build outreach and feedback mechanisms.

Authentic experiences. Survey respondents suggested the need to support ethnic and cultural educational experiences enhanced through strong relationships with local non-profits and other community-based organizations and schools.

Potential actions. Ongoing community engagement can help align Parks and Zoo programming with community needs. The Parks and Zoo should:

- a. Strengthen partnerships with local advocates and service providers.
- b. Seek input from local organizers, give them a voice.
- c. Encourage collaboration among partners.
- d. Provide forums for sharing information and ideas.

As DEIAB goes well beyond the boundaries of the Parks and Zoo, Dane County Parks and Zoo should also provide opportunity for collaboration among its 90 partners.

Oregon Metro and Immigrant and Refugee Organization partnership



Source: <https://www.oregonmetro.gov/parks-and-nature-community-partnerships-program>.

SUMMARY REPORT. Recommendations

6. Strengthen family and youth programming

Results. Many survey respondents reported the need to strengthen family and youth programming, expand facility hours for working parents and provide transportation to remote parks.

Family programming. Community members emphasized family-inclusive programs and events (see Appendix C). They also perceived that current outreach to diverse families is weak.

Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy's Roving Ranger mobile park ranger station and LA Ranger Troca provide examples of how to meet people where they are (see Appendix A).

Youth engagement. Paid internship programs and volunteering opportunities for diverse youth, if strengthened, could create stronger ties to underrepresented communities.

Roving Ranger mobile park ranger station



Source: <https://www.asla.org/2016awards/158531.html>.

Potential actions. Implement inclusive programming for families, caretakers and youth to build early relationships with the Parks and Zoo and encourage continued engagement later in life.

- a. Seek input from educators and other community partners.
- b. Offer or expand paid internships and volunteer opportunities for diverse youth.
- c. Hold free activities for youth, families and caretakers in the evenings.
- d. Extend summer and holiday hours.
- e. Target programming to schools serving diverse communities.
- f. Fund resources to bring the Parks and Zoo to underrepresented communities (e.g., mobile Parks and Zoo bus).
- g. Build partnerships for transportation access to Parks and Zoo.

Partnering or supporting Black churches, community centers, schools with high diversity numbers, could all be good opportunities. It's not about "attracting" them but more about helping them have access through bussing or other modes of transport. Setting up a transit system for these communities would be far too costly but partnerships could be ideal.

Native American woman

SUMMARY REPORT. Recommendations

7. Embrace unique dietary needs

Results. Survey respondents suggested that food can be an important aspect of belonging. Appendix A details what others are doing about food.

Special diets. Whether a person has a food allergy or disease that limits their food options or follows a religious, cultural or lifestyle diet, having a variety of food options and allowing outside foods helps make experiences more inclusive.

Ethnic and cultural experiences. Some community survey respondents recommended more ethnic and cultural events and programming along with a celebration of associated foods to increase the sense of belonging among diverse communities and educate others.

Top 8 allergen free logo



Source: Adobe Stock.

Potential actions. When offering food at the Zoo or as part of Parks events and programming:

- a. Ensure a variety of dining options, and expanded menus.
- b. Offer allergy-friendly menus.
- c. Promote outside food as welcome at the Zoo.
- d. Add food trucks or other opportunities for ethnic and cultural foods.
- e. Tie food to Zoo exhibits to strengthen ethnic and cultural experiences.

Rotating culturally/geographic-specific exhibits. Example: Create a guide that specifically points to African savannah animals, invite presenters who are from Africa to do specific kid-friendly talks and presentations. Highlight the people, culture, invite a food truck specific to the region.

Non-Hispanic white woman

Perhaps have a variety of foods and sweets that are liked by a diverse clientele.

Hispanic American woman

SUMMARY REPORT. Recommendations

8. Celebrate diversity

Results. The study showed the need to better welcome diverse groups.

Underrepresentation. People of color and women do not often see other visitors like themselves when they visit the Parks, nor may they see many staff or volunteers like them. The absence of “like” visitors and staff for visitors from underrepresented groups can signal that this is a place they do not belong or a place that might not even be safe.

Naming conventions and acknowledgements. Several internal stakeholders perceived naming conventions for Dane County Parks (in some cases) to be symbols of “white settlement bias.” To be inclusive, one internal stakeholder suggested that equity be embedded in the Parks naming conventions to ensure that people of color, women and other diverse groups feel welcome.⁶

A staff member added that antiquated exhibits misrepresenting Indigenous cultures are of similar concern and are likely doing more harm than good. Instead, the Zoo needs to engage partners to create authentic immersive exhibits.

Some parks are providing Indigenous land acknowledgements to recognize, respect and affirm the ongoing relationship between Indigenous people and the land, and raise awareness about preserving Indigenous histories, perspectives and experiences.⁷

Restrictions. Staff and survey respondents perceived permitting and licensing as unwelcoming, and burdening individuals of limited means.

Potential actions. Multicultural offerings can encourage visits from diverse groups. Comparative research indicated that ethnic and cultural events can be more successful when executed with a partner organization that is well versed in the cultures and customs. (See Appendix A, for examples.)

- a. Engage diverse partners in inclusive programming.
- b. Support authentic experiences, festivals and events.
- c. Include opportunities for land recognition and other acknowledgements.
- d. Retire Parks names and other artifacts of white colonialism.
- e. Feature diverse communities in promotions.
- f. Welcome underserved communities with targeted outreach.
- g. Rethink restrictive permitting and licensing.

[Do I] feel welcome as a person of color when ... other people recreating there are not, or as a woman, if everyone hunting is male?
Internal stakeholder

Most of our parks are named after white men. Period ... just named a park after a white man Equity ... look at naming conventions.
Internal stakeholder

⁶ For instance, California State Park and Recreation Commission renamed a park in 2021 to Sue-meg (first named for a man who performed atrocities against Indigenous people).

⁷ <https://nativegov.org/news/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/>.

SUMMARY REPORT. Recommendations

9. Develop mechanisms to gather and respond to feedback and measure outcomes

Results. Gathering and responding to ongoing feedback and tracking outcomes are key components of a strong DEIAB plan.

Hearing from those who do not visit. People already coming to parks and zoos have lines of communication to those organizations, but it is difficult to hear from those who are not visiting. For example, the Zoo captures visitor input at its welcome kiosk but is missing non-visitors.

Other organizations provide examples of how to better obtain and respond to visitor and community feedback, especially among groups that are currently underserved by a public agency. For example, the National Recreation and Park Association’s Community Engagement Resource Guide provides measurement tools and case studies for securing community input and meeting communities where they are.⁸ (See Appendix A and D for other examples.)

Feedback tools. Parks and Zoo can benefit from a continuous feedback loop specifically designed to welcome conversation with visitors.

The following example shows how existing communications tools can be strengthened. Dane County Parks has a link to a “Report a Problem” form on its website, but it is not designed for DEIAB feedback. This tool primarily functions as an incident report system for vandalism and downed trees. Communications is mostly one-way (visitors to Parks) with limited or no follow up. Parks needs additional methods for visitors to engage in conversations about equity, inclusion and access.

⁸<https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/19b3cbe05a634d5e8d3b712dbc8aa9d0/community-engagement-guide-nrpa.pdf>.

Potential actions. Providing and maintaining an open door of communication with the community can help gauge how well the Parks and Zoo are doing. This can also help the Parks and Zoo learn about new ways to be more equitable and inclusive.

- a. Actively seek feedback from Parks and Zoo visitors and non-visitors.
- b. Develop an online portal and other methods for comments and feedback.
- c. Review, learn from and respond to feedback.
- d. Track and measure outcomes.

Parks volunteer surveying kayakers



Source: Keen Independent.

SUMMARY REPORT. Recommendations

Implementation

Implementation of these nine recommendations will not happen overnight. A key step would be to initiate the development of a top-down equity plan to set expectations and build internal and external buy in for DEIAB initiatives (to be shared by the Parks and Zoo). Fully embedding the plan would likely be accomplished over time, as Dane County Parks and Zoo build funding and resources for implementation and roll out.

The right column provides suggested steps for next steps.

William G. Lunney Lake Farm County Park



Source: Keen Independent.

- Securing senior-level buy-in and communication of commitment to community stakeholders and employees.
- Assigning responsibilities for launch of new DEIAB efforts.
- Embedding DEIAB into other planning efforts, immediately (including master plans).
- Building, strengthening and sustaining partnerships with historically underserved groups (racial/ethnic, Spanish and Hmong speakers, LGBTQIA+, low-income and transit-dependent, persons with disabilities and others).
- Piloting new outreach, programming and internships to evaluate what works and to identify “quick wins.”
- Finding budget and staff slots for a larger more sustainable effort.
- Reporting back to senior leadership and the community, continuously.

APPENDIX A. Comparative research — Introduction and methodology

Appendix A comparative research demonstrates how Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access and Belonging (DEIAB) can be embedded in park system and zoo policies and practices.

This appendix begins with an introduction and methodology followed by two matrices comparing Dane County Parks and Henry Vilas Zoo equity and accessibility initiatives with practices from other parks and zoos.

Subsequent pages provide detailed examples of commonly implemented practices, as well as new innovations in DEIAB. Key topics include:

- Safety and belonging;
- Diverse communities;
- Disability resources;
- Multilingual support;
- LGBTQIA+ inclusivity;
- Programs for families;
- Youth leadership;
- Inclusive food and dining;
- Community outreach;
- Power of communications; and
- Feedback and accountability.

A. Comparative research — Introduction and methodology

Parks

Keen Independent examined equity policy and initiatives for 30 parks throughout the United States. Research also included guidelines and examples from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA).

Through secondary research, Keen Independent identified typical as well as unique practices being implemented within park and recreation systems. Parks included in this appendix were selected based on their proximity to Dane County, comparable size or innovative practices. In Figure A-3 on the following page, Dane County Parks are also compared with City of Madison Parks.

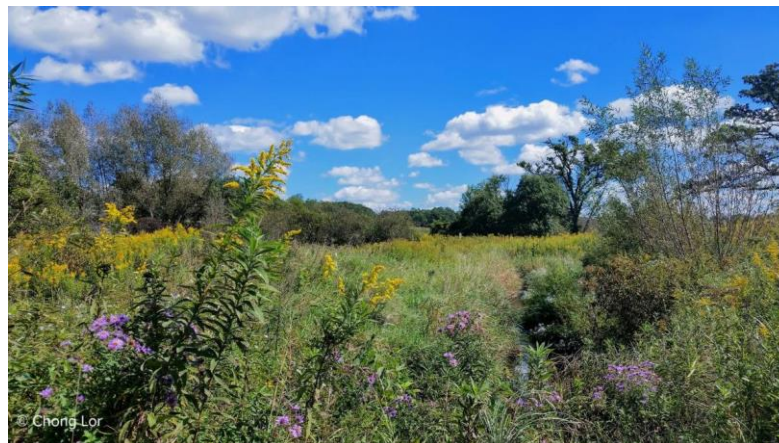
Zoos

Keen Independent also researched 45 zoos both nationally and internationally to learn from DEIAB policies and practices.

Including guidelines from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), secondary research was similarly used to identify typical and unique equity initiatives being implemented by zoos. The case studies are for zoos of comparable size, those that have unique practices or zoos offering free admittance (and sometimes all three attributes).

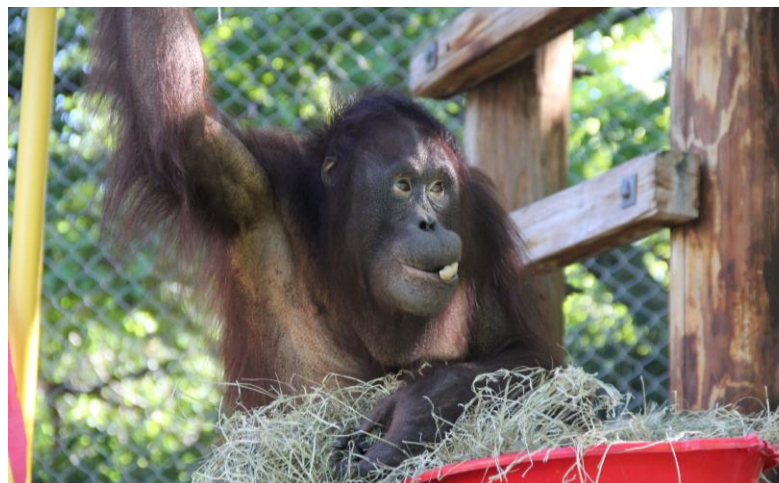
Figure A-4 on page 4 compares Henry Vilas Zoo equity initiatives to other zoos.

A-1. Donald County Park in Dane County



Source: <https://www.visitmadison.com/listings/donald-county-park/183058/>.

A-2. Orangutan at Henry Vilas Zoo



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/HenryVilasZoo/photos>.

A. Comparative research — Summary matrix of equity initiatives for parks

A-3. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access and Belonging comparative practices, parks

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Best Practice	Dane County Parks*	City of Madison	Oregon Metro	Metroparks Toledo	LA County Parks	Ottawa County Parks	Willamalane Parks
Community input feature on website	■						■
Cultural and historical markers and education tools			■				
Cultural programming and events					■		
DEI and intercultural competence staff training	■					■	
Early reservation for large-scale events			■				
External complaint procedure	■						■
Familiarize community with outdoors before visiting the park		■					
Gender-inclusive restrooms	■						■
Inclusive design and artwork			■				
Increased public transportation options	■			■			
Joint events with community organizations	■		■				
Multi-language paper and digital marketing materials						■	
Multi-language signs at park entrance			■				
Multi-language translation function on website	■	■					
Partnerships with local non-profits, schools and libraries	■	■					
Programming and events for families	■	■		■	■		
Programming and events for persons with disabilities	■			■			
Public transportation options on website	■			■			
Social media presence reflects DEI efforts	■		■	■	■		
Scholarships available for children's programs and camps	■			■	■	■	
Youth leadership opportunities for underserved groups	■	■					

*Note: Some related initiatives at Dane County Parks are underway but can be strengthened or improved with additional support and financial resources.

Source: Keen Independent Research secondary research.

A. Comparative research — Summary matrix of equity initiatives for zoos

A-4. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access and Belonging comparative practices, zoos

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Best Practice	Henry Vilas Zoo*, **	Smithsonian National Zoo*	Lincoln Park Zoo*	St. Louis Zoo*	Como Park Zoo & Conservatory*	Fresno Chaffee Zoo	Denver Zoo	Cincinnati Zoo	Memphis Zoo	Woodland Park Zoo
ADA compliance	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Adult changing table						■		■		
Allergy-friendly food items available or outside food allowed	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		■
Cultural programming and events			■				■			
Designated area for nursing mothers	■					■				
DEI and intercultural competence staff training							■			
Ethnic and Indigenous education experiences						■	■			■
Ethnic and Indigenous food options						■				■
Programming and events for families	■		■		■	■	■	■		■
Free passes for community organizations or libraries										■
Free community days							■		■	
Gender-inclusive restrooms/facilities						■				
Identified sensory zones	■	■		■	■	■		■		■
Identifiers for people with disabilities						■				
LGBTQIA+ programming and events	■								■	
Motorized vehicle, wheelchair or stroller rental	■	■				■	■			
Multi-language translation function on website			■				■	■		
Multi-language materials or exhibits		■								■
Non-restaurant dining options, i.e. food trucks								■		
Programming and events for persons with disabilities		■			■	■	■	■		■
Partnerships with local nonprofits, schools and libraries	■		■		■			■		■
Social media presence reflects DEI efforts				■		■				■
Social narratives or pre-visit introduction video		■				■				■
Sensory kits/bags available	■					■		■		
Translators present	■									

*Note: Free-admission zoo.

**Note: Some related initiatives at Henry Vilas Zoo are underway but can be strengthened or improved with additional support and financial resources.

Source: Keen Independent Research secondary research.

A. Comparative research — Safety and belonging

Keen Independent recognized a theme throughout staff interviews, as well as through survey input: It is important to understand that even though there are programs, events, and spaces open to all, some communities and individuals may still feel unwelcome and unsafe.

Guest Code of Conduct

Through secondary research, Keen Independent identified zoos such as Toronto Zoo and Lincoln Park Zoo that have a clear Guest Code of Conduct present on their website. The top of the webpage states that the zoo is committed to creating a welcoming and safe environment for all guests, which is the responsibility of everyone. These guidelines specifically state that harassment, racism, hate speech, offensive gestures, and other forms of abusive treatment will not be tolerated and provide a way for guests to make a report or call for on-site security.

Adding a code of conduct to both the Dane County Parks and Zoo websites is a free and effective way to show the priorities of the organization and demonstrate the safety measures in place for guests before they visit.

Increasing Representation

Increasing representation is one of the most important ways a park or zoo can create a more welcoming, safe environment and ensure visitors perceive that they belong in those spaces. Organizations such as Outdoor Afro, Latino Outdoors, GirlTrek, Pride Outdoors and others offer partnerships with parks and will share events and programs on their websites and social media platforms. Parks can also participate in established social media efforts like Black Hikers Week to highlight, promote and present a more representative visitor base. Dane County Parks and Zoo could draw from similar relationships to identify new channels for reaching underrepresented communities.

A-5. Lincoln Park Zoo code of conduct

Guest Guidelines and Code of Conduct

Welcome to Lincoln Park Zoo. We are committed to creating an environment that is inclusive and welcoming. We celebrate the diverse backgrounds, perspectives, values, and experiences of all people.

Creating a safe, welcoming space for all is a responsibility for everyone.

We expect guests, staff, and volunteers to treat one another—as well as zoo animals and grounds—with respect and care. By visiting the zoo, you agree to adhere to our code of conduct and visitor guidelines, which help protect both people and animals.

Source: <https://www.lpzoo.org/guest-guidelines-and-code-of-conduct/>.

