

Research: Connecting Youth with the Regional Park System

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Research team members

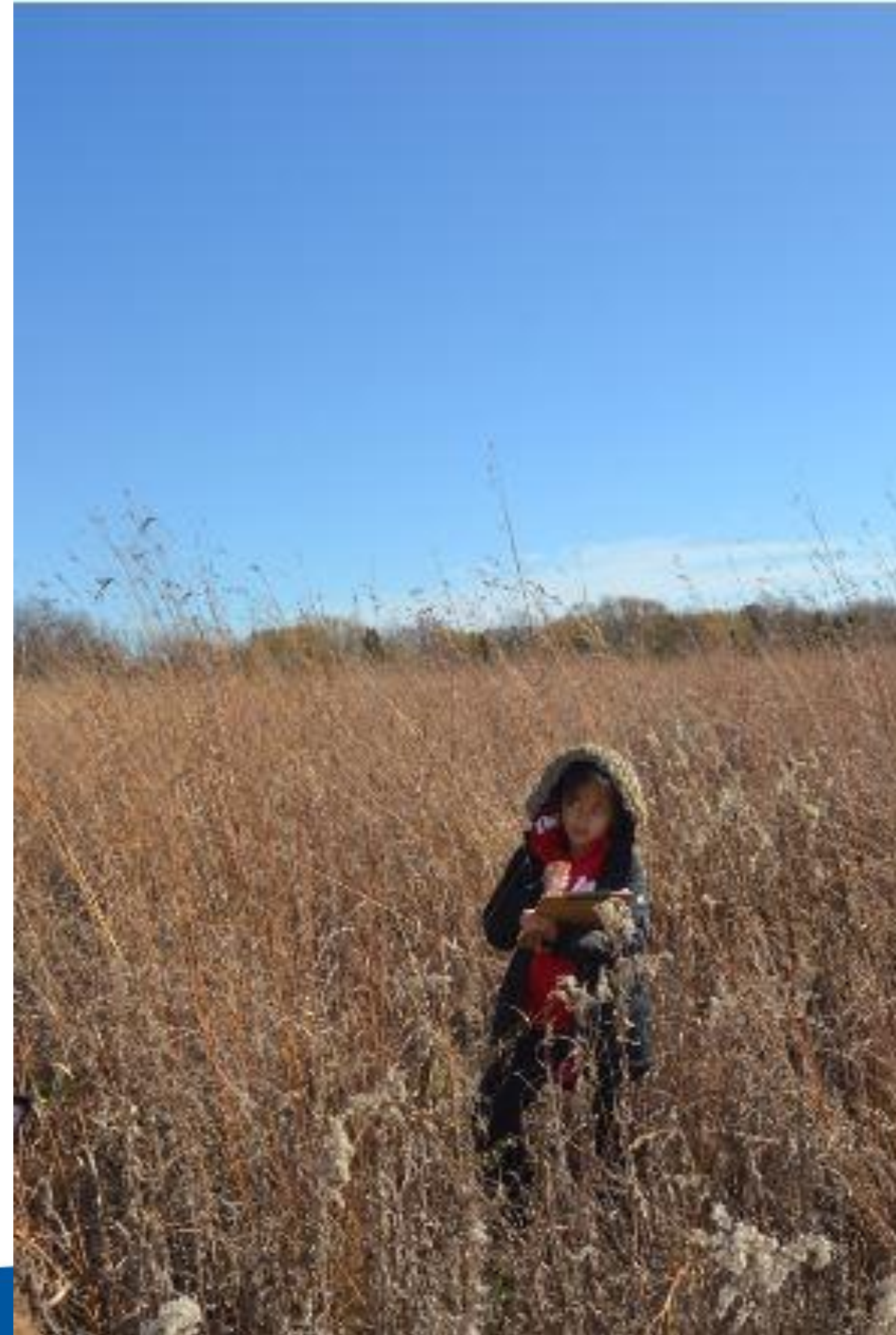
August 3, 2020

Community Development Committee



“Going outside can reinvigorate how you see things. Parks are always important. Because we are human, we are connected with nature. We are grounded in the earth. Being out in parks is a way of being human”

- Parent, Outdoor Latino Minnesota



Research questions



What are obstacles to youth access?

