

## Community Engagement Summary

### Introduction

The Metropolitan Council engaged members of the community to inform specific policy areas of the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan update. Specifically, engagement related to allowable recreational activities and how to spend interest earnings.

Community engagement included:

- Follow up conversations with equity advocates and park partners who informed the Regional Parks Policy Plan in 2014
- Focus groups with specific communities not previously engaged
- Surveys of current parks visitors

### Approach

Previous studies by the Metropolitan Council identified groups of people in communities throughout the region that are underrepresented as visitors to the Regional Parks System. This includes families with both small children and low incomes, who are from communities of color, and who are from a wide cross-section of the 7-county area. To

connect with and engage people who are not regular users of the Regional Parks System, the Council organized focus groups with community-based organizations.

Council staff conducted focus groups in early 2018. Nearly 70 people participated in the focus groups. A follow-up survey engaged nearly 100 park visitors during spring 2018.

### Results

The summary on the next several pages highlights the results from the focus groups and parks visitor survey.

Survey respondents were predominantly female, middle-aged, possessed a high annual household income, and generally had no children under 18 living in their household. Focus group participants were also predominantly female and middle-aged. However, focus group participants represented a more diverse racial background, reported low annual household income (less than \$50,000 a year), and reported having at least 1 or 2 children under 18 living in their household.