A-6. Outdoor Afro Group in Madison, Wisconsin



Source: <https://madison365.com/outdoor-afro-comes-madison-black-people-nature-meet/>.

A. Comparative research — Diverse communities

Culturally Immersive Exhibits

Keen Independent identified immersive exhibits at several zoos that link customs and culture with conservation and animal habitat. These types of exhibits, when authentic, provide avenues for embedding the principles of DEI into the zoo experience.

Fort Worth Zoo in Texas, for example, houses two immersive exhibits as part of its, A Wilder Vision. The image on the right is part of the Elephant Springs (Asian elephant) exhibit, featuring a themed fishing village including handmade fishing poles, nets, hanging rugs and hand-painted barrels and buoys. The same zoo also houses the African Savanna experience where visitors can taste authentic snacks from two African-themed stands. (For more on inclusive foods see page 14.)

Fresno Chaffee Zoo in California is scheduled to open its Kingdoms of Asia, an exhibit modelled on Angkor Wat in modern Cambodia. Zoo leaders assembled a cultural advisory group consisting of local leaders and academic experts to work with exhibit designers and consultants to ensure a culturally relevant and accurate experience. (See image on next page.)

Partnerships

Supporting ethnic and cultural educational experiences can be enhanced through strong relationships with local non-profits and other community-based organizations and schools, as demonstrated by Dane County Parks' and Henry Vilas Zoo's combined list of more than 100 partners representing African American, Hispanic American, Hmong, Ho Chunk Nation and other diverse communities in the County.

Other examples include Denver Zoo in Colorado, which invites local partners to enrich zoo experiences. For instance, Denver Zoo engages speakers from the non-profit Mexican Cultural Center for a talk about the lifecycle of the monarch butterfly and the cultural significance of the species in central Mexico.

Maybe we could do cultural days ... [For example] if you go to the African exhibit, you can taste some of the African food.

Zoo Staff Representative

"You have to have some type of attraction that would interest people in the various targeted groups You're not going to be able to attract everybody to [everything]."

DEI Personnel Group Representative

A-7. Fort Worth Zoo Elephant Springs exhibit



Source: <https://www.papercitymag.com/culture/fort-worth-zoo-elephant-springs-new-habitat-rhinos/#337280>.

A. Comparative research — Diverse communities

Indigenous Connections to Land

Oregon Metro Parks, as part of its Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan, focuses on connecting Indigenous history to the land. The Action Plan also includes strategies for renaming sites to acknowledge cultural and historical ties to Indigenous and other diverse communities. Dane County Parks might consider a similar approach, as some parks have names and historical markers that might evoke “white settlement bias” (see Appendix B and Summary Report recommendations, for more examples).

Another approach that some parks and zoos are implementing is preparing land acknowledgement statements along with their mission statements. The purpose is to recognize, respect and affirm the ongoing relationship between Indigenous people and the land; and raise awareness about and preserve Indigenous histories, perspectives and experiences that are often suppressed or forgotten. However, such statements can be perceived as insincere if they are not supported by meaningful actions. A statement alone is not enough.

Authentic on-site cultural and historical markers and sensory experiences (including art, music, dance and other experiences, as examples) could expand ways to help engage diverse communities.

Racial, Ethnic and Cultural Celebrations

Recognizing racial, ethnic and cultural events and holidays in person or on social media could create a sense of belonging for the groups that are acknowledged. Dane County Parks and Zoo could share parallel events and online posts including recognizing Juneteenth, Black History Month, Native American Heritage Month, National Hispanic Heritage Month, Hmong Heritage Month, Indigenous People’s Day and other significant events or celebrations. Inviting people of color and Indigenous communities to the table to plan these acknowledgements would help initiate authentic experiences.

A-8. Fresno Chaffee Zoo Kingdoms of Asia exhibit simulation



Source: <https://clrdesign.com/project/kingdoms-of-asia/>.

We do have some historical markers placed throughout our [parks] that are managed by the Wisconsin Historical Society, and just from casually going around and reading those, I've definitely ... picked up on a 'white settlement bias' in a lot of them I'm thinking particularly of one that is posted at Pheasant Branch County Park explaining the encampment that was there during the Native American wars that were in this area.

Parks Rangers Group Representative

Nobody talks about [the fact that] the first Park Rangers were African American These are the things that need to be said that nobody talks about Now we need to talk about those things so that our kids are not ignorant ... and perhaps then they would have more of an appreciation.

DEI Personnel Group Representative

A. Comparative research — Disability resources

Adaptive Programming and Accommodations

Keen Independent identified various zoos and parks that are adapting their current programs as well as creating new programs specifically for persons with disabilities.

Physical ability. Metroparks Toledo provides adaptive paddles and specialized wrist and hand equipment for oars that are free to use with any boat rental. These additions create an inclusive experience for paddlers needing physical assistance (See Figure A-9.).

Montgomery Parks in Maryland offers an Access on Wheels unit that can service the parks during larger events. The unit includes wheelchairs, ramps, mobility mats, water bowls for service animals and assisted listening devices. (See Figure A-10.)

Park systems such as Los Angeles County are hosting recreation-for-all activities, workshops and special interest classes. Free and open to all ability levels, these events welcome participation from persons with disabilities, as well as other groups.

Additionally, to ensure that visitors using wheelchairs can view exhibits, San Francisco Zoo lowered many railings around its animal habitats.

Visual impairment and blindness. For persons with hearing or visual impairment or blindness, Smithsonian National Zoo has a designated email address for accommodating visitor sign language interpretation or audio description requests.

The San Francisco Zoo incorporated braille into its tactile Sculpture Learning Garden. However, limiting accommodations for persons with sight impairment or blindness to braille alone can miss individuals with some level of sight impairment but no fluency in braille.

A-9. Metroparks Toledo adaptive rowing equipment



Source: <https://www.metroparks.com/new-adaptive-paddling-equipment-available-at-kensington-and-stony-creek-metroparks-thanks-to-mparks-grant/>.

A-10. Montgomery Parks Access on Wheels



Source: <https://montgomeryparks.org/about/parks/accessibility/inclusive-special-events-and-programs/>.

A. Comparative research — Disability resources

Sensory Sensitivities

In addition to Henry Vilas Zoo, many other zoos are providing free sensory kits or bags for families to pick up at the start of their visits. St. Louis Zoo, like Henry Vilas Zoo, has partnered with KultureCity¹ to identify quiet zones or headphone zones, smell zones and cold zones on their digital and physical maps so persons with sensitivities are aware.

The Cincinnati Zoo in collaboration with the Cincinnati Children's Hospital and University of Cincinnati opened two calming rooms for visitors with sensory sensitivities. These rooms include dimming lights, a rocking chair, crash pad, projector with calming images, bubble wall, stereo, vibrating pillow and a weighted lap pad. This zoo also provides a sensory map for visitor use (see Figure A-11).

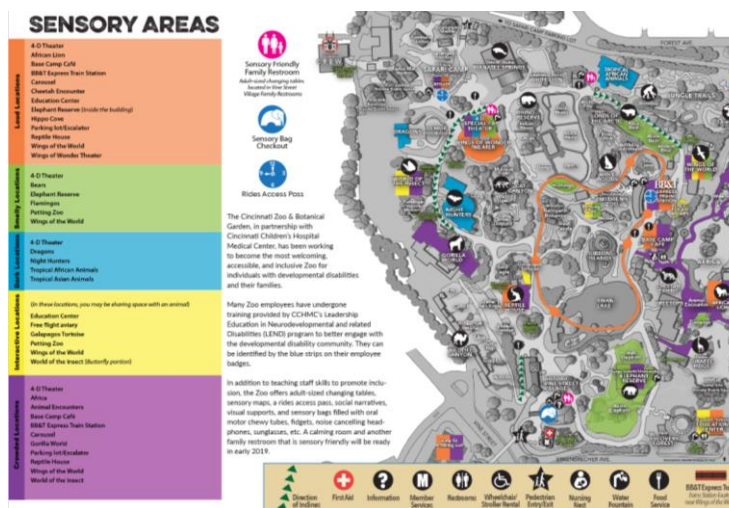
Similarly, Montgomery Parks has a pop-up calming station or sensory tent for persons needing a place to relax and slow or cool down, when large events are underway. The Denver Zoo hosted a low-sensory-light night on New Year's Eve as part of their annual zoo light celebration.

Identifiers for Persons with Disabilities

Some zoos are choosing to partner with healthcare organizations to develop resources and programs for persons with disabilities. The Fresno Chaffee Zoo, for example, has adapted a program from Valley Children's Healthcare that offers visitors with disabilities (including hidden disabilities) the option to wear a George's Pass sticker. The stickers are designed to alert staff to ensure visitor experiences are safe and positive. (See Figure A-12.)

¹ <https://www.kulturecity.org/>.

A-11. Cincinnati Zoo Sensory Map



Source: <https://cincinnati zoo.org/system/assets/uploads/2018/08/SensoryMap.pdf>.

A-12. Fresno Chaffee Zoo station for sensory kits and George's Pass stickers



Source: <https://abc30.com/autism-special-needs-children-with-fresno-chaffee-zoo/5276332/>.

A. Comparative research — Multilingual support

Instructional Materials and Signage

Providing park and zoo resources in multiple languages can welcome visitors who do not read or speak English well. Examples from other parks and zoos include multilingual site maps, brochures, event information and community resources, as well as ADA-compliant wayfinding and directional signage. Although warning signage is important, multilingual translations should not be limited to primarily negative commands, such as “Keep Out” or “Stop.” Instead, where information is in English, it should be similarly and consistently expressed in other commonly used languages. For example, Woodland Park Zoo in Washington welcomes visitors in multiple languages as part of its “Zoo for All, Celebrating our Cultures” branding.

Unlike Dane County Parks, only a few parks and zoos that Keen Independent investigated added a multi-language function to their websites. By taking this step, Dane County Parks sends a message that DEI is a priority. Henry Vilas Zoo could equally benefit from this approach.

Live interpretation is also advised, when possible. For instance, Henry Vilas Zoo staff reported that multilingual volunteers are encouraged to wear languages-spoken buttons, to help engage and welcome visitors who do not speak or read English well. (Volunteer buttons are also used to demonstrate special expertise or interests.)

Multilingual Exhibits

Keen Independent also identified zoos that have bilingual or multilingual exhibits. The Smithsonian National Zoo’s Smokey the Bear exhibit, for example, features an outdoor gallery with panels in both English and Spanish describing the history of the real Smokey Bear and Smithsonian’s research on forest ecology. Understanding language needs is a starting point for inclusion.

“It’s one of our priorities that we’ve taken on for the next year or two, to start updating [a] number of our materials [such as] key features on maps, different welcome signage in multiple languages, having important notices in Spanish and English, or ... like if you have a map of the park, maybe ‘You are here’ in multiple languages ... but currently we don’t have a whole lot. Our website [can] be translated into virtually any language ... but any of our PDFs we have to do on a case-by-case basis”

Parks Managers Group Representative

A-13. Welcome sign for Zoo for All day at Woodland Park Zoo



Source: <https://twitter.com/woodlandparkzoo/status/1129817436025286656>.

A. Comparative research — LGBTQIA+ inclusivity

Gender-inclusive Restrooms

Like Dane County Parks and Zoo, Willamalane Park and Recreation District in Oregon and Fresno Chaffee Zoo offer gender-inclusive or all-gender restrooms. These adaptations are important to the safety and wellness of many communities, including the transgender community. A single, designated, lockable gender-neutral restroom can be adapted from a family restroom or added as new construction. Communicating that these restrooms exist is an important part of welcoming visitors.

Inclusive Design and Artwork

Inclusive design and art can be a welcoming gesture. Oregon Metro features Pride and Transgender Pride flags painted on benches throughout one Portland-area park. This artwork shows LGBTQIA+ community members that they are welcome, as well as celebrated.

LGBTQIA+ Events and Programs

Celebrating Pride week or month through on-site events and social media posts is another way of welcoming members of the LGBTQIA+ community. The Brevard Zoo in Florida celebrates unity with the LGBTQIA+ community during a designated Pride week in June. This zoo sends out educational emails on LGBTQIA+-related topics and creates t-shirts for theme-specific days during the week. This zoo couples Pride activities with inclusive messaging: “We stand together in unity, diversity, and pride.” The Oklahoma City Zoo hosts an annual Pride Date Night featuring drag shows, drink tickets and a safe environment and gathering space for members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Additionally, Seattle Parks and Recreation developed a Rainbow Recreation program that serves Seattle’s LGBTQIA+ older adults through resource fairs, community events, writing and fitness workshops and other activities to strengthen and support this community.

A-14. Oklahoma City Zoo providing a safe environment for Pride Date Night



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/okczoo/photos/pride-night-date-night-at-the-okc-zoo/10156193974502385>.

A-15. Brevard Zoo employee wearing t-shirt designed for Pride week



Source: <https://brevardzoo.org/celebrate-pride-month-with-us/>.

A. Comparative research — Programs for families

For both parks and zoos, a major attraction for visitors is family-inclusive programs and events. Inherently, parks and zoos are places for families, but Keen Independent has identified park and zoo programs specifically targeted to reach diverse communities.

In Wisconsin, City of Madison Parks offer community resource programs for families, such as afterschool curricula, parent-skill development workshops and other programs for families. These types of programming provide opportunities to introduce families to park experiences as well as encourage repeat visits.

Los Angeles County Parks runs a drop-in program from September through May that is free to families and requires no advanced registration or notice to join. This drop-in approach eliminates several barriers for families, especially those with young children who need flexibility, or those of limited means. Additionally, snacks are provided for a specified period and trained park staff are on site to lead a variety of programs. Activities include sports, fitness, arts and crafts, STEM curricula, group games and story time. Free and flexible opportunities like these can increase access for economically disadvantaged families and working and single parents.

The Detroit Zoo offers Zoo Tots, an eight-week program designed for one-on-one exploration and skills-building experiences between children (preschool ages) and their caregivers. The adult participant may be a parent, grandparent, babysitter or other caregiver, encouraging inclusivity within the program.

A-16. LA County Parks summer program digital flyers in English and Spanish



Source: <https://parks.lacounty.gov/summer/>.

A-17. Zoo Tots participants at Detroit Zoo



Source: <https://detroitzoo.org/education/kids-and-families/families/>.

A. Comparative research — Youth leadership

Dane County Parks and Zoo might enhance outreach to diverse youth by strengthening partnerships with schools and other groups to build a pipeline for paid internships and volunteer experiences. For example, Dane County Parks has a Youth Volunteers for Conservation program and a Youth Leadership Council. The Parks and Zoo could benefit from additional financial resources to ensure sustainability of programs targeting diverse youth.

Internship and Employment

The San Francisco Zoo offered the 10 for 10 Gateway High School program for ten African American students to be mentored by zoo staff for ten weeks. Deemed a success, this program was expanded and absorbed into the Summer Leadership Fellowship Program.

Oregon Zoo in Portland has launched Zoo Animal Presenters, a paid internship for young people of color and/or individuals from low-income households. Teen participants teach children at partner organizations to information about animals and conservation.

In addition to creating programs for racially and ethnically diverse young adults, the City of Madison offers employment for youth with behavioral or other challenges. The employment program includes conservation and restoration experiences and leadership development.

Youth Volunteers

Outside of paid opportunities, zoos and parks are making a conscious effort to recruit a diverse volunteer base and increase representation at their locations. ZooCorps at Woodland Park Zoo is a teen volunteer program for young adults of all abilities. Teens in the program were highlighted as Special Olympics USA Games 2018 Game Changers and recognized as a team dedicated to creating an inclusive and accessible experience.

A-18. Zoo Animal Presenters program at Oregon Zoo



Source: <https://www.oregonzoo.org/zap>.

A-19. Woodland Park Zoo's teen volunteer group ZooCorps



Source: <https://blog.zoo.org/2018/07/game-changers-shining-example-of.html>.

A. Comparative research — Inclusive food and dining

One barrier for many zoo visitors is not having options for persons with dietary restrictions. Whether a person has a food allergy or disease that prohibits them from eating certain foods or follows a religious, cultural or lifestyle diet, having a variety of food options creates ways to make experiences more inclusive.

Allergy-Friendly Menu

The St. Louis Zoo has an allergy-friendly menu at their restaurant, Ray's Snack Shack, offering meal options free of major allergens. Other zoos including the San Diego Zoo and Cincinnati Zoo offer both vegetarian and vegan meal options for purchase. Providing inclusive meal options allows all visitors access to a positive food experience while encouraging them to stay longer.

Allowing Outside Food

Another option that Henry Vilas Zoo already implements is allowing outside foods into the Zoo. This option welcomes visitors to enjoy a full day at the Zoo without the financial burden of purchasing a meal.

Inclusive Dining Options

In addition to ethnic food options, the Cincinnati Zoo and others have food trucks and stands located throughout the zoo that are more accessible for many visitors than restaurant-style dining. For some visitors, the option to purchase a snack without having to dine in can contribute to a more welcoming and affordable experience.

The introduction of ethnic food trucks could be an opportunity to make the Henry Vilas Zoo and Dane County Parks more welcoming to diverse communities. The Zoo's current commitment includes building a partnership with SSA Concessions, a firm selected based, in part, on its strong DEI record and innovative practices.

A-20. Ray's Snack Shack featured on St. Louis Zoo's website



Ray's Snack Shack features allergy-friendly menu items and offers something for everyone. We are happy to serve items that are free of gluten, tree nuts, peanuts, dairy and more. Ray's Snack Shack showcases many Zoo favorites, including **chicken strips, thin-crust pizza, nachos, and Dole Whip™ (dairy, egg, peanut and gluten-free ice cream.)** Gluten-free adult beverages are available for those age 21 years and up. We are dedicated to meeting the needs of our guests with dietary restrictions. This restaurant is located next to Stingrays at Caribbean Cove.

Source: <https://www.stlzoo.org/visit/dining-options>.