What does a great day in the park look like?

Increasing Youth Access to Parks & Trails

What advice/assets do youth have as they connect with the outdoors?

How can park agencies build connections to encourage access?

Research Process



Three step process

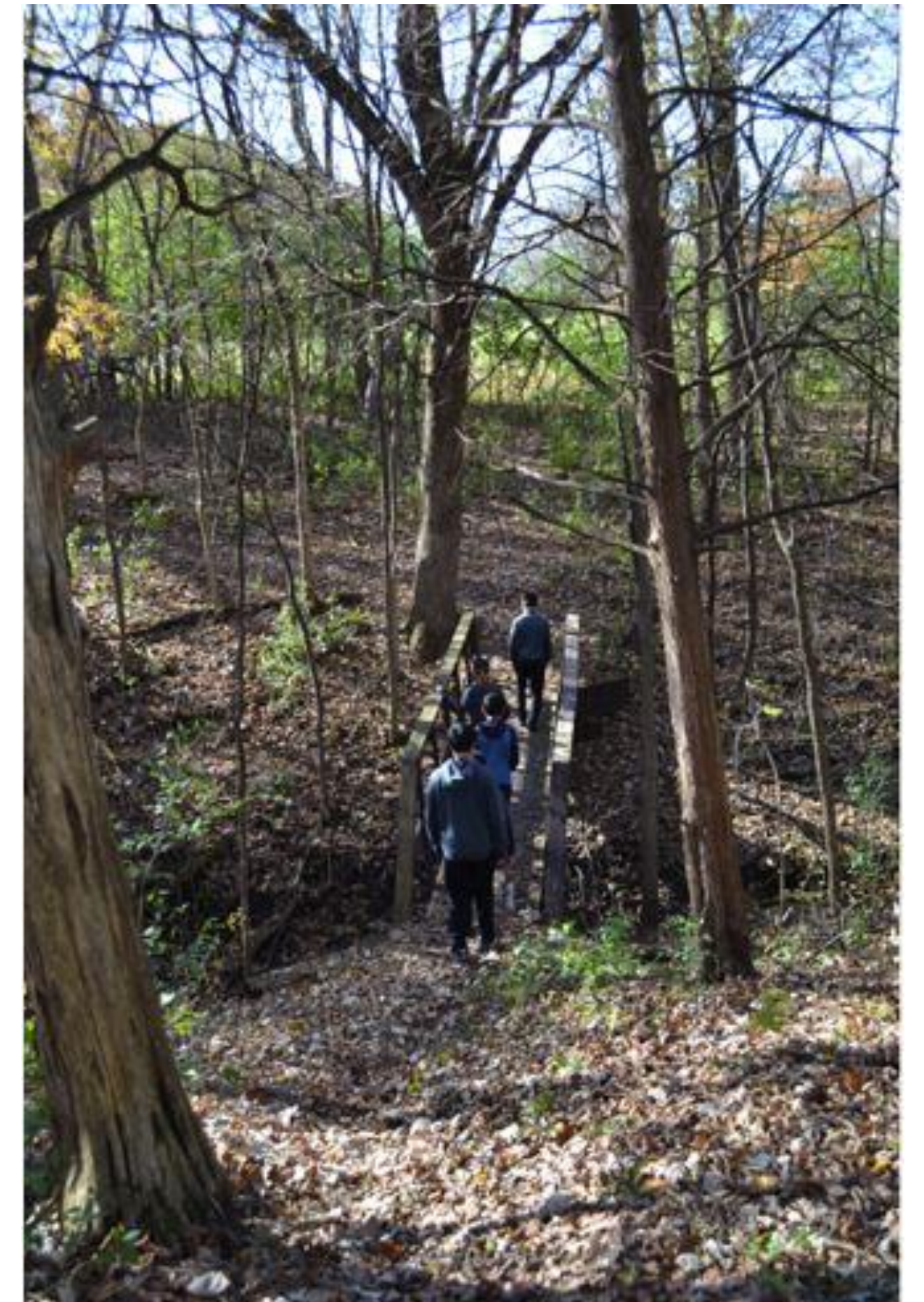
Team Formation

- Youth serving organizations as micro-consultants (paid stipend)
- Team assembled: Researchers (hired) and park agency staff (volunteered from open call to all agencies)

