

# Research: Connecting Youth with the Regional Park System

Ellie Hohulin, Presenting research team member  
Sarah Gong, Presenting research team member

Gunnar Carlson, Lucia Marquez Reagan, Darcie Vandegrift,  
Research team members

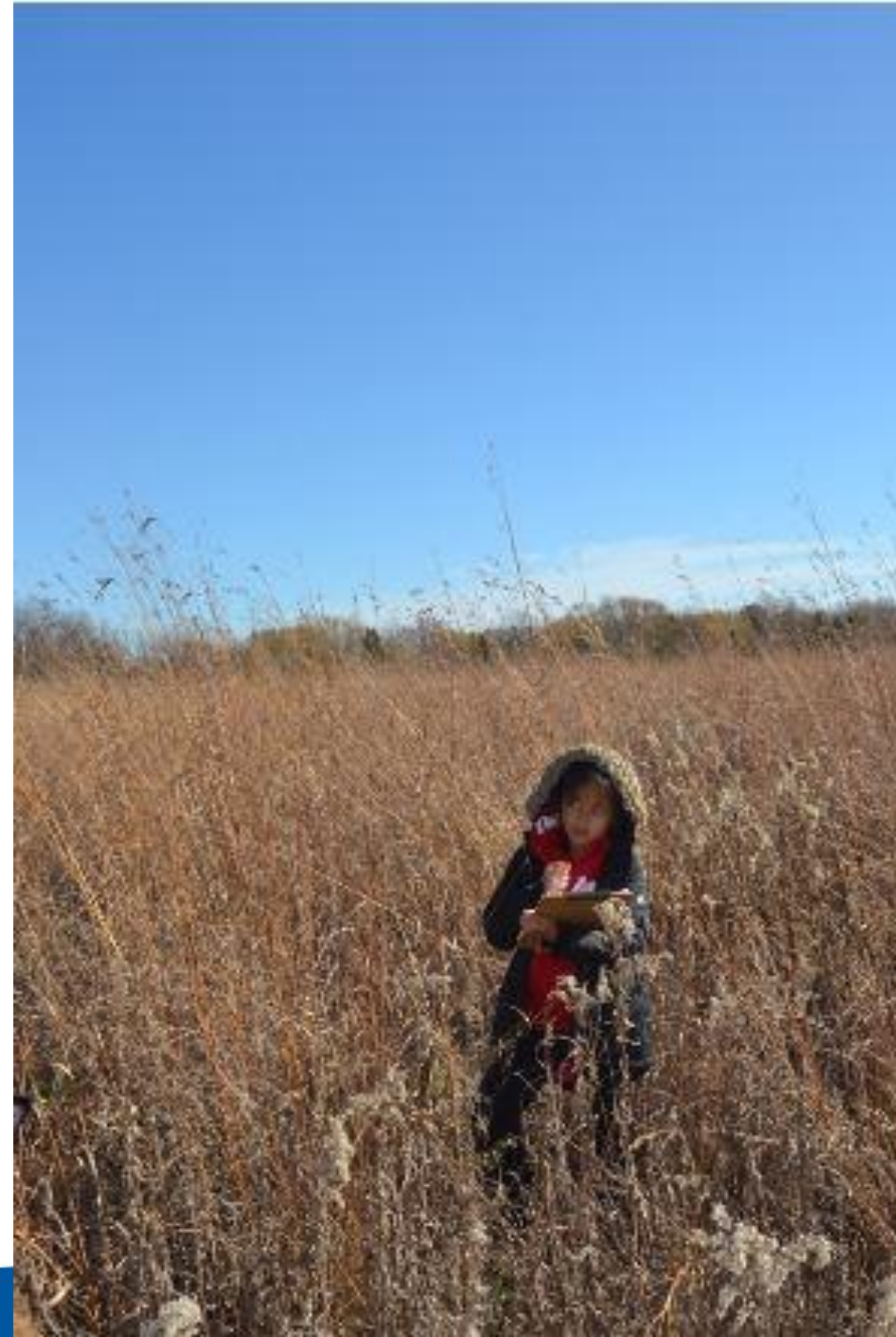
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Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