A-21. Food stand at Cincinnati Zoo



Source: <https://www.citybeat.com/food-drink/the-cincinnati-zoo-adds-food-trucks-and-a-forthcoming-beer-garden-to-new-dining-options-12164552>.

A. Comparative research — Community outreach

Partnerships

One objective for Dane County Parks and Zoo is to expand their reach to non-users from diverse communities. Like Dane County, other parks and zoos Keen Independent researched are partnering with community-based organizations that serve as a conduit to more diverse communities.

Oregon Metro uses its community partnership program to work with organizations of all sizes to connect people of color with their parks. The program has a designated budget dedicated to supporting diverse organizations through hosted community events, nature programming, career opportunities and other activities to foster inclusion and belonging.

Relationships with Local Libraries

Some parks and zoos have cultivated relationships with local libraries. The Oklahoma City Zoo collaborated with the Metropolitan Library System to offer the Read for Adventure program connecting literacy to the outdoors. Any child who checked out the book *Our Day at the Zoo* received a voucher for four free admissions. Starting from a local launch with 19 libraries, the program grew to 193 libraries in just one year. Similarly, Dane County Parks, teaming with the local public libraries, offers the weekly Bookmobile experience at the Parks. Dane County Parks and Zoo could benefit from expanding these relationships.

Funding Early Education Centers

City of Madison Parks Division is dedicated to connecting children with nature and has identified seven early childhood centers which it funds to increase children's access to nature. Additionally, the Parks Division is partnering with local schools to utilize the parks as learning spaces for students.

A-22. Oregon Metro and Immigrant and Refugee Organization co-hosted picnic



Source: <https://www.oregonmetro.gov/parks-and-nature-community-partnerships-program>.

A-23. Oklahoma City Zoo staffer presenting at Hulbert Community Library



Source: https://www.tahlequahdailynews.com/news/local_news/kids-see-zoo-animals-at-hulbert-library/article_6c611b4a-63dd-54fc-b30c-22c7eb33a3ab.html.

A. Comparative research — Community outreach

Bringing Parks to Communities

An innovative community outreach tactic being utilized by the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy is the reconstruction of bread trucks into mobile park ranger stations. The Roving Rangers offer a new way to bring parks to people. In the spirit of the parks, mobile units are designed with large windows for the rangers to interact with a crowd. Since the original Roving Ranger launch in 2013, another has been built for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area called the LA Ranger Troca.

Bring Communities to the Parks and Zoo

Some parks such as the Woodland Park Zoo host community days on site. Community-based organizations are invited to set up booths to share resources, information, upcoming events and recruit new members.

Bringing community events like these to the Dane County Parks and Zoo could be a beneficial approach to strengthening equity and inclusion efforts.

A-24. Roving Ranger mobile park ranger station



Source: <https://www.asla.org/2016awards/158531.html>.

A-25. Inside Roving Ranger mobile park ranger station



Source: <https://www.asla.org/2016awards/158531.html>.

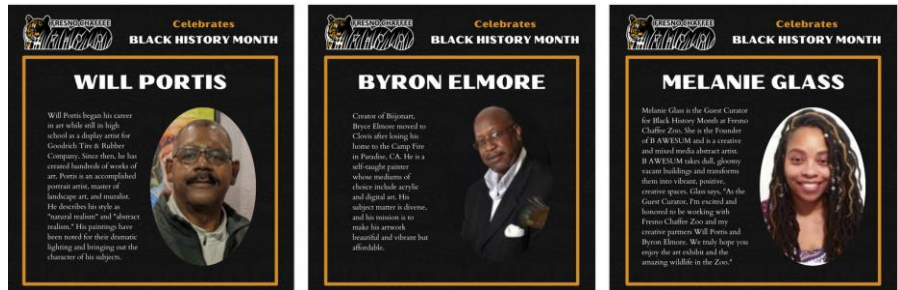
A. Comparative research — Power of communications

Cost-effective communications additions to Dane County Parks and Zoo could include more diversity-, equity- and inclusion-focused posts on websites, online blogs, email newsletters and other social media platforms. Before visitors travel to the Parks or Zoo, they often seek online information. Demonstrating representation from multiple communities is a way to make potential users and visitors more welcome.

Additionally, social media and other communications play a key role in community outreach and awareness of programs and events.

For example, Fresno Chaffee Zoo highlights Black leaders as part of its online presence during Black History Month. Dane County Parks could feature youth leaders volunteering or interning at the Parks and Zoo and include a photo and quote, as well as a call for more volunteers, as well as potential interns. Additionally, recognizing diverse cultural holidays, parades, celebrations and events could foster a sense of belonging for people of color and other diverse communities.

A-26. Fresno Chaffee Zoo Black History Month series on Facebook



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/fresnochaffeezoo/>.

A-27. Woodland Park zoo highlighting two teen volunteers on Facebook



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/WoodlandParkZooSeattle>.

A. Comparative research — Feedback and accountability

An important aspect of a DEIAB program is providing tools for community feedback.

In addition to providing a web-based feedback tool, Willamalane Park and Recreation District in Oregon offers a streamlined process for complaints. This tool allows visitors to formally lodge a complaint against any representative, who is in violation of the organization’s diversity, equity and inclusion values, expectations and requirements.

Denver Zoo has taken a step further by developing a platform that they nicknamed “Woke Yelp.” This digital platform is a space where visitors are given an opportunity to talk about their zoo experiences and whether they felt welcomed, safe and celebrated, not just tolerated.

Dane County Parks has a link to a “Report a Problem” form on its website, but it is not designed for DEIAB feedback. This tool primarily functions as an incident report system for vandalism and downed trees. The Zoo captures visitor input at its welcome kiosk but is missing non-visitors. Dane County Parks and Zoo need additional methods for potential visitors and visitors to engage in conversations about equity, inclusion and access.

I truly believe that outdoor spaces can be as inclusive as we make businesses, and that how they treat marginalized people should be readily available information.

Parker McMullen Bushman, founder of Ecoinclusive and Kween Werk, discussing an inclusive environment at Denver

APPENDIX B. Internal Input — Introduction and methodology

The Keen Independent study team collected qualitative information from internal staff and others affiliated with the Dane County Parks and Henry Vilas Zoo. Keen Independent gathered input from Dane County Tamara D. Grigsby Office for Equity and Inclusion staff, Parks Managers, Parks Rangers, Parks Youth Career Pathways staff, Zoo Education, Operations and Communications staff, Zoo senior staff and Dane County Board and Parks Commission members.

Keen Independent conducted primary research with internal stakeholders from January through February 2022. Combined, Keen Independent conducted nine small group discussions and in-depth interviews with internal stakeholders identified by the Office of the Dane County Board of Supervisors, study Project Manager and Parks and Zoo staff. More than 30 individuals participated in these discussions.¹

Interviews and small group discussions explored the effectiveness of current equity efforts, strengths and weaknesses of related policies, programs, facilities and amenities and any barriers to achieving equity and inclusion for all groups. Internal stakeholders also suggested strategies for making Dane County Parks and Henry Vilas Zoo more accessible to all current and potential users and visitors, ideally broadening the reach to underserved communities.

Appendix B presents qualitative information on the following topics:

- Overall effectiveness serving diverse audiences;
- Equity and inclusion as a priority;
- Impact of limited diversity among staff and volunteers;
- Welcoming and belonging;
- Safety and incidents of bias and racism;
- Marketing, communications and outreach;
- Youth programs;
- Financial access;
- People with disabilities;
- Transportation;
- Hours of operation; and
- Funding and resource constraints.

Throughout this appendix, examples of comments are provided on the right side of each page.

¹ To the extent possible, for purposes of anonymity and to encourage open, candid discussions, Keen Independent does not provide internal stakeholder names or affiliations in this appendix.

B. Internal Input — Overall effectiveness serving diverse audiences

The Keen Independent study team asked interviewees about the County's current equity and inclusion efforts.

Internal stakeholders reported that the Parks and Zoo are not as successful at serving diverse audiences as they should be.

Limitations of Demographic Measures

Interviewees relied on anecdotal information, observation and informal data collection to form impressions about the composition of their audiences, sometimes reporting contradictory information on inclusion of specific audiences. The Parks and Zoo lack data to evaluate equity or inclusion outcomes.

I would say if the goal [were] to be equally accessible to everybody, then no [the Parks do not meet that] ...

[There are not many] Parks where I see a lot of BIPOC individuals.

We have a large Native American presence throughout our parks

Where I think we probably fall [down] on is Latinos

People of color and women have historically not been as welcomed

One other said that women are represented. I haven't heard that any of our parks are not welcoming to women or that women have any issues with our parks. Actually ... I mostly see women in our parks.

... we do keep rough numbers of how many people use the Parks, how many cars ... coming in, but if this person is just having lunch at the shelter or if they are walking the big hill, we don't keep that kind of data. It's more what you observe.

I did a survey one year just talking to people to see how many at Indian Lake were from Dane County and how many were out of the County, just for a couple of days....

The only thing that we measure is the number of guests coming

B. Internal Input — Overall effectiveness serving diverse audiences

Variations among Sites and Programs

Internal Stakeholders perceive that the Zoo draws a relatively more diverse group of visitors than do the Parks. Use by diverse groups is believed to be uneven among the Parks and some activities such as camping and ice fishing are reported to draw a largely white audience.

In comparison to more rural County Parks, stakeholders reported that parks close to the City of Madison attract a more diverse group of users, particularly when amenities include shelters for picnics and large gatherings. Youth programs are another way the Parks and Zoo attract diverse groups.

Anecdotally, we have a very diverse group of people that come and visit the zoo every year

I could probably count on one hand the ... times I see a [Hispanic American] family or an African American family [camping]

Our shelter use has often been the most diverse use that we get.

We've done a really good job of bringing in youth of color and underserved community groups in our youth programs.

B. Internal Input — Equity and inclusion as a priority

Commitment to Inclusion

Many interviewees reported commitment to inclusion and equity and even pride in connecting Dane County residents to the Parks and Zoo. However, equity and inclusion efforts are frequently treated as optional compared to other priorities.

Individual Initiative and Discretion

Priorities and initiatives related to equity are subject to individual staff initiative or preferences.

Individual priority setting is interrelated with the idea that funding and resource constraints necessitate trade-offs as discussed in a later section of this appendix.

I'm proud to work here because of what we stand for — it's not necessarily our mission and vision surrounding animals, it's our mission and vision surrounding community and those that we are providing offerings to I think by default we work here because we love animals ... but we've expanded our love to attract our community because we know that togetherness is something where we can truly make change.

I think people know [equity and inclusion are] important, but I think it's kind of the first thing to fall away as you get busy

I think the challenge is that, like any staff, you want to do what programs interest you most, and sometimes those [youth] programs are things that interest you, but you have [another] fun program that you could work on [elsewhere] and you start to slowly pull out of those ... youth programs Maybe [one] program is doing really well but it's not focusing on the equity piece that we really were focusing on ... because that was what was needed and is needed in our community, where some of these other programs are already happening in other systems or with other groups and aren't as critical.

[One staff member created] a scavenger hunt that was LGBTQ-focused ... on how animals fit into definitions of gender or sexuality and how that manifest in nature, and it was really cool.

B. Internal Input — Equity and inclusion as a priority

Conservation Versus Access

Some interviewees reported that the mission to protect natural resources has driven the focus outside of urban centers, away from diverse populations and toward conservation rather than access.

One internal stakeholder, for example, viewed public access as counterproductive to conservation efforts and questioned the relative priority of equity and inclusion among Parks goals.

In contrast, another internal stakeholder indicated that prioritizing the land without consideration of human experience can result in “gatekeeping” making the Parks particularly unwelcoming and inaccessible to people of color and other diverse groups.

We really think a lot about what are the natural resources that need to be protected, that benefit from public ownership, so these are often water resources, wetlands, unique points of geographic interest — the ice age trail would be a good example of that — and so ... over the past several years there has been this question of, ‘Well, why isn’t this county establishing parks in the City of Madison or in the City of Verona?’ and we’ve historically viewed our role [as] protecting resources outside of the urbanized areas.

... we lead with resource conservation first, and that’s always going to drive where we’re acquiring land and providing public access

[On] our last Parks and Open Space plan update survey ... it did come back, just resounding[ly], that people did appreciate and value the County’s commitment to resource protection, and enjoy for the most part, non-developed parks and just the value of the green space

Do we have an overarching mission or goal ... of being inclusive and reaching out to [specific] groups? [Some of our] role is to get the necessary people out there to perform restoration ... [for] 13,000 acres and more every day of natural areas.

B. Internal Input — Impact of limited diversity among staff and volunteers

Interviewees reported that staff and volunteers are predominantly non-Hispanic white. Limited diversity among staff and volunteers is closely related to the sense of belonging as noted in the next section of this appendix.

Efforts to Diversify the Workforce

Recruitment of diverse applicant pools has had mixed results. Youth internships addressed later in this appendix have made efforts to serve underrepresented groups and function as a pipeline of future talent. However, one ranger indicated not knowing of any youth of color applying for or being hired as interns, despite the high hourly wages.

Efforts to Diversify Volunteer Participation

Interviewees had limited or no awareness of efforts to diversify volunteer programs but spoke of volunteers as an important public face of the Parks and Zoo. Some interviewees suggested educating volunteers and Dane County Friends Groups² to increase their knowledge of Parks and Zoo equity and inclusion initiatives and build support for ensuring that the Parks and Zoo welcome and serve all groups including diverse and underrepresented populations.

If you look at who is employed and working in our park system, it is primarily white people. Part of that comes from exposure as a kid and throughout your life to systems like that ... but also opportunities to work in those spaces. There's been a couple of newer initiatives in the last couple of years that I think have helped diversify our staff, but that hasn't necessarily spilled over into the diversification of our volunteer base.

We do have ... these perceived barriers. We have a problem with recruitment as well, and we do work with our Office [for] Equity and Inclusion, and they've really helped promote our jobs further, but we still have a very white applicant pool

Our volunteer base is generally older, probably generally more well-off socioeconomically, probably folks that have just the privilege to spend their time doing something that they don't get paid to do, so yeah it tends to be more retired, white folks

[For Dane County Friends Groups], boards take up a lot of the person's time, and I get the feeling that they're generally made up of older folks, and the demographic is ... pretty white.

² Dane County Friends Groups are groups officially registered with Dane County Parks that serve as volunteers in support of the Dane County Park System.

B. Internal Input — Welcoming and belonging

Generally, interviewees recognized that being free does not make the Parks and Zoo a welcoming experience for all groups. Interviewees discussed barriers to creating a welcoming experience and fostering belonging for guests from diverse backgrounds. Noted barriers fall into three major categories: underrepresentation, legacy naming and misrepresentation in content, and “insider knowledge” necessary for access and participation.

Lack of welcoming and belonging, in more extreme form, has manifested as concern about safety and resulted in incidents of bias and racism, which are discussed in the next section of this appendix.

Underrepresentation

People of color and women do not often see other visitors like themselves when they visit Dane County Parks, nor may they see many staff or volunteers like them (as noted earlier in this appendix). The absence of “like” visitors and staff can signal to visitors from underrepresented groups that this is a place they do not belong or a place that might not even be safe.

Naming Conventions and Misrepresentation

Several internal stakeholders perceived naming conventions for Dane County Parks (in some cases) to be symbols of “white settlement bias.” To be inclusive, one internal stakeholder suggested that equity be embedded in the Parks naming conventions to ensure that people of color, women and other diverse groups feel welcome.

A Zoo staff member added that antiquated exhibits misrepresenting Indigenous cultures are of similar concern and are likely doing more harm than good. For example, the Zoo’s aviary is reported to have a “fairly inaccurate portrayal of Indigenous culture.”

[Does one] feel welcome as a person of color when the only other people recreating there are not, or ... as a woman, if everyone hunting is male?

I was just meeting with someone who’s Hmong, and [they] said [their] family never goes to the County Parks because [they] go there and [they] don’t see anyone that looks like [them], and there’s a lot of Asian hate crimes right now, so it makes [them] too nervous.

Not having other female or minority volunteers at our events, it’s hard for anyone coming in to ... feel like they belong

I’m into [representation] in our Park System. Most of our parks are named after white men. Period. We just named a park after a white man, recently. So, I’d say if we want to look at equity, we should look at those naming conventions.

We do have some historical markers placed throughout our [Parks] that are managed by the Wisconsin Historical Society, and just from casually going around and reading those, I’ve definitely ... picked up on a white settlement bias in a lot of them

Our aviary right now has ... what I’m guessing was one of the very first attempts at trying to incorporate Indigenous culture into an exhibit space because ... it’s not a successful example of [that] It starts with a large mural of a fairly inaccurate portrayal of Indigenous culture It is something that if you are taking a group in that space you can use to show the evolution of AZA [Association of Zoos and Aquariums] zoos and how we talk about this ... but I think from a guest perspective when you’re just walking through that building ... you probably don’t have a positive takeaway

B. Internal Input — Welcoming and belonging

Hidden Rules and Insider Knowledge

Interviewees reported complicated “hidden requirements” and an array of “insider knowledge” needed by visitors, especially around use of parks. Examples include:

- General access to County Parks does not require a pass or permit (which is different from state parks and may not be understood). However, certain activities and areas within the County Parks do require permits.
- State-owned sections of the bike trail connecting urban residents in diverse neighborhoods to County Parks require a permit *in some cases* (also related to financial access, which is addressed in another section of this appendix). The permit requirement is specific to how that section of the trail is used: walking is free but riding on wheels is not.
- Various activities within the Parks, which may be unfamiliar to new users, are subject to unwritten rules of etiquette. Unknowingly violating etiquette expectations may lead to corrections by other visitors which are unwelcoming at best and at worst contribute to concerns about safety as discussed in the next section of this appendix.