Designing experience/Generating data
Youth-park connection

Data analysis

“Thank you for bringing this team to work with our youth. Because you have a research team that is mostly people of color, the kids can see that they as young people of color belong in the park, that parks are not just for white people, that working in the outdoors is something they could do.”
– Urban Roots Staff Member



Three step process

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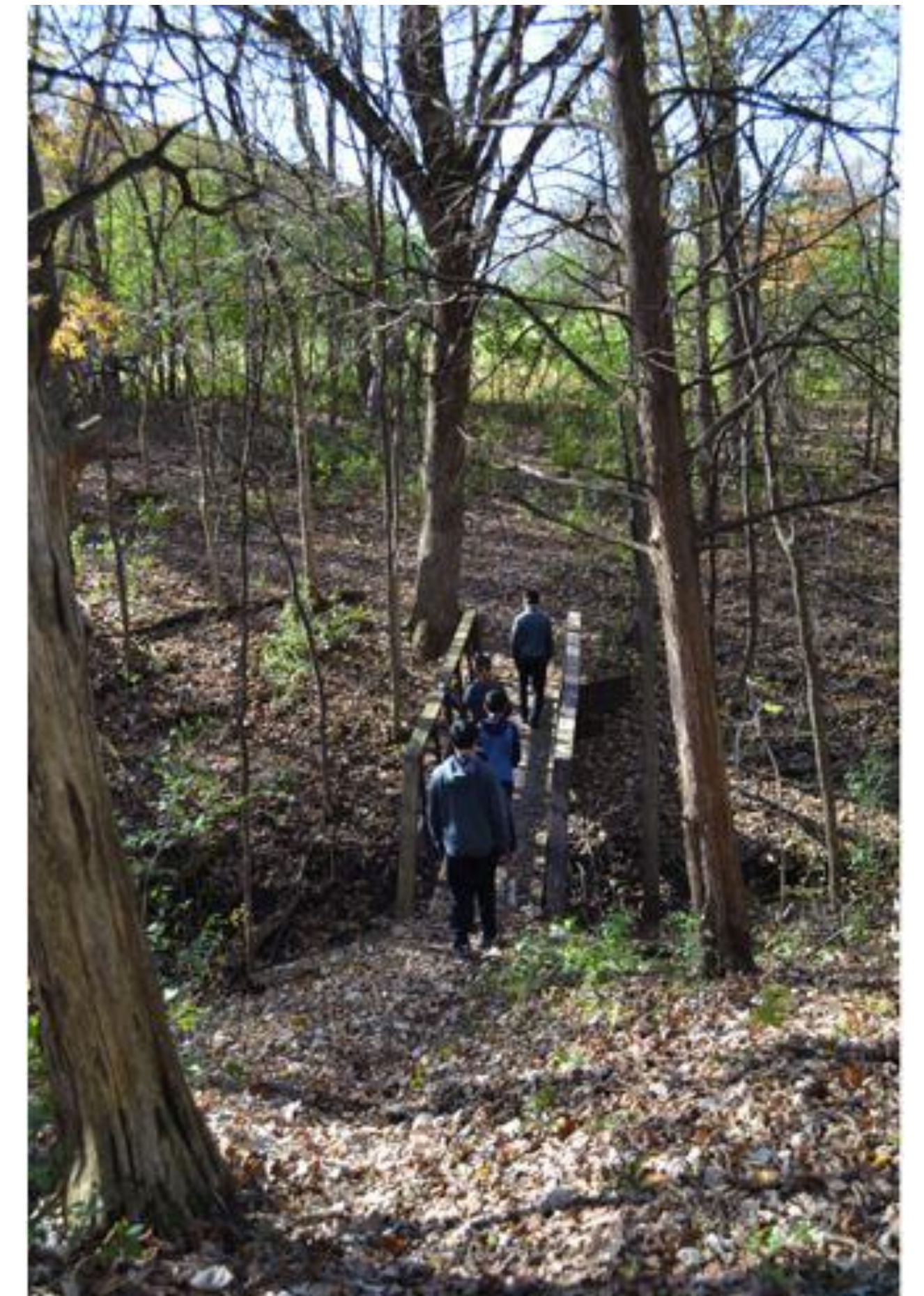
Designing experience/Generating data Youth-park connection