“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



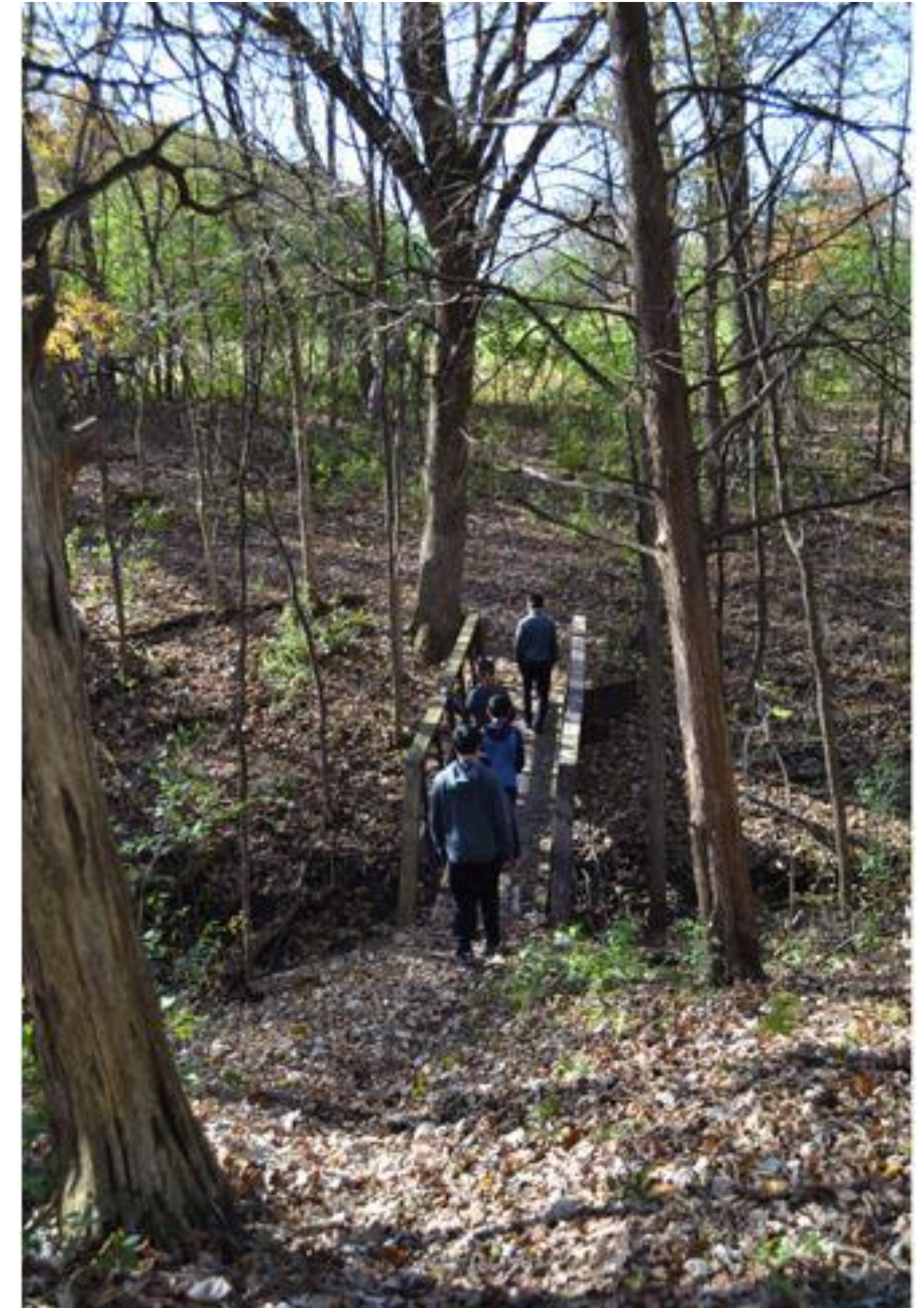
# Three step process

Team Formation

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



# Partnerships

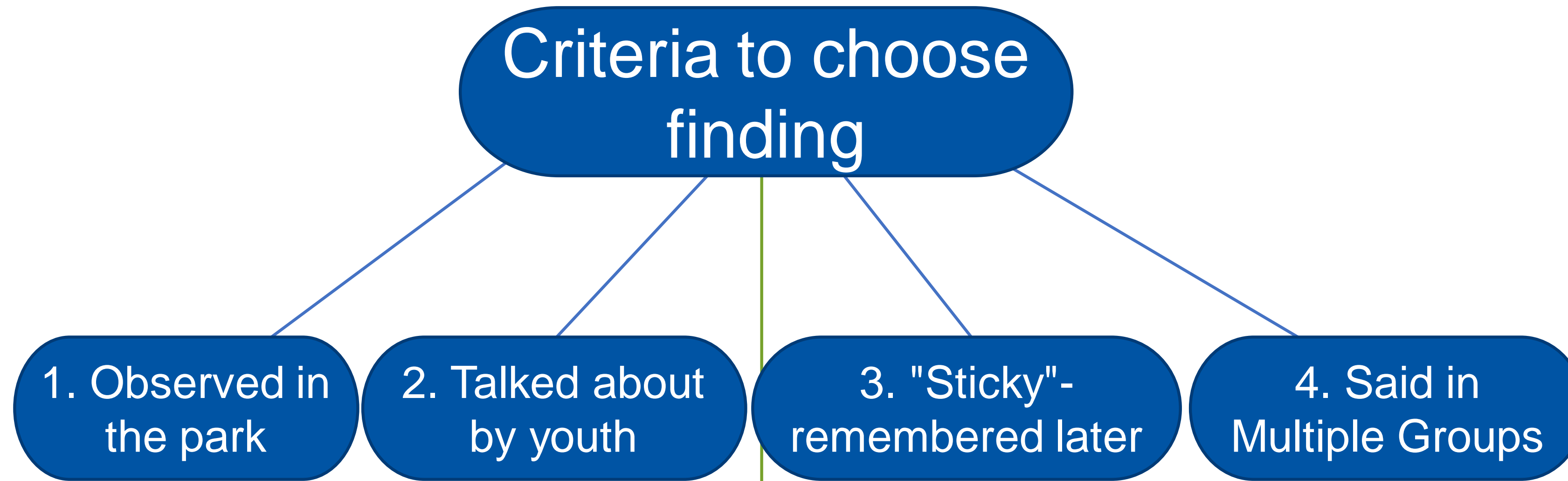
Youth Serving Organization*	Implementing Agency	Park Visited
Asian Media Access, St. Paul	Ramsey County	Battle Creek Regional Park
Organization of Liberians in Minnesota, Brooklyn Park	Three Rivers Park District	Elm Creek Park Reserve (Eastman Nature Center)
Outdoor Latino Minnesota, Great Twin Cities	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