## Who we talked to

### Survey Respondents

Average age: 47, Age range: 21-83

**93%**  
Female



**7%**  
Male



### Focus Group Participants

Average age: 40, Age range: 21-68

**58.9%**  
Female



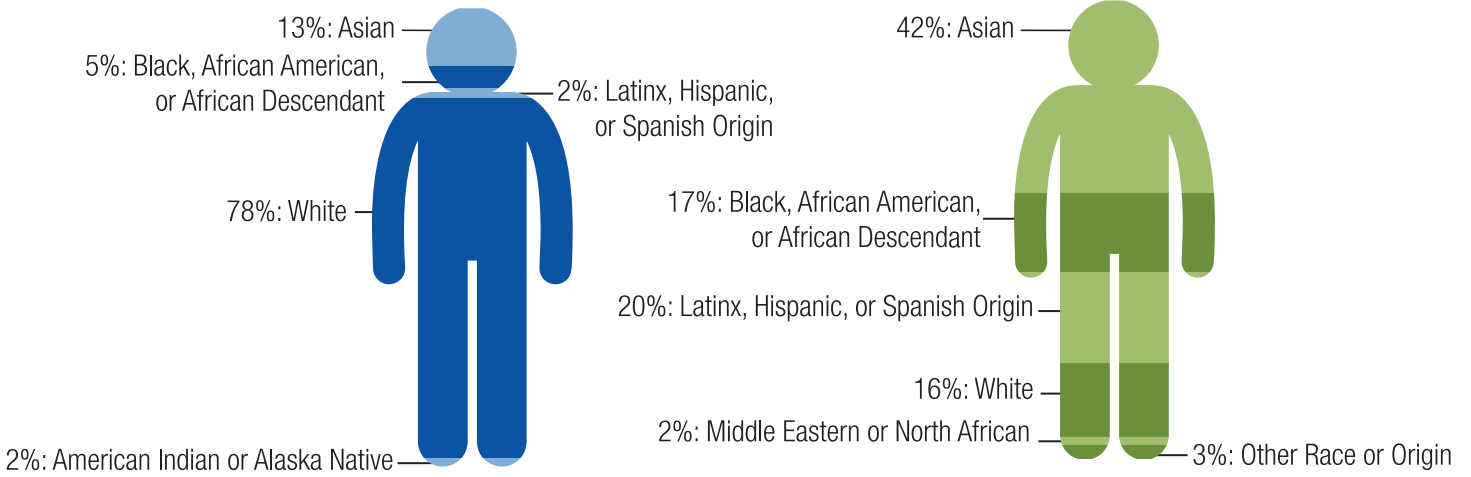
**41.1%**  
Male



# Demographics

## Race and origin

■ Survey Respondents ■ Focus Group Participants



## Languages translated

■ Focus Group Participants



## Countries of Origin

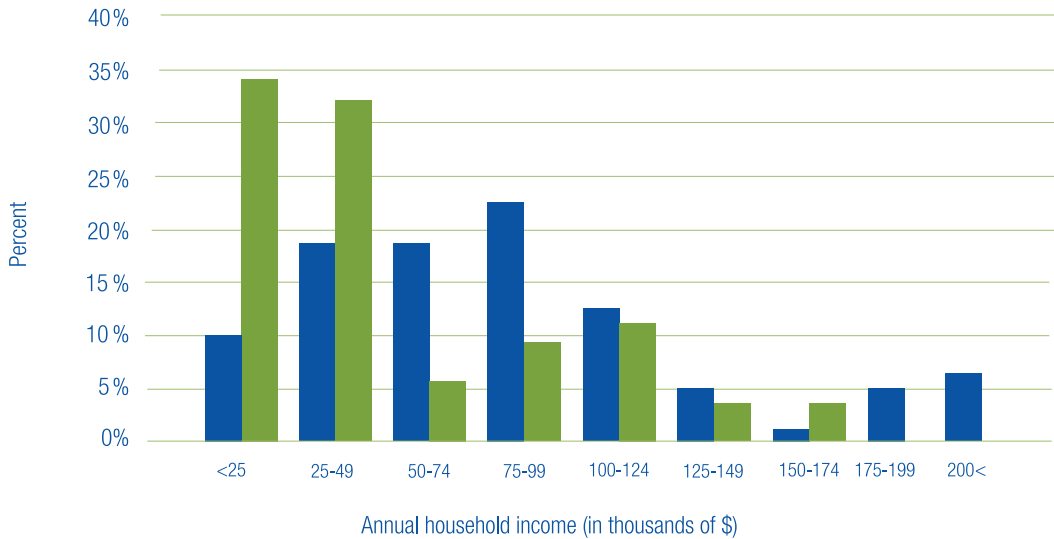
■ Focus Group Participants



# More Demographics

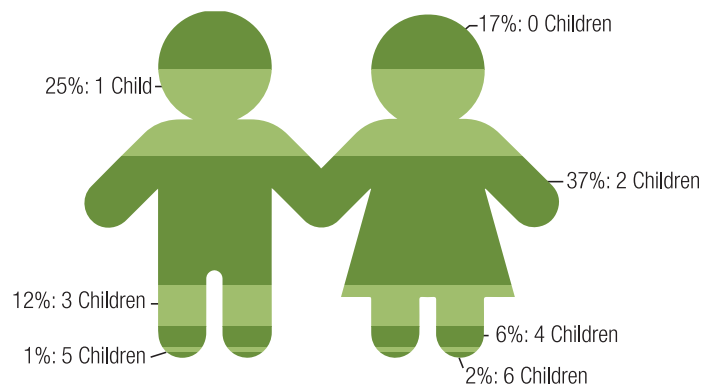
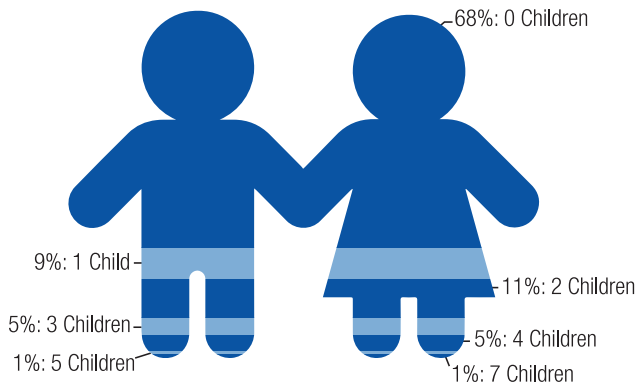
## Annual household income