Collectively, the web of “insider knowledge” necessary to feel confident accessing the Parks may deter new users from even attempting a visit and may create an unwelcoming “outsider” experience for new visitors.

... our use areas require a permit ... just coming to have a picnic ... doesn't ... so just making sure that we're doing that outreach and letting people know that they're welcome ... without a permit, unlike a state park where you have to have that entry sticker or day pass.

We ... create a culture ... if someone doesn't have a permit, we're not there to enforce [permits] Do we empower staff to pass that message on [particularly when the cost of permitting is a hardship]?

[The southern green belt is] free to walk on, but it's not free if whatever you're riding has wheels, so if it's a bicycle, roller skates, a skateboard We're in a predicament where while the State owns that trail ... contracted to the County to manage it

[We] have this southern green belt ... called the Lewis Nine Springs E-Way, and it connects through some of the most diverse neighborhoods in our city. And it has this bike trail that is owned by the State, so we've got to follow their regulations on this, but the fact is that this bike trail has a cost barrier. You actually have to have a permit to [use] it. But it's connected to all of the City of Madison's free bicycle commuter trails. And this [is] one of the few resources that people have a direct line, not only to the County Parks, but a lot of other green spaces throughout the City and the County through other trail networks, that's for some reason, this one is the one in Madison that costs money to get onto

I think now we need to broaden that etiquette to etiquette towards other users and potentially new users and/or people of color to make people feel welcome, not just nuts and bolts stuff ... you're not supposed to snowshoe on groomed cross-country ski trails, but to broaden it to just, I guess being friendly to other people who might be new to a sport or whatever.

B. Internal Input — Safety and incidents of bias and racism

Interviews covered awareness of safety concerns and specific incidents of bias or racism and their sources.

Awareness of Safety Concerns and Incidents

Interviewees spoke to the importance of safety and the role of fear as a barrier for diverse visitors. Those working most closely with the public were most likely to report awareness of specific incidents of bias or racism. Even when stakeholders did not report direct awareness of incidents, nearly all interviews included discussion of anecdotal or secondhand awareness of incidents.

People Who are Unhoused

Park users who are unhoused were reported to be both a source of concern about safety and discomfort for other visitors, as well as a target of bias.

[A] lot of state and national parks have been fairly unsafe places for a lot of people and ... they felt like they weren't welcome there, or were physically in danger there, and I think that culture continues on

The concern for human safety ... should be at the top ... because people are not going to go where they feel that they are going to be harassed or they feel that their life is [in] jeopardy.

Vandalism ... swastikas ... that stuff happens, you know, I wouldn't say frequently, but enough that it's disturbing

As far as disabilities are concerned, you may have individuals who may be mean towards individuals who may have disabilities ... or even if they're homeless at that time

We do have a contingent of people who have found themselves in a homelessness situation, and people make off-the-cuff remarks about them that I would say would be discriminatory

B. Internal Input — Safety and incidents of bias and racism

Taking Ownership

Some internal stakeholders reported that encouraging users to take ownership of County Parks can be a double-edged sword. While feeling a sense of ownership can empower Parks users, it should not lead to exclusion of others.

Overuse of Ordinances and Police Patrols

Incidents of bias were described as often originating with abutting neighbors and other visitors and escalating to allegations of ordinance violations that specifically target visitors from diverse backgrounds.

One interviewee noted that biased reporting by the public can lead to biased perceptions among staff — because members of the public disproportionately report people of color, staff who are responding may begin to believe that incidents are more likely to occur with people of color.

Another interviewee reported police presence as more likely at Park events hosted by people of color.

I think that confirming to people that [they] are an ‘owner’ in this and this belongs to [them], I think is really empowering for people to use the spaces, but I could see how people would ‘kinda’ be like, ‘This is my park where I hang out’ to the exclusion of other people.

I have been invited to various functions at parks [where] people ... have actually reserved shelters and space, and they’re having their gathering and [other] people have shown up ...and just assumed that they could just come, and so the [event organizers] they would say, ‘Oh we have this rented,’ and [the other people] were like ... ‘Prove it’ ... and that happened at least a couple of times.

... an African American fisher ...told me ... that the person who was confrontational with him had phoned into the [Department of Natural Resources] that he was illegally fishing, and he wasn’t. His fish was within the bag limit and size limit.

Sometimes we’ll get a neighbor complaint ... that [a] shelter group is really rowdy, but they might not be. They might just be having fun like so many others are, but they’re a group of color

We have received ... complaints from our residential neighbors regarding what they consider to be excessive noise ... and typically when we respond to those calls, we ...find a minority group

[I’ve] noticed the police patrolling the area sometimes a little bit more, stopping in, just saying that they were just checking on things but kind of hanging around ... I’ve been to all types of events, so there’s events with people of color, and events that mostly where it’s not a lot of people of color, and I don’t really see the police presence as much [where there are] ... not people of color.

B. Internal Input — Marketing, communications and outreach

Internal stakeholders noted that the challenge of attracting underserved audiences requires heightened efforts in marketing, communications and outreach. In effect, marketing levels and efforts must *overcompensate* to clear the hurdle of underrepresentation and lack of awareness among diverse groups.

Discussions addressed promotional needs, community outreach, partnerships and overcoming language barriers.

Increased Promotion

Interviewees expect that building awareness and attracting visitors from populations who have not historically used the Parks and Zoo will require more marketing and promotion.

Creating focal events or programs to increase awareness and attract visitors were also cited as necessary to increase visits by historically underserved audiences.

Outreach

Interviewees recommend staffing community-based events in neighborhoods populated by audiences the Parks and Zoo do not typically reach.

I think in terms of outreach for our programs, [communications] is a massive area where we are critically under capacity

In the last [three years] ... we've been able to get a grant from Dane County to provide scholarships for families for some of our paid programs and that's been very helpful, but then I think it's still getting the word out about that scholarship program and about the camps in general.

You have to have some type of attraction that would interest people in the various targeted groups

Most parks don't really have a lot of programs, mostly the rural ones Things like Schumacher have a Halloween and Harvest Festival and those you get a lot of people in. Some of the other ones, you really don't have that type of program They have programs but ... the general population is very white

Maybe we could do cultural days [For example] if you go to the African exhibit, you can taste some of the African food.

... a lot of places have community festivals, like Centro Hispano. I think we need more staff at those events versus trying to get people to come to get more information ... but everyone's so busy.

I would love to go in person to ... events where there are different areas of the community, I don't normally get to talk to

B. Internal Input — Marketing, communications and outreach

Partnerships

In addition to being mentioned as an important part of the diversity effort in youth programs, as noted later in this appendix, partnerships are important to more broadly fostering diversity according to many interviewees. Participants spoke of the importance of partnerships for building awareness, improving outreach, gathering community input and encouraging program attendance.

Activities and programs offered to the public in the absence of partnerships designed to generate participation by diverse audiences attract a largely white audience.

Some of the successful things that I have seen are specific gardening programs....They have partnerships with ... local communities of color

You've got to get to those individuals of color where they are You have to go to venues that they participate in and go to Maybe even sending something home with the school students, some type of announcement Even when you hit those [community] organizations ... you still don't hit everybody within our community, so you have to think about another ... way to get to them

[Adult relationships are] something that we've identified in our plan and ... we've had some initial conversations with ... Color in the Outdoors. They were interested in ... group meetups, so it would be them helping organize their members to come do things like that, and then also with the Ho-Chunk; they want to do some more activities in the Capital Springs Park ... I do think those group opportunities are maybe better able to reach those adults.

We received last year a grant to create an Interpretive Master Plan, and as part of that we really are looking at, how do we [collaborate with] members of various culture communities within Madison and Dane County [on] that plan? So, we are working specifically with Madison Children's Museum, [which] has a lot of these connections already ... to reach out to various groups ... and really get their thoughts and have them be a part of that plan.

I think any of the events that we host that are just open to the public, those tend to be very white. We had a hiker meetup with the Ice Age Trail Alliance to meet Emily Ford, who was the first woman to hike the Ice Age Trail in the winter, and she's also a person of color, and everyone that showed up [to meet her] was white.

B. Internal Input — Marketing, communications and outreach

Overcoming Language Barriers

Interviewees spoke about the need to improve access for non-English speakers through translation of written information, registration and program availability in Spanish or other languages. Language access was described as both an area in which some efforts have begun and an area that is a continuing barrier requiring more focus.

For this evaluation, for example, Keen Independent and County staff produced electronic and hard copy communications in English, Spanish and Hmong.

It's one of our priorities that we've taken on for the next year or two, to start updating number of our materials [such as] key features on maps, different welcome signage in multiple languages, having important notices in Spanish and English, or ... like if you have a map of the park, maybe 'You are here' in multiple languages ... but currently we don't have a whole lot. Our website [can] be translated into virtually any language ... but any of our PDFs we have to do on a case-by-case basis

[We] just translated all of our waivers into Spanish, so we have all of our volunteer waivers, our education program waivers, photo releases, all of those have been translated into Spanish

Last year in COVID, we ran a Zoo school program, and partnered with a community center, and the community center signed up all of their participants. Many of the families didn't speak English ... so I think that's another barrier as well.

If they ... have the ability to have a QR code and have [Park information] put in a different language, I think that would be great. I don't know how much that would cost ... to do that, but that would be phenomenal, but then you have to ... [consider] persons who are hard of hearing or who are sight impaired – how do we do that? ... I know putting all of that together would require some funding

I don't have the ability to go in and give a presentation in Spanish in person to a bilingual class ... so we're definitely missing out in the Zoom era.

B. Internal Input — Youth programs

Interviewees discussed youth programs as an important strategy for equity and inclusion.

Impact on Equity and Inclusion Efforts

Interviewees reported that concerted efforts in developing programs through community group partnerships have increased participation by youth of color.

Interviewees cited youth programs as an intentional strategy to create a pipeline for future engagement that may also help diversify applicant pools.

Limitations

Limitations cited include capacity constraints and inconsistency of efforts systemwide.

[With] these organized ... partnerships, we do see more diversity because they're very intentional partnerships

... four years ago, we didn't have any [youth] programs, and now we have a number of programs that engage youth, and our focus really for those programs are youth of color, and the bulk of our participants in those [programs] have really fulfilled those demographics and created a sense of place and promoted a continuation of engagement ...

I would say that we've done a really good job of bringing in youth of color and underserved community groups in our youth programs, and that's been our primary focus and engaging those communities in terms of the staff at community and neighborhood centers

The Zoo has an education component during the summer. If kids can't afford it, they're subsidized ... The times I've observed, it's probably two-thirds minority Parks have a lot of those programs too

... our long-term solution to trying to get more applicants, is starting young.

One of our benefits for members is you get advance registration for camps and programs, and they fill up within a week, so we don't even open it up to the public which is a huge barrier for diverse groups.

I know that there are partnerships that are working ... but those are almost like one-offs ... some are loosely connected, and others aren't. Also, it's not [in] every one of our parks.

B. Internal Input — Financial access

Interviewees cited free access to the Parks and Zoo as well as bus funding and scholarship opportunities as beneficial for equity and inclusion. Some also noted that it is important not to confuse being free with being accessible.

Add-on Costs

Although admission is free, costs for various activities, equipment, permits and add-on options during visits were cited as possible barriers.

Invisibility of Financial Access Opportunities

Some interviewees noted that funding and waivers are available to offset the financial burden for certain permits. However, the funding and waiver programs are not promoted in order to prevent abuse, which means that they are not known to intended users and are therefore ineffective.

See the Welcoming and Belonging section of this appendix for additional discussion of the impact of permit requirements.

Schools and groups can apply for reimbursement from Nature Net for their bus funding

In the last [three years] ... we've been able to get a grant from Dane County to provide scholarships for families for some of our paid programs and that's been very helpful

It's free to use any of our parks ... but we nickel-and-dime people with these permits [for] other specific activities.

[Camping does have] cost barriers, you have to have equipment ... tents [and] sleeping bags or ... whatever you're into.

We've [tried] having some days where it's a free day where the carousel and train are free for everyone If a family wanted to ride those, but they didn't have them means ... we still would allow it.

We do give out a commuter permit [to the southern green belt] for free, and people can also apply for a hardship permit. That's the case for all of our permits We don't ... advertise that because it is a revenue generator for us as well, and you know it costs money to maintain the trails....

To get back to the question of, how does somebody find out that [free permits] exist [for those who cannot afford them] ... there's no signage saying it. We don't really advertise it prominently on our website – I don't know if it's on the website at all – so unless you see a Parks staff member, and say, 'Hey I'm struggling but I want to access this,' maybe that person will divulge the secret

B. Internal Input — People with disabilities

The emphasis for accessibility efforts has historically focused on ADA requirements for people with disabilities.

Existing Efforts

Positives mentioned by interviewees included: accessible bathrooms, paved paths, designated handicapped parking spaces, a partnership offering an all-terrain wheelchair at one of the Dane County Parks and accessibility to people with cognitive disabilities, neurodiversity or sensory issues.

Barriers

Interviewees also cited areas that could be improved or may be barriers for people with disabilities including:

- Availability of seating;
- Condition of wheelchairs and strollers;
- Doors without automatic openers;
- Distance of handicapped parking to the entrance; and
- Grade of certain paths and terrain.

The distance of the bus stop to the Zoo was also cited as a concern for visitors with disabilities and is also noted in the Transportation section of this appendix.

I think accessibility, at least historically, for us has really mostly been pointed towards ADA and people with mobility issues

[For] people who have mobility issues ... there are some parks that they can't get into due to terrain aspects, but most of our parks have some sort of trail system or overlooks that are ... easily accessible

... from my visits to Parks [accessible bathrooms and paved paths] seem to be things that are being worked on or have been established.

... Lake Farm County Park, which is the closest to Madison, ... provides a free opportunity for people with mobility issues to check out [an] all-terrain wheelchair to explore our parks or to take outside the Park

We see a lot of adults with cognitive disabilities at our zoo. That is partially due to our size. It's not overwhelming

We are a sensory-inclusive institution [which] essentially means we have signs around the zoo ... that say 'Headphone Zone,' so, [for example,] right outside of our aviary there's one of those signs, so guests know coming in that ... space [is] going to have sudden loud noises that might be overwhelming for someone who has sensory disabilities. We also have [Quiet Zones]

I think there's a couple places on [the Zoo] grounds where we have a steep path, and we don't have a good alternative

... our wheelchairs and strollers are not in the best shape

B. Internal Input — Transportation

The location of the Parks and Zoo outside of the urban area makes transportation a key factor in who can visit and how easily.

Bus Access

Lack of public bus transit to Dane County Parks is a barrier for residents who do not have cars. Traveling to the Zoo by public bus is possible, but the distance between the bus stop and the Zoo can be a barrier.

Bus funding can be provided for schools and community groups, which addresses both financial and transportation concerns.

Parking

Interviewees stated that parking is typically not a barrier at Dane County Parks, but inadequate parking is a problem at the Zoo.

Biking

The distance involved in biking to the Parks and Zoo does not make biking a realistic option for many visitors. And, as noted previously in this appendix, portions of the bike trail are subject to rules and costs that function as a barrier.

... a lot of our parks, particularly in the County Park System, are not accessible unless you have a car or are willing to bike a significant distance.

... [from] downtown, there's very little public transportation access to any of the parks, so that's a large potential user group that has limited [access] to the parks.

We're a free zoo, but we got to get you here, so those routes, and those roads and that parking ... are big identifiers of why certain people don't come here.

Right now, it's about three blocks away ... from a bus stop to the Zoo, so it's kind of a long walk. It would be nice to have a bus stop for people or an opportunity to have some sort of shuttle.

Transportation can be a barrier [for community groups], but luckily ... we [can] provide transportation if they need it.

We do not have even close to enough (Zoo) parking. We have maybe a hundred and some spots and two different parking lots and we have 800,000 visitors a year so you can imagine that's kind of crazy [In addition] there simply isn't capacity in the neighborhood to find convenient parking.

B. Internal Input — Hours of operation

Hours of operation were cited as a barrier to inclusion.

Impact on Visitors

Hours of operation and programs offered during workdays were noted as barriers for working people, particularly families.

Impact on Volunteers

Volunteer events and hours also limit who can participate.

Concerns about Abutting Neighbors

Although an option to be considered, expanding hours of operation was noted as complicated due to the potential impact on abutting neighbors.

If we want to see more diversity we do need to [hold events] outside of the normal [Parks] work time which we can't do because of our staff needing to [keep] regular work hours

Other barriers to the general public, I think are our hours. We close at 5:00 every single day, and that includes summer months, and so during the week that's challenging

A lot of the programming that we do offer is typically during working hours for a lot of people, so that's something that we definitely need to look at and [try to] figure out how we can offer these opportunities maybe later at night or on weekends ... so that people who are working a more traditional schedule are able to participate.

There's also the difficulty of transportation [for camps], too, for some families ... being able to drop their kids off in the morning and pick them up in the afternoon We used to offer an after-care program that ran from 3:30 until 5:00 p.m., but we haven't done that since COVID.

A lot of the volunteer events ... are scheduled 8 a.m. to noon during weekdays, so I think that is a barrier that prevents a lot of people being able to participate

We definitely have been looking at extending hours ... but we needed to take into account all of our stakeholders. Clearly, there's plenty of stakeholders who would enjoy that but there's also our neighbors to think about.... That is an opportunity that we are open to, but it's going to have to be vetted through a community.

B. Internal Input — Funding and resource constraints

Interviewees described budget as the most significant barrier to sustained efforts and improved outcomes on external equity and inclusion. The most frequently cited issues were lack of dedicated staff to focus on equity and the “zero-sum game” approach to new initiatives.

Interviewees were almost universally aligned on the subject of budget. However, one interviewee, in contrast, reported that the Zoo is very well supported financially and that getting more resources when needed is not an issue even though the process can take time.