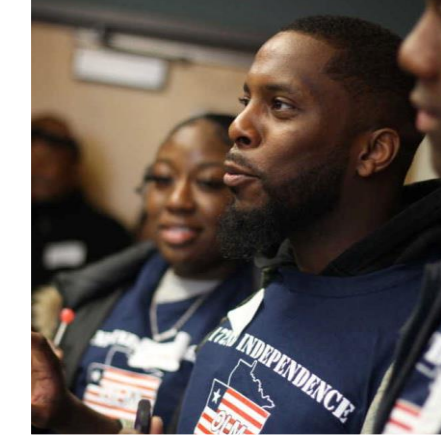
## Safety

- 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 tell kids, ‘Use your inside voice.’ That means that the outside voice is loud. It’s only logical. They want to run wild, but this does not mean they are violent. They are not violent. They are not causing trouble. People call the police on them. All they want is to be out and about."

# Obstacles related to social context



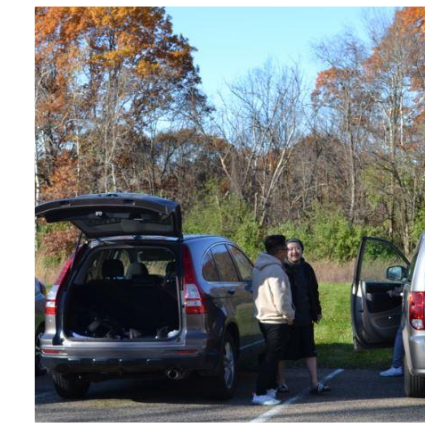
## Awareness

- “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

- 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.