■ Survey Respondents ■ Focus Group Participants



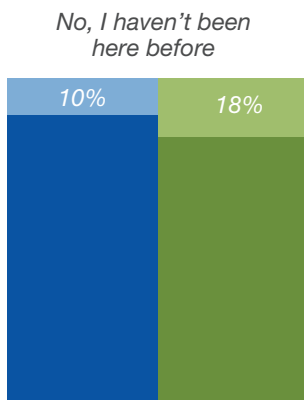
## Number of Children

■ Survey Respondents ■ Focus Group Participants



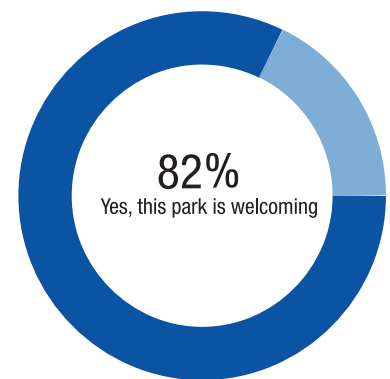
## Prior visitation to regional parks

■ Survey Respondents ■ Focus Group Participants



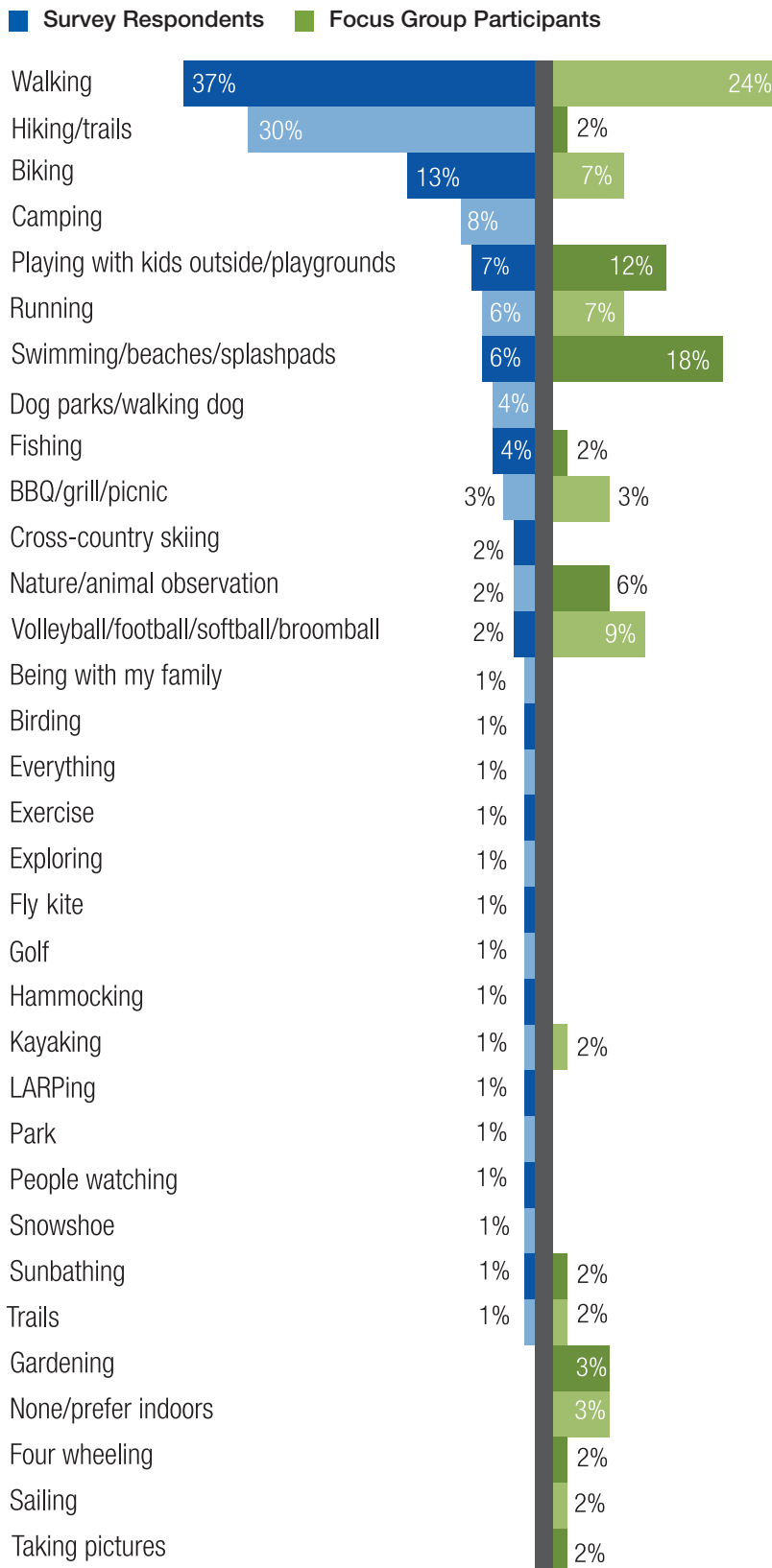
## Perception of regional parks

■ Survey Respondents



# What kinds of outdoor activities do you like to do?

Many different outdoor activities were noted among park visitor survey respondents and focus group participants.