- Pre-experience meetings to learn motivations, needs, capacities. (Data generated: Fieldnotes and in-park design)
- Five half or full day in-park experience: Fieldnotes and photos of experience, focus groups with supportive adults

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Three step process

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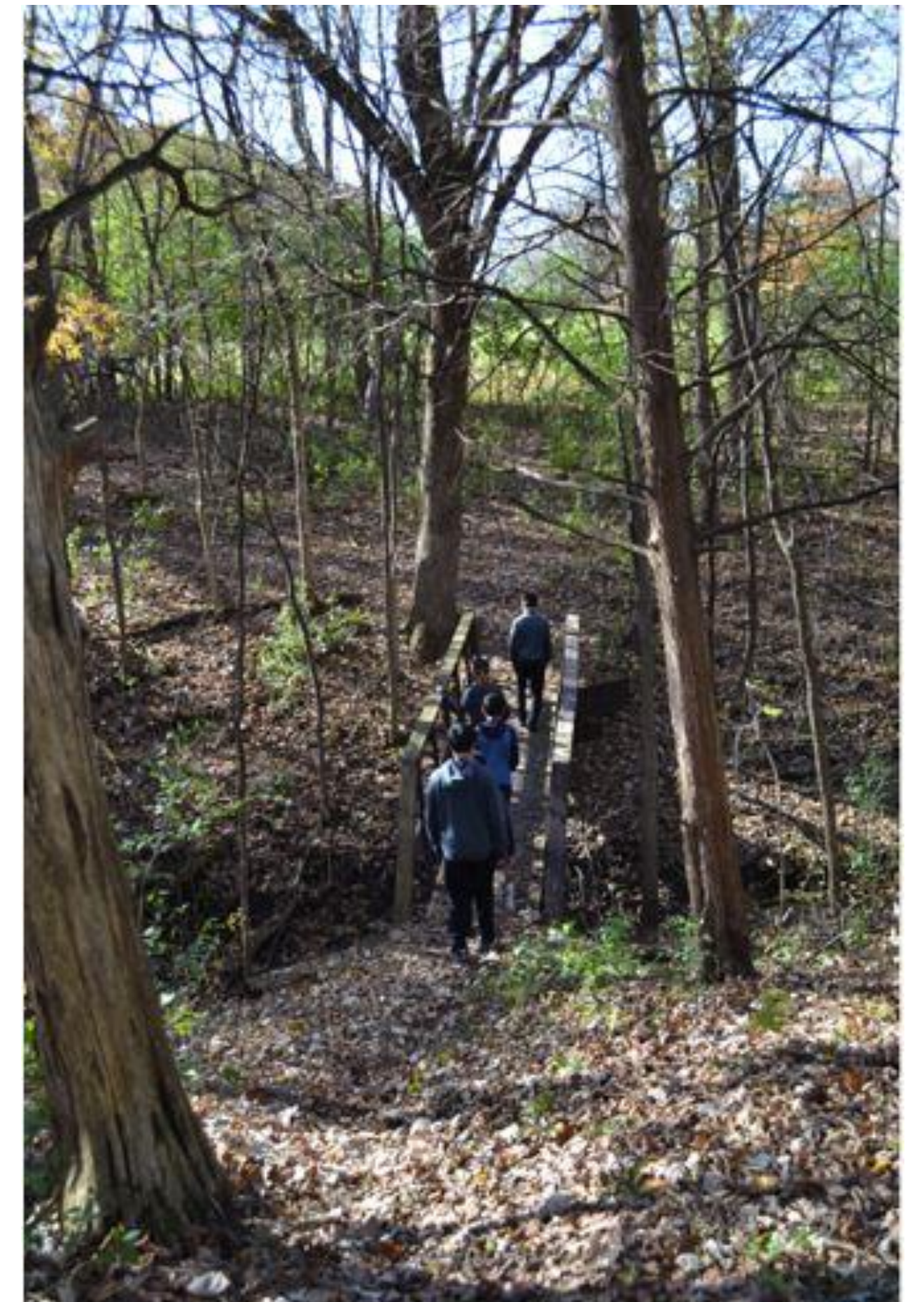
Designing experience/Generating data
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Data analysis