# What Creates Connection between Youth and the Regional 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 fee elimination



# 3. All youth have relevant prior experience

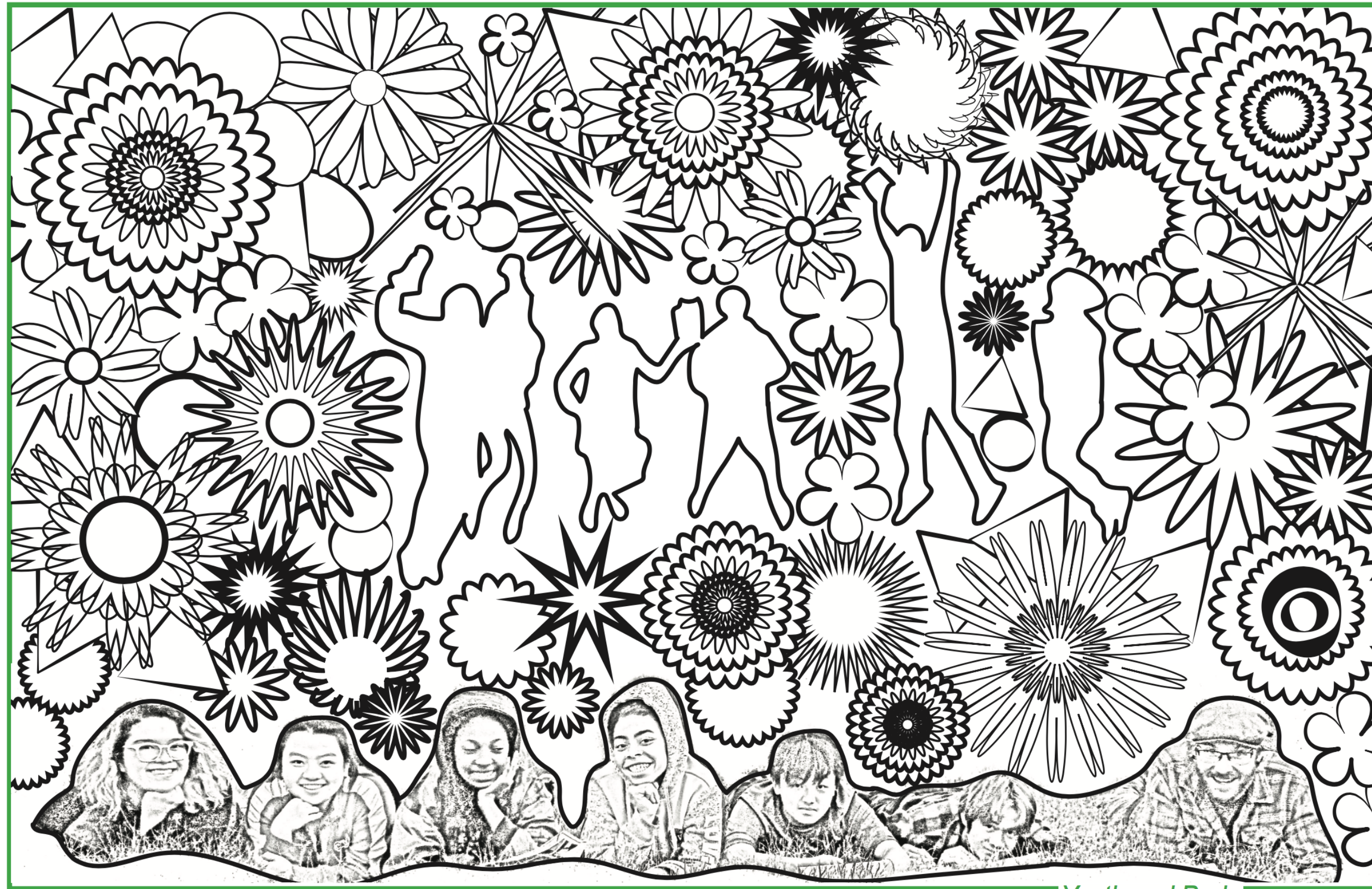
- All users approach their park visit using prior experience: personal, family, community, culture.
- Stories from elders, family trips outdoors, school trips, prior events, school learning.
- How can implementing agency and Council staff connect?



# 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.”



# Council recommendations

1. Use Council funding to support equity-focused continued connection between programming and planning.
- 2. Continued engagement with underserved youth: African American, Indigenous, LGBTQ, 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



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

# Questions / discussion:

- **Support – How can the recommendations support MPOSC and Council priorities?**
- **Collaborate – How can the Council collaborate with agencies to connect youth with the park system?**
- **Strengthen – How can these findings strengthen equity efforts in the Regional Parks System?**

Ellie Hohulin, Intern

Sarah Gong, Intern

Darcie Vandegrift, PhD, Principal Researcher

651.602.1669

[darcie.vandegrift@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:darcie.vandegrift@metc.state.mn.us)

