The intersection of research, practice and reflection: One agency’s journey to diversity and inclusion

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Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority

• To strategically buy, preserve, protect, restore, and enhance treasured pieces of Southern California to form an interlinking system of urban, rural, river parks, open space, trails and wildlife habitats that are easily accessible to the general public.

• We are a joint power authority between the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and the Conejo and Rancho Simi Park and Recreation Districts.
Demographics

Los Angeles County

- 21.4% under 18
- 48.6% Latino/Hispanic
- 34.0% Foreign born
- 56.6% speak a language other than English at home

(Census data 2019 estimates)

- 8,495 people per square mile

(worldpopulationreview.com)
Nature is good for you!
Significant research on the benefits of being in Nature/
Nature Experiences

- Social
- Developmental
- Physical
- Emotional
- Cognitive
Research and Intersectionality

Significant research on barriers to nature

Knowledge of costs and location
Lack of Family Network
Lack of Transport
Lack of Representation
Fear of Wildlife and Outdoors
Am I welcome here?

Barriers Intersect
A Facilitated Experience
Ambassadors from the community
Fun for the whole family!
Outdoor Equity
**Barrier**

Lack of Proximity to nature/open space

**Program Solution**

*Advocate*
- Advocate for public transportation routes to public lands.

*Build*
- Build parks and green spaces in urban, park poor neighborhoods;

*Provide*
- Provide transportation to regional parks and open space; and
Barrier

Lack of representation of a diverse public in the form of park staff, volunteers and outreach materials

Program Solution

- Targeted recruitment;
- Job training programs that include career tracks beyond maintenance and operations into the carrying levels of an agency/organization;
- Review and amendment of job requirements;
- Develop partnerships with colleges and universities.
Barrier:
No historic outdoor social or family networks

Program Solution:
- Partnership with community organizations, churches, libraries
- Diversification of outreach to community-based organizations
- Multi-generational programming
Barrier

Am I welcome here/Perceived racism

Program Solution

- Diversify park staff and volunteers;
- Customer service training for all staff;
- Diversity and inclusion training for all staff and volunteers;
- Match staffing with community representation;
- Best practices of interpretation.
Barrier

Community involvement in program development

Program Solution

Community listening sessions;
Let the community lead;
Park visits with community hosts;
Hire consultants/engagement professional locally;
Partner with local nonprofits.
**Barrier**

Lack of knowledge
- Where? What?
- How?

**Program Solution**

- Park information in multiple languages in nontraditional places;
- Skills classes;
- Maps with public transportation routes;
- Equipment loan programs (FamCamp);
- Guided hikes and facilitated experiences designed for first time park visitors; and
- Technical assistance for community-based organizations.
Create a Community-Focused Culture

The Community is the expert on the community!
It’s about relationships!
You want them to help you – how can you help them?
What do they want/need as opposed to what you think they need
Invest In Community

- Assistance with capacity building;
- Increased program offerings;
- Organizational esteem and pride;
- Provide compensation;
- In kind support, introductions advocacy; and
- Opportunities for members/participants.
Commitment at all levels