Lack of Dedicated Staff

Interviewees see staffing as key to advancing equity whether at the County level or in some decentralized structure. Some interviewees described the need for a County-level role, beyond what the Tamara D. Grigsby Office for Equity and Inclusion is currently doing, to drive inclusion initiatives forward, coordinate efforts and expand capacity. Other interviewees described the need for division level staff dedicated to equity and inclusion.

Having a role that is dedicated to driving [diversity and inclusion] Maybe it's not a zoo employee. Maybe there's a county individual who drives this initiative that supports these institutions, such as Parks and us, to help do that and is an extension of our labor force here. I think that's crucial.

It takes many people to ... [ensure] that the programming that we have is equitable and we're reaching all populations and identities While we all should be striving to do that, I think it would help if there's someone or some people [in each division] ... to help people establish those relationships and look at their programming

The Office [for] Equity and Inclusion – it took us a little while to figure out what it is that they do, and they really focus on internal policy and procedure. There's not a whole lot that they do that involves outreach or training on a grand scale I think they're still a fairly young department

B. Internal Input — Funding and resource constraints

“Zero-Sum” Approach

Interviewees described resources for equity and inclusion initiatives as requiring trade-offs akin to a “zero-sum game” (i.e., they can only get the resources they need to advance equity efforts by taking them from something else or some other audience). In combination with the reliance on individual initiative and discretion, as noted in the Equity and Inclusion as a Priority section earlier in this appendix, the “zero-sum” dynamic has meant that efforts are often sporadic rather than sustainable.

We’ve had trouble getting people to be involved because I think we are all a little overwhelmed it becomes a very political issue in that to ... give [someone] the resources they need to create [a new] program for [e.g.,] women or nonbinary individuals, [we] have to take resources away from another group. When that happens, those complaints go to the County Board, they go to the County Executive, and the direction [we] get back, is [to] just make it work [and] do more with less.

I do struggle to imagine, how I can empower [staff] to do that extra program without having it negatively impact our existing users

It’s like pulling teeth to get any extra money for parks. So, do we get rid of three or four rangers and put in a shuttle? It really doesn’t make sense because then you don’t clean bathrooms.

[We] can’t create a new Youth Educator [position] if [we] know that some of our other core duties and responsibilities aren’t being met. That’s really hard to communicate to the public, and it’s even a challenge internally to talk through those [things] and to get everyone on the same page about, what can we do to better allocate those resources or to make really hard decisions

I don’t have [enough] capacity for that [community relationship-building], which I find myself struggling with that because I would love to do so much more but ... can’t.

APPENDIX C. Community Survey — Introduction

Keen Independent conducted a community survey to gather input from:

- Parks users and Zoo visitors;
- Parks and Zoo non-users and non-visitors;
- Community leaders and others advocating for diverse communities, and their constituents;
- Faith-based leaders;
- Dane County Parks and Zoo staff;
- Friends of the Parks and Zoo and other volunteers; and
- Other interested individuals.

Methodology

Keen Independent conducted in-person intercept surveys on June 3, 4 and 5, including on-site visits to several Dane County Parks, City of Madison Parks and the Henry Vilas Zoo. Locations included:

- Law Park, City of Madison;
- Indian Lake County Park, the Ice Age National Scenic Trail;
- Henry Vilas Zoo;
- Vilas Park, City of Madison;
- Lake Farm Park Dane County; and
- Lower Yahara River Trail Dane County.

Small incentives and refreshments were offered as a thank you. Respondents could take the survey in English, Spanish and Hmong in hard copy or online via QR Code. Keen Independent Principals, the County Board Office Program Evaluation Coordinator and Parks and Zoo staff and volunteers administered surveys at key locations. At each intercept location, the team attempted to obtain a completed survey from at least one representative of each visiting group. Adults were the focus, although some teens completed surveys.

The community survey was also distributed to about 90 community partners of the Dane County Parks and Zoo to share with the community members they represent (online or hard copy). Community partners included members of an Ad-hoc Advisory Group convened by Keen Independent, as part of this study:

- Madison Children’s Museum;
- Ho-Chunk Nation;
- Operation Fresh Start;
- Access to Independence;
- Madison Public Library;
- Nehemia Center for Justice and Reconciliation;
- One City Schools;
- Goodman Center;
- Centro Hispano of Dane County;
- Color in the Outdoors;
- OutReach; and
- Madtown Mommas and Disability Advocates.

Through this outreach, people who did not regularly visit a County park or the Zoo were represented in the survey responses.

Parks and Zoo staff also shared the community survey with visitors engaged in Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and other community events. The Madison Children’s Museum and Dane County Library Bookmobile posted the QR Codes and/or hard copies for added survey outreach to parents and caregivers.

The community survey included open-ended and closed questions (see survey at end of this appendix). This effort resulted in 595 completed surveys.

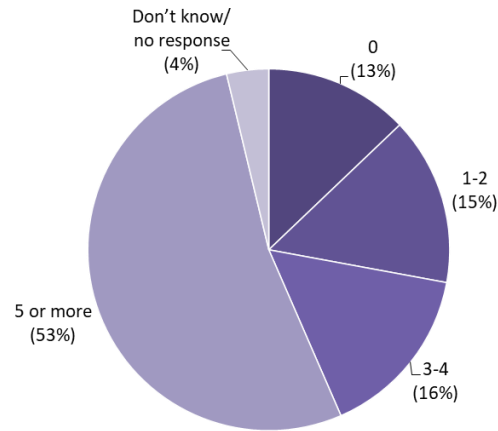
C. Community Survey — Demographics of respondents

The pie charts to the right examine frequency of use of the Parks and Zoo among survey respondents.

Respondents were asked how often they had visited Dane County Parks and the Henry Vilas Zoo in the last 12 months. Of those who responded, 13 percent had not visited Dane County Parks in the last year and 30 percent had not attended the Zoo. (Some of the survey respondents had not visited either a County Park or the Zoo.)

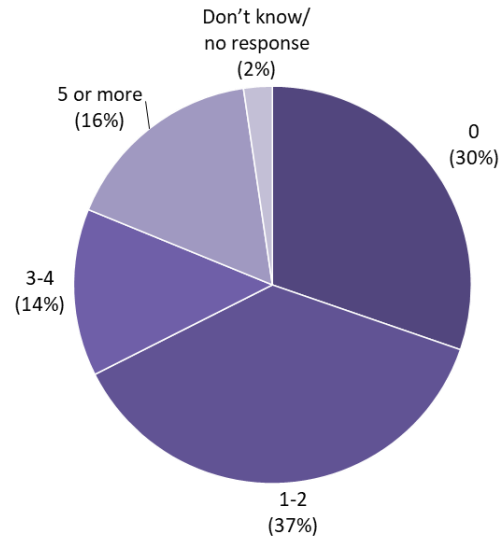
Some respondents were frequent visitors. About one-half of the respondents had visited Dane County Parks five or more times during the last 12 months. About one-third had gone to the Zoo at least three times in the past year.

C-1. Frequency of visits to Dane County parks in the last 12 months



Source: Keen Independent Research.

C-2. Frequency of visits to Henry Vilas Zoo in the last 12 months



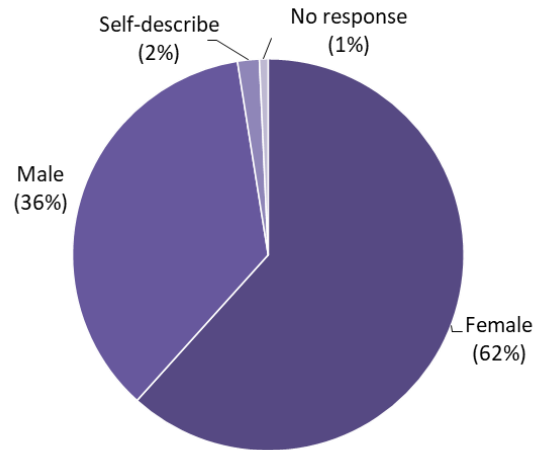
Source: Keen Independent Research.

C. Community Survey — Demographics of respondents

More than 60 percent of the survey respondents were women.
(see Figure C-3).

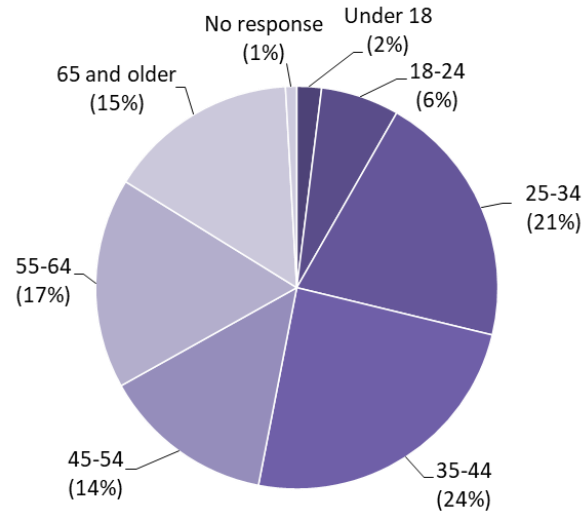
As shown in Figure C-4, many age groups were represented among the survey respondents. The two largest groups were ages 25 to 34 and 35 to 44, which together accounted for 45 percent of all respondents. People ages 65 and older were 15 percent of those completing the survey.

C-3. Gender of respondents



Source: Keen Independent Research.

C-4. Ages of respondents

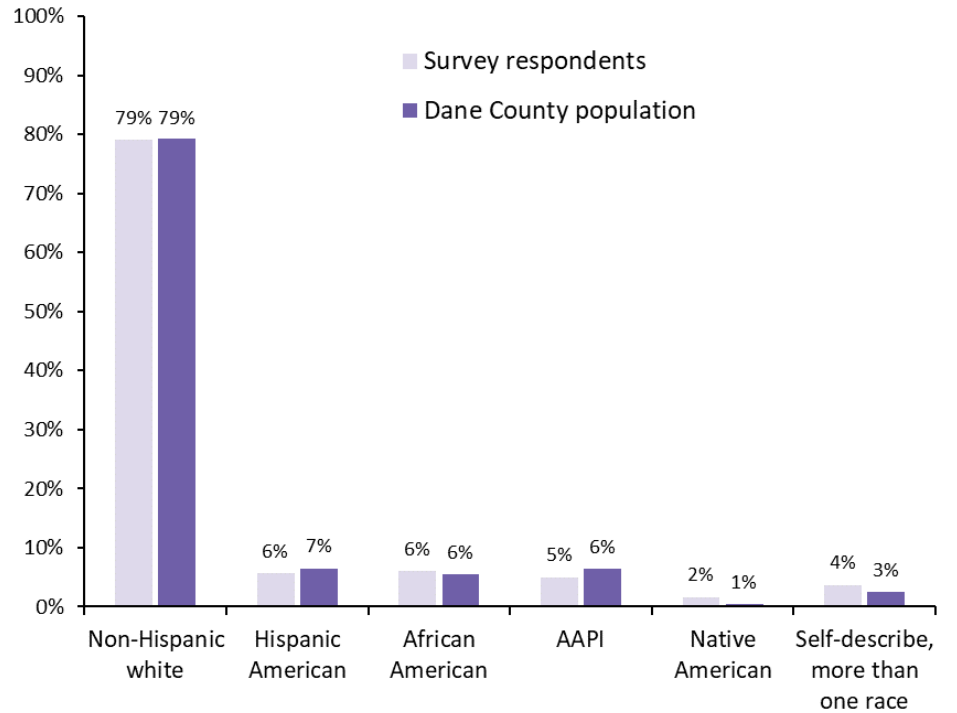


Source: Keen Independent Research.

C. Community Survey — Demographics of respondents

The bar chart to the right (Figure C-5) compares the race and ethnicity of survey respondents to the population of Dane County. The percentage of survey respondents who identified as Hispanic American, African American, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) and Native American was similar to what is found for all Dane County residents.

C-5. Survey respondents compared with Dane County population demographics



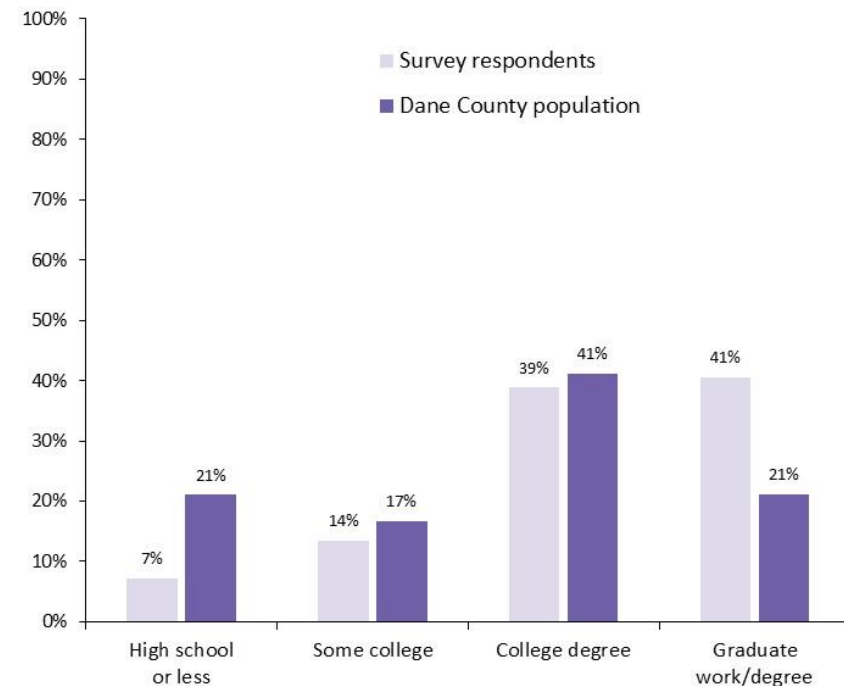
Source: Keen Independent Research and U.S. Census Bureau.

C. Community Survey — Demographics of respondents

Survey respondents were also asked about their education level. Of the respondents, 7 percent reported they had completed high school or less and 14 percent reported completing some college.

Most respondents had completed a college degree, with 39 percent of respondents having a college degree and 41 percent having completed a graduate degree or graduate work (in total 80%). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 52 percent of Dane County’s adults ages 25 and older have a bachelor’s degree or higher.¹ The survey respondents were more educated on average than the Dane County population.

C-6. Level of education of respondents



Source: Keen Independent Research and 2020 ACS-5-year estimates.

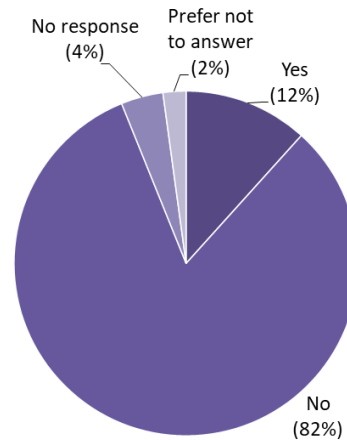
¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/danecountywisconsin>.

C. Community Survey — Demographics of respondents

Of the survey respondents, 12 percent identified as a person with a disability. (In comparison, about 6 percent of County residents under the age of 65 have a disability based on Census Bureau data.²)

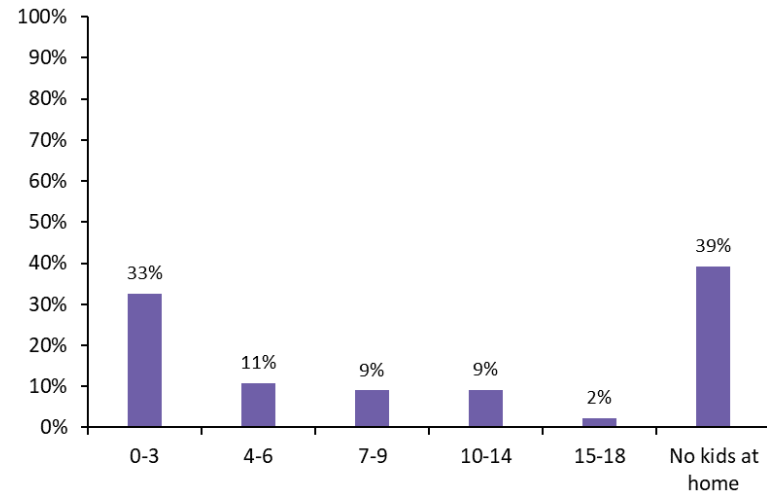
A large share of survey respondents had children 18 or younger living at home, as shown in Figure C-8. A large share of respondents had children ages three or younger.

C-7. Respondents who identify as a person with a disability



Source: Keen Independent Research.

C-8. Age categories of children at home



Source: Keen Independent Research.

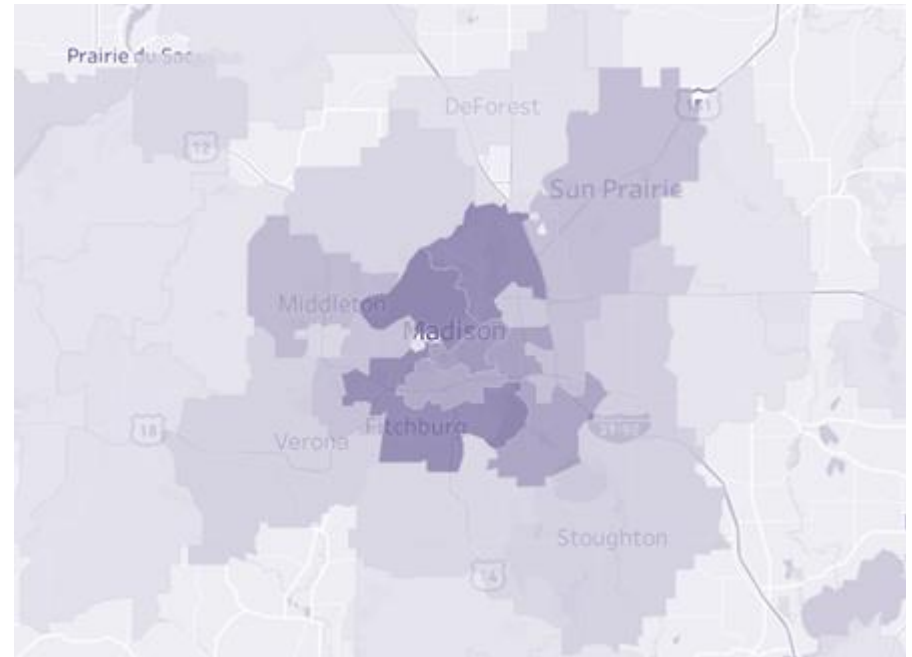
² <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/danecountywisconsin>.