*“One of the activities my two boys like is baseball... another activity we enjoy is biking. We look for parks. We go far (biking) but it’s part of the exercise (activity). I play volleyball once in a while. I try to teach them (my kids) --that is my favorite activity.”*  
 -West Metro Focus Group Participant

*“I like to bring my two grandchildren (5 and 9) where they can do activities they like, sliding, riding on swings and seeing waterfalls.”*  
 -East Metro Focus Group Participant

*“Like to visit different parks. Like the thing that mists [splashpads], kids stay until soaked and then ready to leave.”*  
 -South Metro Focus Group Participant

<sup>1</sup> Open-item question: “What is your favorite outdoor activity?” Respondents frequently listed more than one activity.

<sup>2</sup> Focus group question: “What kinds of outdoor activities do you like to do?”

## Are there certain activities you wish you could do, but can't in regional parks and trails?

### ■ Focus Group Participants

*"I would like more activities for children, clowns (with balloons), puppets or marionettes, and places where kids can jump rope."  
-East Metro Focus Group Participant*



Use Family Gathering Spaces



Access to Community Liaisons



Organized Sports



Walk around/or Walk with family

## Are there certain things you wish every park or trail had?

### ■ Focus Group Participants



Playgrounds



Bathrooms



Family Gathering Space



Promotions/ Discounts



Staff Assistance

## What do you think money should be spent on in the regional parks system?

### Top spending priorities

#### ■ Survey Respondents ■ Focus Group Participants



Maintain parks and trails  
57%



Add new amenities  
45%



Extend and add trails  
43%



Add new amenities  
55%



Expand event and programming opportunities  
19%



Add or improve bathrooms  
12%

*"I would like to have activities outside with my family: birthdays, spend a weekend day with my family just hanging out. We need bigger grills to cook food for our families."  
-East Metro Focus Group Participant*

# Are there any concerns or problems that come to mind when you think about visiting regional parks in the Twin Cities metropolitan area?

## Most noted concern



Dirty or locked bathroom



Lighting when it gets dark



Need of lifeguards on duty



Mosquitos and bees with hidden hives



Lack of cleaning up after pets



Lack of signage and navigation



Not enough parking



Safety, in general



Lack of info about parks and trail hours and programs

## Additional concerns

### ■ Focus Group Participants

## Conclusion

Differences were found between survey respondents and focus group participants. Survey respondents presented interest in nature-based activities as responses while focus group respondents presented interest in social and family-oriented activities.

### What were the top favorite outdoor activities?

- Survey and focus group responses differed
- Walking and hiking was the number one favorite activity among both groups.
  - Only one focus group member mentioned hiking as a favorite activity
- After walking, there was a range of preferred activities including splashpads, playgrounds, and organized sports including soccer, volleyball, basketball.

### What should we invest in?

#### Survey respondents had interest in investing in:

- Outreach, promotions and discounts
- Maintaining parks and facilities
- Adding new amenities
- Extending and adding trails

#### Focus groups voiced they were interested in investing in:

##### Adding new amenities:

- More picnic shelters, gathering spots for parties
- Water features like splashpads and pools
- Indoor playgrounds, particularly for Pre-K children (ideal for colder months)
- Volleyball nets, soccer, football, softball, broomball; fields for pick-up games

#### Expanding event and programming opportunities:

- Year-round organized programs for kids like swimming, and sports
- Music, danceable music, and art

#### Adding or improving bathrooms:

- More bathrooms that are open year-round (including diaper changing facilities)

#### Further reading

For relevant research conducted by the Metropolitan Council, please refer to:

##### [Regional Park Use Among Select Communities of Color \(2014\)](#)

Involves 16 focus groups with a total 263 individuals representing various racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

##### [2016 Regional Parks System Visitor Study](#)

5,459 parks and trails visitors were surveyed in this system-wide scientific study.



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