- Post-park analysis (validity conversation) with youth organizations and research team
- Research team coding of fieldnotes, interview transcripts, photos, video. Create end products (in process)

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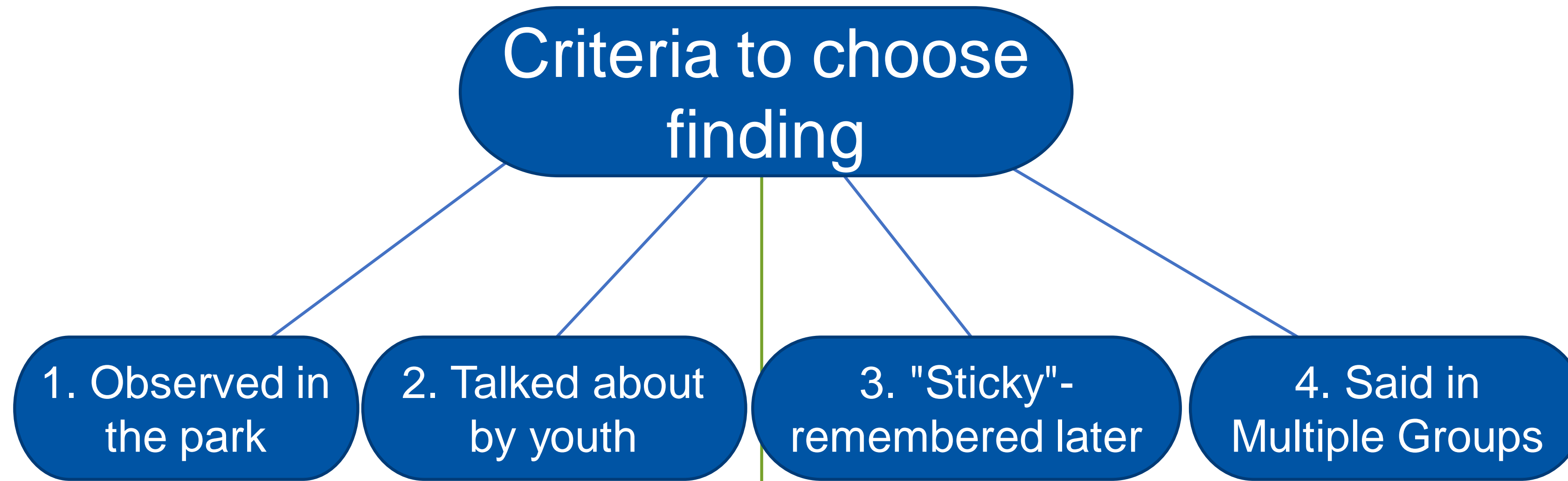
Partnerships

Youth Serving Organization*	Implementing Agency	Park Visited
Asian Media Access, St. Paul	Ramsey County	Battle Creek Regional Park
Organization of Liberians in Minnesota, Brooklyn Park	Three Rivers Park District	Elm Creek Park Reserve (Eastman Nature Center)
Outdoor Latino Minnesota, Great Twin Cities	Dakota County	Spring Lake Park Reserve (Master Plan)
Scout Troop 100, Greater Twin Cities**	Washington County	St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park
Urban Roots, St. Paul	Washington County	Pine Point Regional Park (Master Plan)
Three Rivers Park District Teen Council (Validity-conversation only)	Three Rivers Park District	Research team visited Teen Council

*Organizations included Hmong, Liberian, Latinx, African American, Asian communities

**Including consulting researcher Chaoching Vang

How we analyzed the data



- Additional Considerations**
- Overcomes obstacles
 - Adults mention value

Obstacles



Obstacles related to park experience



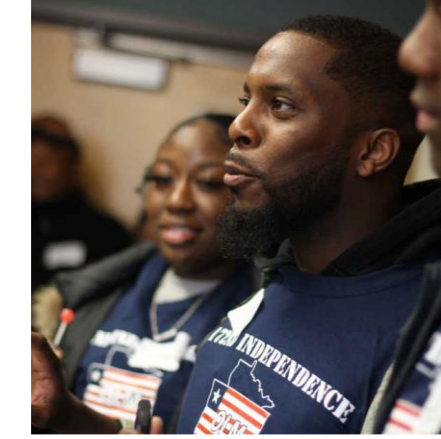
Safety

- Youth described that “Outdoors can be ‘unpredictable’ which can be ‘safe and unsafe’... concerns are ‘bad weather,’ ‘animals can come out’, and ‘bad people’”