C. Community Survey — Demographics of respondents

Figure C-9 shows the residence of survey respondents, not including the 8 percent of people who said they lived out of state. About 60 percent of the respondents reported living in Madison with most of the remaining respondents in zip codes just outside Madison city limits.

The survey asked individuals to identify the Dane County Parks or trail they visit most often. Figure C-10 on the following page presents those results. Note that results do not reflect a random sample of park visitors. Some of the highest results match the Dane County Parks or City Park where intercept surveys were conducted (Indian Lake, Henry Vilas Park, Lake Farm Park, Lower Yahara River Trail).

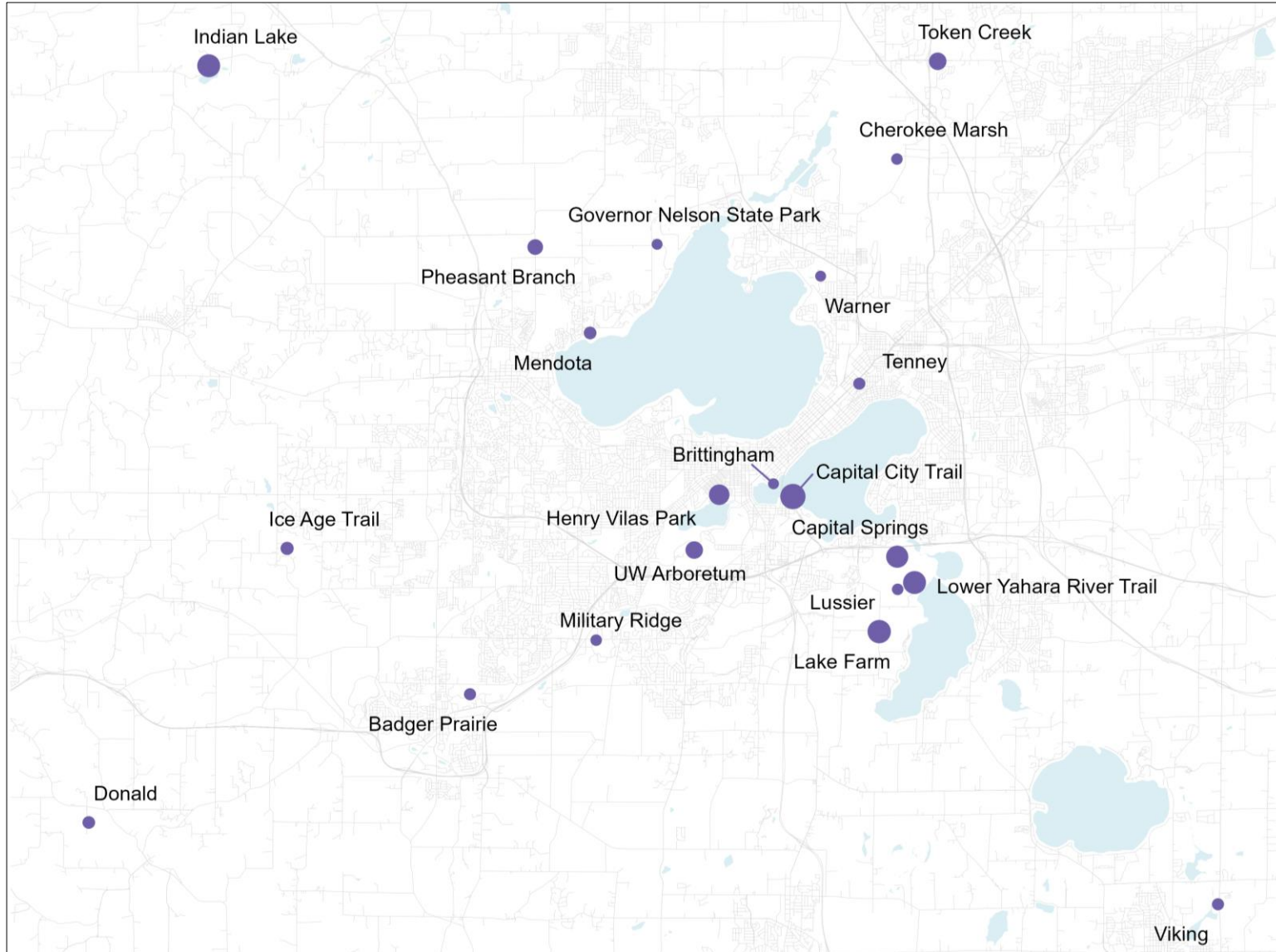
C-9. Respondents by zip code



Source: Keen Independent Research.

C. Community Survey — Activities of respondents

C-10. Parks and trails most frequently visited by respondents



Note: The size of the dots coincide with how often the Parks or trails were mentioned. Only locations with a response rate higher than 2 percent were included.

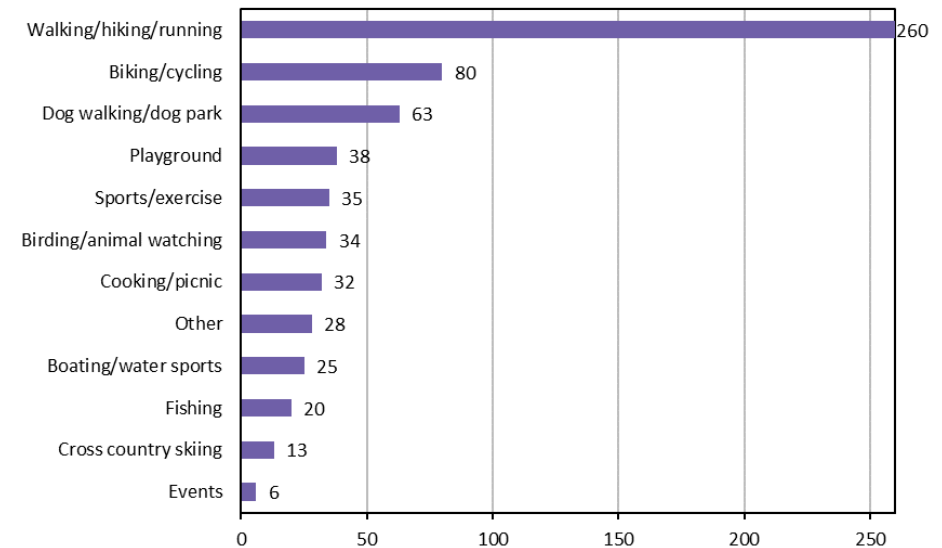
Source: Keen Independent Research.

C. Community Survey — Activities of respondents

After identifying the Dane County Parks or trail they most visit, respondents indicated the activities they most often do at that park or trail.

- Walking, hiking and running were the most frequently mentioned activities.
- Biking, dog walking or going to a dog park, and going to a playground were also frequently mentioned.
- Sports/exercise, birding or animal watching, and cooking or picnicking were mentioned by at least 30 respondents each.

C-11. Most popular activities of respondents at Dane County parks



Source: Keen Independent Research.

We need to think about what the different parks are structured for innately. There are certain choices made around what the primary activities are in a park just by the park design. I wonder how we can think about making sure that those things are reflective of what community members want to do. Are we anchoring these places with activities that the community wants to do? I want to make sure that is not an add-on, and it is part of what the park experience is.

Ad Hoc Advisory group member

C. Community Survey — General comments

Respondents were asked to think about how Dane County Parks and Henry Vilas Zoo can attract people of all backgrounds from throughout the County and how both can be more welcoming to diverse visitors. Many respondents reported that overall, the facilities provide a welcoming space for everyone, but suggested ideas about how to improve upon current efforts. (See general comments to the right.)

The following were common themes from the survey responses:

- Communications and outreach to diverse communities;
- Information and signage in multiple languages;
- Multicultural programming and events;
- Land recognition;
- Events and activities for families;
- Restrictive permits and fees;
- Accessible information;
- Gender-inclusive bathrooms;
- Representation;
- Accessibility;
- Transportation and parking;
- Extended hours; and
- Facility maintenance.

About one-fourth of the respondents reported that free access provides opportunities for diverse groups of visitors to enjoy the Dane County Parks and Zoo. Several respondents said advertising that both the Parks and Zoo are free may attract more visitors.

I think you have to make the park feel like home to the people who are actually going to use it.

African American woman

By partnering with the people within the community and providing programming that speaks to their needs and dreams.

Hispanic American woman

Different cultures use parks for different things. Identify those things and make them available. For example, some cultures gather as an extended family and will cook and eat in the park. They will like picnic areas and grill. Others use parks for recreation and exercise. And others for social activities.

Non-Hispanic white woman

Talk to people about the zoo and the amenities and benefits of the zoo. Explain about what animals are around and why it is fun to watch their behavior. Also mention the Zoo is free, so no cost to go and explore!

Asian American Pacific Islander woman

We make the trip from 2 hours away to visit [the Zoo].

Non-Hispanic white woman

When there is no clear representation, it is easy to feel like you don't belong in places where communities of color or underrepresented communities were traditionally not accepted.

Hispanic American woman

C. Community Survey — Communications and outreach to diverse communities

A number of respondents reported that Dane County Parks and Henry Vilas Zoo should design communications that welcome diverse communities. When asked how the Parks and Zoo can better attract people of diverse backgrounds, many respondents mentioned advertising or marketing in their response.

Suggestions for targeted outreach included media with images of Parks users and Zoo visitors who are people of color and members of other diverse communities.

Some respondents indicated that communications to diverse communities are most effective when associated with targeted outreach to community-based schools, places of worship, community centers, recreation centers and other community gathering places. Some indicated that a dedicated committee focused on outreach efforts may be an effective way to personalize engagement to specific communities.

Additionally, some respondents suggested that the Parks and Zoo utilize a variety of marketing tools such as social media posts and paid ads, flyers, posters, advertising in local newspapers and magazines, features in community newsletters and other community-oriented platforms.

Make sure your advertising is meeting people where they are, not waiting for them to find you.

Non-Hispanic white woman

Need to have inclusive programs that are advertised to the right demographics — schools, parks, educational workshops.

Asian American Pacific Islander man

I think people in the times we are in are fearful of being outside in large crowds for obvious reasons. With all the violence they are seeing that's happening, so I think people are keeping their kids closer to home because they're afraid. Maybe there is a committee that just focuses on outreach for the parks.

African American woman

More information about parks at libraries and public places. Potentially a partnership with schools to let children know about local parks and how to get there.

Non-Hispanic white woman

Outreach initiative around what the parks have to offer, what it means to them and their community. Because people want to be connected from a place of safety and most times that's going to be their home. So maybe outreach starts for a park within a five-mile radius of your home and then from there introduce farther parks and then move out. Do it as a scavenger hunt for kids, I've seen tons of towns do that where you go to one and do this and then you go to another ... and you can do it as even a project as a family.

African American woman

C. Community Survey — Information and signage in multiple languages

Many survey respondents reported the need for information and signage in multiple languages. The most common languages suggested were Spanish and Hmong.

A number of the community survey respondents suggested that welcome signs in multiple languages would create a more engaging environment at the Dane County Parks and Zoo. Other respondents reported that online and in-person maps should be available or displayed in Spanish and Hmong.

They should advertise in multiple languages. I only see signs in English.

Hispanic American man

The signage, the photos, the stories all need to be in a variety of languages and cultural contexts.

Respondent identifying as a person with a disability

... more programs in the languages present in Dane County.

Hispanic American man

I would appreciate the signage being in different languages ... even when you go see the different animals at the zoo, it would be beautiful to have [the name and description in multiple languages].

African American woman

C. Community Survey — Multicultural programming and events

Many respondents reported that adding multicultural and other inclusive events and programming could encourage belonging among diverse communities.

Several respondents suggested that the Parks and Zoo could partner with community groups to authentically celebrate significant holidays, promote cultural heritage months and honor days of remembrance.

Some respondents indicated that people and families of color might be encouraged to visit Dane County's rural parks if they had activities that interest diverse communities. Desired amenities included large-party picnic pavilions, basketball courts and tetherball poles, as well as interactive water features for children. (Several other zoos Keen Independent researched include similar amenities such as interactive water elements like Phoenix Zoo's Leapin' Lagoon for small children.)

A number of survey respondents also suggested incorporating ethnic and cultural foods into programming and exhibits to increase the sense of belonging among diverse communities.

Several respondents indicated that the addition of artwork and murals that depict inclusivity would create a more welcoming space for diverse populations.

A number of respondents indicated that the Parks and Zoo should better advertise low-cost pavilions and spaces available for rent, to encourage gathering of diverse community groups and extended families and friends. Some commented that they would utilize the picnic areas and facilities for outdoor celebrations and indicated that others would, as well, if they knew they were available.

We have to get out of this notion that we've built parks for everybody when we exclude in certain ways those people who would probably frequent it more if it looked like them, if it felt like them.

African American woman

Perhaps consider hosting cultural events like pow wows or agricultural events that appeal to the BIPOC community that strikes a chord with their heritage or cultural roots.

Native American woman

Offer events like the [Zoo's] 'Black Birding' event ... targeting [diverse] populations to build a sense of belonging and comfort.

Asian American Pacific Islander woman

Rotating culturally/geographic-specific exhibits. Example: Create a guide that specifically points to African savannah animals, invite presenters who are from Africa to do specific kid-friendly talks and presentations. Highlight the people, culture, invite a food truck specific to the region.

Non-Hispanic white woman

I have a grandson and I wouldn't necessarily take him to a lot of those parks because there's nothing for him to do there. He loves basketball, not every park has a basketball court. And I've noticed that around the country we've tended to take basketball courts out because we do not want our Black and Brown children at the park. But that's traditional for us, basketball and tetherball.

African American woman

Perhaps have a variety of foods and sweets that are liked by a diverse clientele.

Hispanic American woman

C. Community Survey — Land recognition

Some individuals reported that some Dane County Parks named after white landowners or those reflective of white colonialism add to an unwelcoming environment, for many. Comments suggested that retiring park names and other artifacts of white colonialism could encourage visitors of diverse backgrounds and Indigenous communities to feel more welcome at the Dane County Parks. One Ad-hoc Advisory Group member noted that “Prairie Moraine” is a Dane County Parks name that is more suitable. She suggested that the County simply stop naming parks after “white men.”

A number of respondents reported that land recognition of the Indigenous lands upon which some or all Dane County Parks are sited could contribute to a more welcoming environment for Wisconsin’s Indigenous communities. Several recommended telling authentic stories through historical and cultural markers and statues at park entrances, along trails or at rest stops or scenic areas, as well as acknowledgements via websites and other social media.

Additionally, some respondents suggested that the Parks and Zoo showcase land-culture connections through Indigenous community events and activities.

The names of Dane County parks are named after white landowners. When you go to a park entrance, like Donald Park, there is a picture of the Donald family ... this old white family in this black and white photo and it tells the history of this family. And that’s where you’re greeted, that’s where you’re welcomed into this park.

African American woman

Classes could include information on Indigenous populations and their interactions with native animals such as buffalo or tigers for example for Hmong and Asian connections. I am Native American, and I would love to see a level of that and including acknowledgment that the Zoo sits on Indigenous lands.

Native American woman

I think culturally appropriate statues or sculptures would be amazing. To go to a park and see something that represents ‘you and your culture’ would be amazing.

African American woman

Hold special cultural events; events honoring the land and the people on whose land the parks exist; target programming for focus on experiencing the parks though one sense at a time; hold “how to” events related to nature and ways to utilize the parks.

Non-Hispanic white woman

C. Community Survey — Events and activities for families

Many respondents recommended increased Parks and Zoo events and activities for families. Nearly half of the respondents mentioned “events” as one strategy for increasing access for all groups. Suggestions included festivals, live music or other community events.

Some events and activities at the Parks and Zoo could be tailored to specific age groups of children. As shown earlier in this appendix in Figure C-8, more than 60 percent of the respondents have children at home, so additional family-friendly activities at the Parks and Zoo could attract more visitors. Specifically, about half of those children are under the age of 9, and enhancing age-appropriate educational events and activities could make Dane County Parks and Zoo more relevant for these visitors.

Several respondents reported that free activities at the Parks and Zoo could increase visitation and accessibility among economically disadvantaged individuals and families, as well as other groups. Some suggested that more activities should be offered, especially family-friendly programming. Based on this input, as both the Parks and Zoo offer family-friendly programs and events (some free), awareness of family-focused activities may be limited.

We're in an age now where parents don't have the time, except when they do have the time and then are they thinking about spending the day at a park? Probably not. Unless there is something for them to do there.

African American woman

Provide a variety of activities, not just having the bike trails, etc. but things like teaching kids how to fish. We did a thing this winter ... teaching people how to snowshoe.

Non-Hispanic white woman

Offer more family-fun activities at the Zoo.

Frequent Zoo visitor

Outdoor activities such as 'introduction to basics of anything.' How to hike, how to picnic, how to bike

Non-Hispanic white man

C. Community Survey — Restrictive permits and fees

Some respondents indicated that the Parks and Zoo might be more welcoming to diverse visitors if there were less restrictive permits and fees. For example, one respondent reported having to leave one of the dog parks because she was unable to purchase a pass. Another reported about parking tickets at the Zoo and indicated that this could be a deterrent for possible visitors.

