

Tips for Culturally Competent Catering

Food is an important part of building community. Sharing a meal is a fun, simple, and useful way for people to come together – and a great way to spend a day in the park! We found that catering food for the Youth Serving Organizations was a great way to discuss and debrief our in-park experiences. This document shares specifics from the Met Council Youth and Parks research in hopes of offering you ideas for working within your organization.

During our meetings with the Youth Serving Organizations (YSOs), we sought to understand what foods were appetizing and/or culturally competent for the youth and their organization. Providing foods that youth of different cultures enjoyed and from locally owned vendors was an important part of our process. When we invite new or underserved groups of people into the parks, the foods offered in hospitality need to be inclusive to peoples' cultural diets and tastes.

Expanding options from the foods we serve is a great way to be more culturally inclusive and competent, and to make the parks feel more welcoming to underserved park users. Park agencies and other public sites offering food can ensure that approved site caterers and onsite vendors offer an inclusive set of food options.

As often as possible, we used the [Metropolitan Council's Underutilized Business \(MCUB\)](#) vendors list to select a vendor that would satisfy the needs and tastes of the YSOs. MCUB vendors are minority-owned businesses throughout the Twin Cities metropolitan region. If there were no vendors specifically from our MCUB list near our meeting sites, we applied MCUB principles to select vendors.

When selecting a vendor to work with youth consider or discuss the following:

- ✓ What are the tastes, preferences, and restrictions of the population I am serving?
- ✓ Will this food be enjoyable and accessible to the population I am serving?
- ✓ Are there any allergies to account for?
- ✓ Are there any dietary restrictions that must be accommodated for? (I.e. no pork or beef products, no meat, no shellfish, etc.)
- ✓ How can we uplift minority-owned and underutilized businesses?
- ✓ Is the vendor a minority-owned or locally owned business?
- ✓ Can this vendor provide utensils to accommodate for disabilities?
- ✓ If a vendor is from a chain, consider if there are minority-owned or locally owned businesses that provide the same cuisine
- ✓ Is there room to help build a relationship between the population you are serving and the vendor?

While we remained respectful of cultural dietary restrictions, the foods we catered were not always from the respective cultures of the youth from the YSOs. For example, we ensured that there would be options with no pork-products for a youth group to accommodate Muslim youth in the organization. We provided banh mi from [Mi-Sant Banh Mi Company](#) for one of our meetings with them. Mi-Sant is a local restaurant owned by second-generation Vietnamese American immigrants in Brooklyn Park. Youth were very excited to try banh mi, and one of the YSO leaders asked for *Mi-Sant's* information!