Opportunity

- “I wanna get over my fear of water because I don’t know how to swim. But I want to learn how to swim... I’m scared of the water because I don’t know how to swim, and it stops me from going on a boat. But I want to know”



Racism

- “We’re minorities, we’re people of color. Depending where you go (in the outdoors), it can be tense. For example, if you’re out west, you get questions about things a lot. In areas where it’s predominantly white, in less diverse communities. So I, as a parent, that’s always in the forefront of my mind. “

Obstacles related to social context



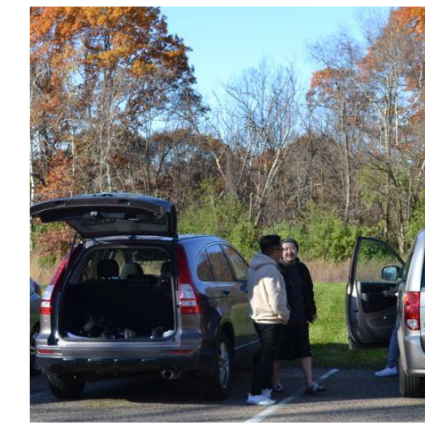
Awareness

- “This park was not even on the radar. I just didn’t know, and it’s in my neighborhood.”
- “With the regional parks, they’re not as well known... If they don’t know anything about the regional parks, they can’t get started”



Time constraints

- “My parents are very busy, and they are tired when they are home so they do not want to go outside.”
- “My younger son wants to go. He always says, ‘let’s go out, let’s play soccer, let’s go to the park. But my older girl is always running to get things done, and she doesn’t have time.’”



Economic

- Estimated 40% of youth live in households with cost-barriers
- “Five dollars is a lot of money. That is my gas money.”
- Transportation – “Yes it would be easy, but not financially... Sometimes families have to conserve the gas that they use to do fun things because they have to use that gas to get other places and using to go to the park would be a waste of money.”
- No bus access to parks.

Findings: What Connects Youth and The Park System?



1. Investment in Staff and Programming

- Excellent staffing addresses obstacles.
- Youth enjoyed learning: Natural world, new skills, cultural history
- Best programming included blended time for instruction and informal exploration/play



2. Desired Amenities & Activities

- Teach groups to camp
- Photography
- Winter sports
- Hanging out, survival skills, arts-based activities
- Youth value connecting with their own community in nature
- Scheduling and elimination of fees