However, some respondents reported that being able to purchase permits onsite at the parks made visiting easier. A few respondents indicated that substituting a countywide tax could be more beneficial than individual permits, as it could eliminate the burden of fees for low-income populations.

Less restrictions like purchasing passes. I went to the new dog park and left because I didn't have a credit card to purchase a pass.

Non-Hispanic white woman

For all visitors, it is not very welcoming when you get back to your car and have an expensive parking ticket. It is hard to enjoy the Zoo when you have to rush to get back to your car.

Person with a disability

This is pertaining to the Henry Vilas Zoo. You could attract more people if you had better parking to allow easier access. I used to take my kids and grandkids a few times a year. Now I have a knee replacement and need the other one done. It is difficult finding a place to park and by the time I get to the Zoo, I am in pain. I need to sit and rest often. Your parking lots only allow you three hours [of] parking. Last time I was there ... we got a \$20 ticket because we took four hours.

Person identifying as with a disability

Signing up for permits at [the] parks is a really good idea, make it easier to get a permit and not have to worry about it.

Non-Hispanic white woman

Changing fees from being individual-based to being a tax spread out among everyone in Dane County may make things more accessible to lower-income populations.

Non-Hispanic white woman

C. Community Survey — Visitor information

A number of respondents indicated that potential visitors might be more inclined to visit the Parks and Zoo if they had information in advance of a visit. Suggestions included more detailed and interactive maps of trails and exhibits, as well as programs and activities offered.

Respondents also requested more information about the organization and management of Dane County Parks. Many respondents reported that they did not know the difference between Dane County Parks and other city and state parks. Some indicated that a greater awareness overall of what Dane County Parks offers (including trails and other amenities) when advertising might encourage more visitors.

Maps (Google and on Dane County website) so I know where they are; your mobile website doesn't provide a map that works and the map on your desktop is unreadable. Onsite fixed maps of recreation trails once I get there. Signs for those trails and at the parks. Upload hikes with pictures on 'AllTrails' app. Your reservation system being online is good.

Non-Hispanic white woman

Put info about accessible trails on websites (i.e., type of trail, length, etc.). There's too little information that it's hard to know if a trail is suitable for my older mom.

Non-Hispanic white woman

Better advertising for what the Parks ... offer. Right now, I don't know what programs and features are at the parks, so I don't think of them when planning family time.

Non-Hispanic white man

I had to look up which parks are actually Dane County vs. state parks. More awareness overall that they are there and have stuff to do for families or groups.

Non-Hispanic white man

C. Community Survey — Representation

Some respondents indicated that increasing the diversity of Parks and Zoo staff and volunteers could create a more welcoming environment. One person identifying as having a disability said, “The staff need to be a living demonstration to the diversity of the County.”

Some respondents indicated that engaging diverse youth through community groups or schools could cultivate an interest in the Dane County Parks and Zoo. These respondents suggested partnering with schools or other community groups to build interest among youth from underrepresented groups and other diverse communities.

Specifically, respondents mentioned paid internships and volunteer opportunities as ways to encourage involvement in and exposure to Dane County Parks and Zoo among diverse youth.

Although Dane County offers well-paid internships and the Zoo partners with internship programs at organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club and Centro Hispano, participation among communities of color and other diverse groups could be strengthened. For success, the Parks and Zoo need to consider new ways to recruit and build a diverse pool of applicants in fields where people of color are not well represented. Internships could serve as an entrée into those fields.

Hire more diverse staff, provide more cultural information through signage and educational information so BIPOC don't feel out of place.

Native American woman

People go where there are others that look like them so actively recruit and hire diverse zookeepers, store managers, etc. Make sure all staff is welcoming of all people, even those who think, believe, behave ... different from them. Your staff is front line and if they can't respect and celebrate differences, you're never going to make all people feel welcome.

Non-Hispanic white woman

I think it would be a good opportunity for the county to hire people who represent the diversity of the community and offer to advance once inside. This motivates the community to go to events or places where there is clear support for all communities.

Hispanic American woman

Hire more diverse staff, provide more cultural information through signage and educational information so BIPOC don't feel out of place.

Native American woman

I like the idea of having paid internships. We have to expose our young people, but we also have to understand that we are living in a world now where young people are actually contributing to their household It's about exposure, where are we finding young folks. We have to reach out to all young people, in all communities, to make sure that all young people have access to such opportunities.

African American woman

C. Community Survey — Gender inclusive bathrooms

A number of respondents reported that having gender inclusive bathroom facilities is important to ensuring all visitors feel safe in the Dane County Parks and Zoo.

Figure C-3 earlier in the appendix shows that 2 percent of respondents self-described their gender, and of those, most reported identifying as non-binary. As shown in the comments to the right, some respondents had no knowledge of all-gender or gender-neutral restrooms at the Parks and Zoo (although they are offered by both).

Gender inclusive bathrooms that feel safe for people of any gender.

Non-Hispanic white woman

Gender inclusive bathrooms would be huge—my spouse is trans and no matter what bathroom he chooses, he may still be at risk of bigotry and hate if it's assigned to a gender. Even just having a few bathrooms in the Zoo that aren't assigned to a specific gender would help a lot.

Person identifying as with a disability

C. Community Survey — Accessibility

Several respondents indicated that there was a need for increased accessibility at Dane County Parks and the Zoo. A number of respondents mentioned the need for ramps, level and smooth walkways, directive signage, accessible trails, improved viewing areas for persons in wheelchairs, free or rentable motorized scooters and larger wheelchair sizes. Of those respondents, some mentioned a need specific to using a wheelchair or scooter. A number of respondents reported that there is a need for additional ADA-compliant parking at the Zoo.

Some respondents reported that more information about the accessibility of trails would encourage persons with disabilities or mobility issues to use the Dane County Parks.

For example, these individuals need a clear understanding of the conditions of trails before they can bring wheelchairs, strollers and other assistive devices. They may also need to know if there are easily accessible and well-maintained, accessible bathrooms, as well as access to electrical outlets to charge wheelchairs and other assistive devices. Individuals with mobility concerns need to know the distance to both regular and ADA-compliant parking lots as well as the frequency of placement of benches where they can sit and rest.

There are manual wheelchairs at the Zoo which are not accessible for larger-bodied individuals. Could there be a mix of wheelchair sizes? ... There have been times when we have needed assistive devices to access your Zoo and they either didn't exist, or couldn't fit a larger body, and so we had to leave. Your Zoo is very good for able-bodied individuals but for people who are disabled, or who may not be able to walk the whole Zoo from time to time (as ability can fluctuate for some disabled bodies), its much less so.

Person identifying as with a disability

More support for disabled folks who might need assistance getting into the Zoo. This might be hard, but better parking, as I'm a disabled person married to another disabled person, and we don't have disabled plates so finding parking that doesn't exhaust us or cause us pain before we even get into the Zoo is a huge barrier for visits.

Person identifying as with a disability

The only real disability access at the Zoo is rentable push wheelchairs that you have to pay for. My spouse and I both have mobility issues, which means we can't push each other, but we don't regularly need our own mobility aids unless we're walking a lot. Having motorized wheelchairs/scooters would help.

Person identifying as with a disability

Highlight accessibility as an option for visitors or website users. Often, it's unclear if there are accessible trails (and what that means), accessible bathrooms, and what resources might be accessible for those who need specialized equipment to enjoy the space. Pictures are helpful as are detailed descriptions. Consider a dedicated accessibility tab for internet searches.

Non-Hispanic white woman

C. Community Survey — Accessibility

Some respondents reported additional accessibility concerns at the Dane County Parks and Zoo outside of mobile accessibility. For example, some respondents indicated that more designated quiet areas, low-stimulus hours or smaller group tours may create a more welcoming environment for some visitors.

Provide low-stimuli hours/events, all of the stimulation during regular hours (at the Zoo) can be overwhelming for some individuals. Provide audio headsets for visually impaired or those with auditory sensitivities for self-guided tours. Make faculty-led tours more frequent [with] smaller groups.

Non-Hispanic white woman

Interior spaces free from VOCs and other harsh chemical contaminates. Not using any scented products in any interior spaces: gift store, reptile house, aviary, bathrooms, etc.

Person identifying as with a disability

I would like to see free programs at off-peak hours for adults and seniors—use the greenspace by the rhinos for exercise classes like yoga and tai chi, or other quiet pursuits. Add more seating areas in quiet places. The zoo has very few quiet spots for more sensitive people.

Non-Hispanic white woman

C. Community Survey — Transportation and parking

Respondents frequently highlighted the need for more transit options to the Dane County Parks and Zoo. Some respondents provided suggestions on how to provide alternate modes of transportation by partnering with community groups that can expand bus and shuttle access.

Many respondents mentioned that increased public transportation options and routes would encourage more visitors of all backgrounds. Some suggested increased bus routes or the addition of bus stops closer to the Parks and Zoo.

Parking at the Zoo was also a common concern, with 14 percent of respondents indicating that parking is a barrier to attendance.

Partnering or supporting Black churches, community centers, schools with high diversity numbers, could all be good opportunities. It's not really about "attracting" them but more about helping them have access through bussing or other modes of transport. Setting up a transit system for these communities would be far too costly but partnerships could be ideal.

Native American woman

Transportation accessibility, maybe a weekend bus route from targeted area[s] to park locations.

Non-Hispanic white woman

More parking or improved bus transportation routes. It would take over an hour and a half on a bus from far west side. 15 minutes by car.

Non-Hispanic white woman

The parking is terrible around the Zoo — maybe better bus access, I understand there is not much room to expand parking but what about shuttle service from the college, which has better parking.

Native American woman

I think the parking and access is a big consideration for a lot of people, especially older people that like to take their grandkids.

Person identifying as with a disability

C. Community Survey — Extended hours

A number of respondents noted the need for a greater variety in the hours of operation at the Zoo. Some suggested extended evening hours especially during the summer, to accommodate working individuals, parents and caretakers.

Some respondents indicated that Parks and Zoo evening events for adults could encourage more diverse visitors including young adults and adults with no children living at home. Events could be targeted to adults ages of 18 and 35 (about one-third of the survey respondents were ages 18-35) and adults with no children living at home (nearly 40% of the survey respondents).

Most people are not free from 9–5 on the weekdays. It would be great if once or twice a week [the Zoo] could be open later, until 8 or so during the summer.

Hispanic American man

... it's not about attracting them; they want to go. It's about helping them get there and supporting parents who work all hours of the day and do not have the time to get them there.

Native American woman

Maybe have one night a week where you are open later during the summer so that working families could come. Weekends sometimes fill up fast and a quick trip to the Zoo after work might be something a family could [do] together.

Frequent Zoo visitor

Create activities that are of interest not just to children but to adults. Maybe even adult-attracting, specific activities. Zoo lights is great — could lights be kept up in trees, to have some Zoo after dark activities?

Person with a disability

Besides school and kids' activities, include special days during the week for families that don't know what do with their kids during the summer or late afternoon.

Hispanic American woman

C. Community Survey — Facility maintenance

A few respondents reported that keeping the Parks and Zoo facilities clean and free of trash would create a more welcoming environment for everyone. Some specifically mentioned keeping the bathrooms clean.

Additionally, some respondents indicated that well-lit areas could make visitors feel safer while at the parks. Women were more likely to offer safety-related comments than men.

Cleaner and more updated playgrounds [are needed]. There [are] some that are still pretty outdated, and some have inappropriate things written all over. Sprinklers will be nice for kids to cool off during summertime.

Hispanic American woman who frequently visits the parks

Ensure places are safe for people of all backgrounds by having good lighting and landscaping [that] doesn't feel like it provides hiding places near shelter areas.

Non-Hispanic white woman who frequently visits the parks

C. Community Survey — Survey instrument



DANE COUNTY PARKS AND HENRY VILAS ZOO — USER/VISITOR SURVEY

Introduction

The Office of the Dane County Board, in collaboration with Dane County Parks and the Henry Vilas Zoo, engaged Keen Independent Research to conduct a program evaluation to advance racial and social equity and access at Dane County Parks and the Henry Vilas Zoo.

As part of this study, Keen Independent Research is gathering input from visitors and non-visitors of the Parks and Zoo and seeks your input and comments. Results will help inform recommendations to guide the County towards improving access to its facilities, lands, properties and programs, and ultimately become a more inclusive, equitable and racially just place for all. Visit the study website: <https://keenindependent.com/danecoparksandzooequity/>

Results will be reported in aggregate.

You may also reach out to Lisa MacKinnon, Sustainability and Program Evaluation Coordinator, MacKinnon@countyofdane.com

C. Community Survey — Survey instrument

Questions

Please respond to each question.

1. Think about **Dane County Parks**, how can they attract people of all backgrounds from throughout the County?

2. Now, think about **Henry Vilas Zoo**, how can it attract people of all backgrounds from throughout the County?

3. In the last 12 months, how many times have you used a **Dane County Park**? (If you answered “0” to question 3, skip to question 6.)

0
1 to 2
3 to 4
5 or more
Don't know

4. Which Park or trail do you visit most often?

5. At the Park or trail you mentioned, what activity or activities do you most often do?

6. In the last 12 months, how many times have you visited **Henry Vilas Zoo**?

0
1 to 2
3 to 4
5 or more
Don't know

7. Please provide input regarding how Dane County Parks and Zoo can be more welcoming to diverse users and visitors.

C. Community Survey — Survey instrument

Demographics

8. Select one:

Male

Female

Self-describe: _____

9. Please select age group:

Under 18

18–24

25–34

35–44

45–54

55–64

65 and above

10. Please select one:

African American

Asian American or Pacific Islander

Hispanic American

Native American

Non-Hispanic white

Other: _____

11. Highest level of education. (Select one)

High school or less

Some college

College degree

Graduate work/degree

12. Do you identify as a person with a disability?

Yes

No

Prefer not to answer

C. Community Survey — Survey instrument

13. Ages of any children living at home (Check all that apply):

0–3

4–6

7–9

10–14

15–18

No kids at home

14. Zip code of residence:

APPENDIX D. Equity plans — Introduction

Professional associations relevant to parks and zoos provide guidance for developing equity and inclusion plans. In addition, communities regarded as having industry leading practices in equity and inclusion offer examples that can inform equity and inclusion initiatives for Dane County Parks and Zoo.

This appendix summarizes recommendations from professional associations, primarily the National Recreation and Park Association and Association of Zoos and Aquariums, and highlights practices drawn from equity plans for Seattle, Portland and Minneapolis, communities regarded as having undertaken exemplary work in equity and inclusion.

Summary of Steps to Building an Equity Plan

As part of this evaluation, Dane County Parks and Zoo can learn from how others embed equity and inclusion across organizations, using a top-down and community-inclusive approach.

Recommended practices and components for effective equity and inclusion plans compiled from or represented by these sources include:

- Building plans with community participation, including input from underrepresented groups;
- Prioritizing equity and inclusion in the organizational mission, vision and strategy;
- Supporting equity efforts through the commitment and involvement of the top leaders;
- Putting words to the “why” that will drive the work and foster a shared purpose and vocabulary;
- Setting centralized goals that create a framework to align all levels of government as well as support individuals implementing those goals;
- Focusing on organizational commitments but recognizing that individual level execution, which will cause efforts to succeed or fail, must be accomplished through universal training, toolkits and failsafe processes;
- Defining measurable indicators of progress and outcomes and creating methods to fill measurement gaps;
- Creating accountability by assigning leadership responsibility to all planning objectives with timelines and a process for assessing and reporting progress;
- Structuring deliverables as ongoing, short-term, medium-term and long-term recognizing that some goals will take years to bring to fruition but early “wins” will be important to building momentum and buy-in;
- Ensuring baseline funding for agreed upon operations and then addressing equity through designated allocations beyond the baseline so equity and inclusion priorities do not depend on or compete with base operations;
- Staying focused on the scope of the intended plan while still capturing essential information that falls outside the scope or under the auspices of other groups in an appendix or through other mechanisms;
- Creating internal governance and leadership structures to sustain the work;
- Engaging external advisors in implementation to ensure oversight and guidance; and
- Sharing the work, progress and revisions of the planning efforts transparently to the community.

D. Equity plans — Professional associations

The Keen Independent study team reviewed resources offered by the professional association for parks administration.

National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)

NRPA offers a variety of resources to foster equity and inclusion in domestic parks. Resources, including its own organizational Equity Action Plan, reflect a strong commitment to equity as central to the mission of parks as well as commit to a focus on racial equity. In addition, NRPA launched Parks for Inclusion in 2017 to ensure that everyone has access to the benefits of parks and recreation. This program has published resources particularly helpful in guiding the development of equity and inclusion plans for parks. Three are highlighted here.

Elevating Health Equity through Parks and Recreation:

A Framework for Action.¹ Although specific to health equity, this document includes a series of assessment worksheets and planning tools that have broader application to equity and inclusion. In this framework, self-assessment precedes organizational assessment, recognizing that distributed involvement in DEI action plans is contingent on the individuals throughout the organization who will be depended upon for the work.

For each area of agency assessment, the worksheets prompt consideration of current state, ideal state, action items (what and who) and aspects of the question in need of further exploration. This framework values incremental steps with prompts to focus on actions needed to move from good to better or from better to great. Action plan worksheets for each topical area invite participants to define a vision for success, steps to be taken within 30 days, six months, and one year, what resources will be needed, what indicators will define success and steps to create accountability internally and externally.

Examples of questions prompted by the framework worksheets include:

- Which groups are unintentionally being left out of our programs and services? Why are these groups being left out?
- How do our organizational policies, practices and tools help or hinder progress toward our equity goals?
- How do we create space and a mechanism for community members to actively take part in conversations about programs and services from conception to implementation and evaluation?
- Does our agency mission and vision explicitly include diversity, equity and inclusion principles?
- Does our agency have an explicit commitment from leadership to center equity in decision-making and program planning?

¹https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/fb504056fcdd49a483936175230a2077/nrpa_framework_2021.pdf.

D. Equity plans — Professional associations

Creating Equity Based System Master Plans.² This NRPA resource includes discussion of implementation planning for equity-based master plans (which is relevant to equity and inclusion planning more broadly). The recommended approach builds implementation plans on a foundation of data analysis, community engagement, needs identification and goal setting to then create a realistic implementation plan that considers current and future resources, partnerships and funding options.

To foster community and political trust and buy-in, NRPA recommends including a range of priorities from quick wins that can be attainable in three to six months, medium-term projects attainable in one to three years, and long-term projects likely to require three or more years.

Examples of short-term/quick wins include:

- Mobile play, pop-up demonstrations;
- Walking groups;
- Creative placemaking (integrating art projects to reflect specific audiences); and
- Low-cost maintenance improvements to increase usability.

Examples of medium-term projects include:

- Augmentation of park safety elements such as lighting;
- Addition of a single park amenity such as a shade structure to an existing park;
- Removal of a barrier such as fences or bushes; and
- Improvement to maintenance policies.

Examples of long-term projects include:

- Designated community-focused staff;
- New parks;
- Joint park-use agreements (e.g., Community School Parks (CSP) open to the public);
- Sidewalk improvements; and
- Land acquisition.

² <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/best-practice-resources/creating-equity-based-system-master-plans/>.

D. Equity plans — Professional associations

Community Engagement Resource Guide.³ This guide recognizes the importance of focused efforts to engage community members who are systematically disadvantaged by location and lack of proximity to parks and who are part of vulnerable populations. In this document, NRPA recommends staffing at least one or two positions focused on community engagement and acknowledges that funding constraints may require that this goal be considered long-term.

This guide also recommends leveraging current staff connections and establishing a community advisory council to build relationships with and foster participation by underrepresented audiences.

Having at least one or two community outreach specialists on staff is ideal but financing these positions can be difficult. To move toward hiring community engagement staff, recognize it as a long-term goal for your agency, create an action plan and get leadership buy-in to help secure funding for these positions. While strategizing about hiring community outreach staff, you can begin forming relationships with community members in other ways.

Community Engagement Resource Guide, p.4

³<https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/19b3cbe05a634d5e8d3b712dbc8aa9d0/community-engagement-guide-nrpa.pdf>.

D. Equity plans — Professional associations

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA)

AZA expects members to have written plans to support equity and inclusion. Accreditation standards require a written program for diversity, equity, access and inclusion and guidelines for developing a Diversity, Equity, Access and Inclusion (DEAI) program.

Guidelines for Developing a Great DEAI Program (AZA).⁴ In 2020, the AZA Diversity Committee issued guidelines for DEAI programs. The document aligns with meeting accreditation standard 7.9 which calls on AZA members to follow a written plan for DEAI. To meet the standard the written program must be proactive and transparent, include measurable goals and have paid staff or committee responsible for oversight. The Henry Vilas Zoo has followed these guidelines by preparing its equity plan and assembling an equity committee.

The guidelines for a DEAI program address overall DEI program administration, staff and volunteers, suppliers and including most relevant to the scope of the Dane County Parks and Zoos evaluation, visitors. Four standards for DEAI visitor initiatives deem that:

- The organization works with the diverse demographics and geographic communities that are in its audience;
- Visitor experience and programs are co-created with input from diverse community stakeholders;
- Evaluation is culturally appropriate and responsive; and
- The organization has formed key partnerships with diverse community groups and leaders.

The institution must follow a written diversity, equity, access, and inclusion program. Programs must be proactive and transparent, with measurable goals for assessing progress, and must have a paid staff member(s) or committee responsible for oversight. Explanation: Programs must reflect recognition of the important connection between mission and diversity, and present an on-going effort to enhance diversity, equity, access, and inclusion. Efforts must address areas including paid and unpaid staff, guests/audience, and supplier diversity. Programs must be evaluated at least annually for effectiveness and content, and refinements made as needed.

Accreditation Standard 7.9

⁴https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2332/guidelines_for_developing_a_great_deai_program.pdf.

D. Equity plans — Professional associations

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)

Although not specific to parks or zoos, SHRM offers substantial supporting resources for DEI planning.

Guide to Developing a Strategic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan.⁵

This guide covers a wide range of equity topics. SHRM emphasizes areas related to human resources such as workforce diversity and staff training, which are not a primary focus of this outward-facing study intended to focus on user and visitor inclusion. However, this resource addresses several areas relevant to Dane County Parks and Zoo as it focuses on equity and inclusion for audiences including mission and vision, communication, marketing, partnerships, customer experience and evaluation.

Of relevance, SHRM underscores the importance of securing commitment from the top as key to the success of an equity and inclusion plan.

Describe the specific actions you would like your CEO/senior leaders to take in the first three months of your strategic DE&I management plan. These actions should, at a minimum, include participating in the creation of your vision, mission and strategy, and a commitment to put his or her name to all company-wide communication about the new plan.

*Guide to Developing a Strategic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan,
Commitment from the Top*

⁵ This and related information are available to members at: <https://www.shrm.org/>.

D. Equity plans — Municipalities and other entities

NRPA has cited three communities, Seattle, Portland and Minneapolis, as having exemplary park departments that have “shifted their approach from mere inclusivity to racial equity.” This appendix considers the racial equity plans for these three communities, and, in the case of Portland, the plan for the surrounding regional Parks and Recreation program under the purview of Oregon Metro.

Seattle, Washington

The Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) is the City of Seattle’s commitment to racial equity in Seattle. Regarded as the model for efforts that followed in Portland and Minneapolis, also described in this appendix, Seattle offers a centralized strategic plan and racial equity toolkit and structures goals and processes to align city departments toward racial equity outcomes. Recognized for stakeholder driven processes and partnerships with organizations embedded in their communities, Seattle deploys resources to serve communities with the greatest disparities. Top leadership in the Parks department set clear and unifying objectives as staff build equity implementation into their day-to-day work.

For more information, the Racial Equity Toolkit is available here:

https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/RSJI/RacialEquityToolkit_FINAL_August2012.pdf.

Race and Social Justice 2022-2026 Strategic Plan.⁶ Strategies to embed racial equity into the work of the City include:

- Supporting departmental Change Teams to advance racial equity through city departments;
- Sustaining a structure of leadership that includes an RSJI sub-cabinet, Directors Forums, Equity Leads and an interdepartmental Workforce Equity Planning and Advisory Committee;
- Collaborating with the City Budget Office to develop tools for equitable budgeting; and
- Using the racial equity toolkit to advocate for equitable community engagement and redirection of resources to communities most impacted by structural racism.

⁶ <https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/RSJI/Strategic%20Planning/RSJI-Strategic-Plan-2022-2026.pdf>.

D. Equity plans — Municipalities and other entities

Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) Strategic Plan 2020-2032.⁷ The Seattle Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan for 2020-2032, “Healthy People, Healthy Environment, Strong Communities,” while broader than equity and inclusion, heavily emphasizes and addresses equity. Equity and access are among the four SPR values listed in the plan along with the commitment to racial equity.

The strategic plan includes:

- Developing an SPR Equity and Engagement Plan to implement the city’s equity goals;
- Developing an equity scorecard and map for resource allocation that uses data to address disparities for underserved areas and groups;
- Revamping SPR’s Race and Social Justice Initiative Outcomes, Strategies, and Actions to ensure an equity lens is integral to the work;
- Training all SPR staff about the Pathway to Equity;
- Conducting robust and culturally responsive community outreach and engagement; and
- Developing an equity dashboard and performance indicators as part of performance management.

Furthermore, the steps in the pathway to equity are as follows:

- “Healthy People” connects to the Pathway to Equity around health disparities for people of color.
- “Healthy Environment” connects to the Pathway to Equity around the disproportionate exposure of people of color, low-income communities and tribal populations to harmful environmental conditions.
- “Strong Communities” connects to the Pathway to Equity around the disproportionate impacts of income inequality, educational gaps and unemployment on communities of color.
- “Organizational Excellence” connects to the Pathway to Equity by making it incumbent upon the City of Seattle to take responsibility for the ways it has contributed to worsening racial disparity through redlining and other discriminatory practices and to prioritize serving those harmed.

⁷https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/ParksAndRecreation/PoliciesPlanning/SPR_Strategic_Plan.03.27.2020.pdf.

D. Equity plans — Municipalities and other entities

Portland, Oregon

Portland’s environment for fostering equitable park and zoo inclusion benefits from:

- Citywide tool and templates used across all bureaus;
- Application of bureau planning tools toward the creation of a Parks and Recreation racial equity action plan; and
- Being situated in a regional governance structure (Oregon Metro) that supports robust equity and inclusion planning for regional parks and the Oregon Zoo.

Portland citywide tools. Portland offers Microsoft Excel-based assessment and planning tools to city bureaus linked to centralized efforts. To strengthen accountability, these tools offer a structured process to align all parts of the organization’s centralized goals and strategies with specific actions, metrics and reporting.

Examples of these Excel-based assessment tools are to the right.

Road Map Tool. Portland’s Road Map Tool (also referred to as the Assessment Tool) collects standardized bureau-level data on employee and leadership diversity and contracting practices. An equity baseline assessment tab collects ratings on specific items under each of the following areas: Organizational commitment, leadership and management, workforce, community access and partnership, contracting, data metrics and continuous quality improvement. Standardized scoring draws conclusions about areas of relative strength or weakness.⁸

Equity Plan Template. For bureaus within the City, the template creates the structure for developing five-year plans, planning actions and measuring outcomes. It also prompts identification of evaluation tools and assigns lead staff, oversight and due dates.

Annual Reporting Template. This document is a companion to the Equity Plan Template with tabs for annual progress reports for each year of the five-year plan. It logs itemized bureau-level actions designed to support central goals and strategies as well as summarizes annual status, performance measures, challenges, successes and any gaps in support.

⁸ To download the City of Portland’s Road Map Tool, click “Assessment Tool” under the header, “Racial Equity Plan Materials” at: <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/oehr/70046>.

D. Equity plans — Municipalities and other entities

Portland Parks and Recreation Racial Equity Action Plan.⁹

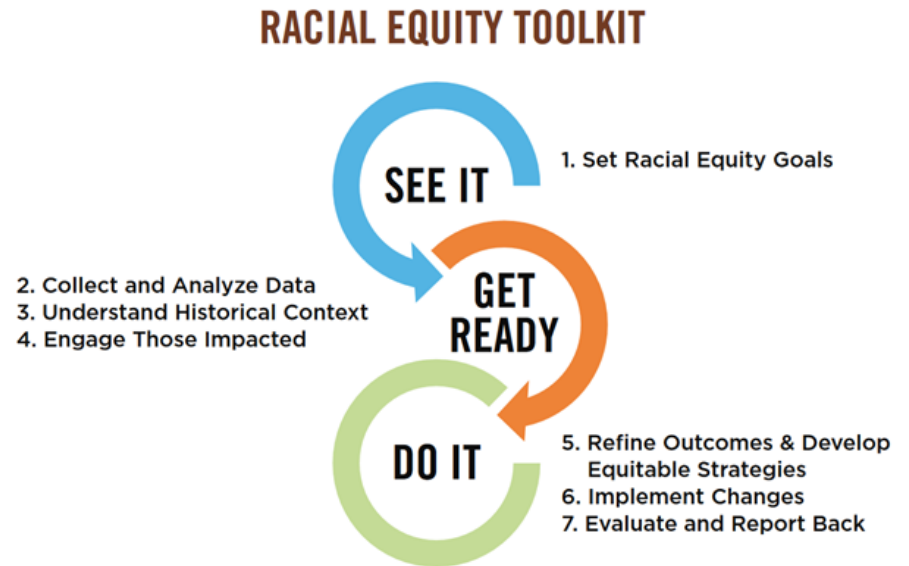
In addition to the overall city bureau planning tools, Portland Parks and Recreation has published a five-year Racial Equity Action Plan to structure its implementation of racial equity goals adopted by the City Council.

Portland’s strategies for bringing a racial equity framework to Parks and Recreation include working with the Office of Equity and Human Rights to develop a racial equity lens and toolkit as well as a vulnerability index based on park area demographics. Additionally, ongoing training and support for employees is another key part.

To strengthen engagement among people of color and refugee and immigrant communities, Portland focuses on partnership development, communications, representation on advisory boards, participation in budgeting, and education of “friends” groups regarding racial equity data collection. The end goal is to ensure culturally responsive programming, as well as services for non-English speakers.

In addition, Portland set up the Parks Race and Ethnicity Project (PREP) to collect information on the demographics of users.¹⁰

D-1. City of Portland Office of Equity and Human Rights Racial Equity Toolkit



 OFFICE of EQUITY
and HUMAN RIGHTS
CITY OF PORTLAND

Source: <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/oehr/71685>.

⁹ <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/article/623289>.

¹⁰ <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/article/448942>.

D. Equity plans — Municipalities and other entities

Oregon Metro Parks and Nature: Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan.¹¹ Broader than and distinct from Portland, Oregon Metro is a regional governance organization of three counties and 24 cities including Portland. Within Metro’s purview are regional parks and the Oregon Zoo.

This plan references Oregon Metro’s overarching racial equity goals and then links its purpose to the fulfillment of Metro’s mission for Parks and Nature through three outcomes: Economic equity, environmental equity and cultural equity. Definitions and examples of outcomes in each area foster a shared understanding and vision.

A sidebar notes that “Parks and Nature staff identified many actions well suited for other Metro departments, including human resources, finance and procurement.” These are compiled in an appendix.

For each Metro-level goal, the department delineates objectives and associated outcomes corresponding to the three above defined as economic, equity and cultural.

A range of suggested timeframes for roll out include ongoing, years 1-2 and years 3-5. Each has an identified lead team.

This plan functions as a “living document.”

Examples below of actions from this plan could also be applied by Dane County Parks and Zoo:

- Inventory geographic locations of parks and natural areas (Metro and local providers) and program offerings; and identify geographic gaps in programming and outdoor facilities relative to the geographies of communities of color.
- Establish a standing Parks and Nature equity advisory committee including members of communities of color from across the region.
- Create a new position filled by a person with experience collaborating with Indigenous communities.
- Identify community-based partners to promote an exclusive early reservation period for large-scale holiday celebrations or events at Metro Parks.
- Reassess guidelines and processes governing community access to undeveloped natural areas to remove barriers over time.
- Establish a process to establish partnership and engagement priorities for department programming.
- Explore opportunities to engage with regional transportation, with the goal of improving public transportation access to park destinations.

¹¹https://www.oregonmetro.gov/sites/default/files/2019/04/05/ParksNature_DEI_Workplan_Summary2018.pdf.

D. Equity plans — Municipalities and other entities

Minneapolis, Minnesota

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) published both the MPRB Racial Equity Action Plan and a January 2022 update. The MPRB plan update points to five broad goals and defines an indicator, outcomes and actions for each along with timeline, accountability, performance measures, progress report and resources needed.

MPRB’s plan serves as a working, updateable document. Updates are and prior versions are available to the public through the MPRB website. (See links on the next page.)

By city ordinance, Minneapolis has tied accountability to budgeting, requiring a racial equity assessment for all new budget requests. Since 2016, for example, Minneapolis has utilized an equity matrix to prioritize and select capital improvement projects in neighborhood parks. In 2017 and 2018 respectively, the equity matrix prioritization process expanded to regional parks and trails and recreation centers.

The equity matrix considers community characteristics and site-specific characteristics in a weighted formula to select capital projects and decide equity-based funding priorities. In the case of recreation centers, after baseline funding is allocated, community and site-specific characteristics become factors in the allocation of remaining funds above baseline. Community characteristics include diversity index, health indicators and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation. Site-specific characteristics include hours of operation or the level and cost of late-night operations serving underserved populations in the urban core.

Examples of outcomes and actions in this plan are:

- Create MPRB101 for Minneapolis residents, including underrepresented and underserved communities;
- Develop multicultural advertising plan to promote use of regional parks;
- Pilot and test welcoming wayfinding to address barriers to regional park use by communities of color; and
- Implement community gardens in specified Minneapolis parks in or adjacent to Areas of Concentrated Poverty or USDA Food Deserts.

D-2. Minneapolis Recreation Center equity funding allocation criteria

Criteria Categories	Portion of Total Funding Allocation
Baseline Funding	Equal level of funding to each Site
Community Characteristics	50% of remaining funding after Baseline Funding
Diversity Index	1
Health Indicators	1
SNAP Participation	1
Youth Population	1
Senior Population	1
Vehicle Access	1
Crimes Against People	1
Median Household Income	1
Site Specific Characteristics	50% of remaining funding after Baseline Funding
Operating Hours per week	1,2
Number of Program Offered	1
Participation per Hour of Activity	1
NiteOwlz Program Site	1,2,4
Gym on Site	2,3
Warming Room on Site	1
High Use Site	1

Source: Equity Criteria for Allocating Recreation Center Funding, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, October 18, 2017.

D. Equity plans — Municipalities and other entities

For more information on equity matrix-based funding for park and trail improvements and recreation center operations in Minneapolis see:

- MPRB Racial Equity Action Plan and January 2022 update:
<https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/about-us/racial-equity/>.
- https://library.municode.com/mn/minneapolis/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PAREBOCOOR_CH17CRBASYCARENEPA_PRSCCOCH16--20YENEPAPL.
- https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/_asset/zvw35c/Equity-Based-Criteria-for-Neighborhood-CIP_050416-highlight.pdf
- <https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/equity-based-criteria-for-regional-cip.pdf>
- https://www.minneapolisparcs.org/_asset/mnm8ps/10-18-2018-budget-equity-criteria-rec-center-funding.pdf
- <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program>