3. All Youth Have Relevant Prior Experience

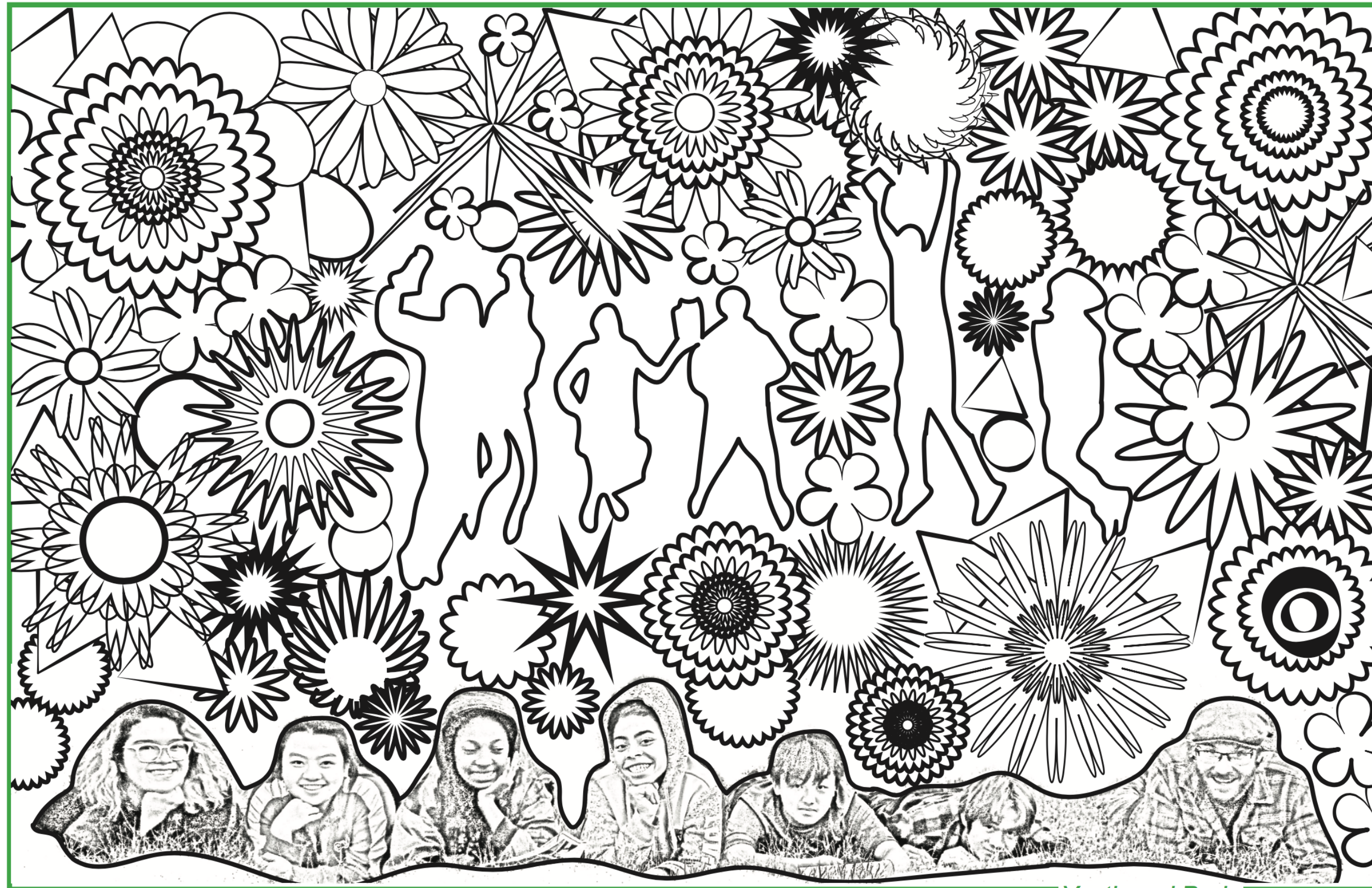
- What assumptions guide engagement with new youth users?
- All users approach their park visit using prior experience: personal, family, community, culture.
- Stories from elders, family trips outdoors, school trips, prior events, school learning.
- How can implementing agency and Council staff connect?



Photos Taken by OLM Youth



Outputs/Deliverables



Youth and Parks

- Activity & Coloring Book
- Detailed Report/Actionable Summary
- Engagement Toolbox
- Presentations for various audiences
- Launch of Youth and Parks webpage

Why does this Research Matter?

- “By 2040, 39% of the population will be people of color, compared to 24% in 2010. The share of people of color increases among younger age groups; 53% of residents younger than age 18 will be people of color in 2040.”
- “Involvement in nature-based outdoor recreation among young adults and their children has decreased since the 1990s.”



Regional Park Use among Communities of Color. (2014). Metropolitan Council. Minnesota Compass analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census and Population Estimates and Minnesota State Demographic Center (e.g., <https://www.mncompass.org/demographics/race#7-5081-g>)
White, M.P., Alcock, I., Grellier, J. *et al.* Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing. *Sci Rep* 9, 7730 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-44097-3>

Council Recommendations

1. Use Council funding to support equity-focused continued connection between programming and planning.
2. Continued research with underserved youth: African American, Indigenous, disabled, and rural youth, youth experiencing homelessness or poverty.
3. Sustained research, programming and engagement efforts by the Council to connect youth with the outdoors.



Implementing Agency Recommendations



4. Develop and adopt models for engaging with youth that value prior experience and cultural context.
5. Deeper investment in cultural inclusivity, subsidized programming and anti-racist parks policy development.
6. Agency partnerships with constituent-led youth serving organizations.

Questions / Discussion

What information from this report connects most directly with your priorities for the Council?

How can Council collaboration with agencies and budget investments support connecting youth and parks?

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