



Indigenous Perspectives on Equitable Development

From Acknowledgment to Action in a Government Agency

An example from the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board

Since Spring 2020, the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board has initiated, funded and started to implement an **Indigenous Acknowledgement and Reconciliation Action Plan**. Growing from desire to create a land acknowledgment and deepening into a codified commitment to center and include Minneapolis's significant Indigenous communities, this plan seeks to integrate truth, reconciliation, and acknowledgment of Indigenous land, people, and nations into all of MPRB's work. At our March 2024 convening of the Scorecard Enthusiasts, we heard reflections and insights from **Carrie Christensen**, a Senior Project Manager at the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board; **Carrie Day Aspinwall** of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe/Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and MPRB's first Indigenous Parks Liaison; and **Darek Delille** of the Bad River Ojibwe and Manager of Make Voting A Tradition & Civic Engagement at the Native Community Development Institute.



LISTENING

“Our park system is on Dakota homeland – and there's so many different aspects of what we do that connect land and people. **This was coming up a lot in community:** what does and can and should the parks board do in regards to this idea around indigenous acknowledgment, and truth and reconciliation?”
- Carrie Christensen

“Our parks board made the decision to really try to understand who we are, how we operate, and how their actions have affected us for us 140 years. **For 140 years this institution has been in place without a single Native voice.**”
- Carrie Day Aspinwall



CODIFYING

Based on community input, specific strategies were codified in **MPRB's 2023-2036 Comprehensive Plan** that was passed by the board in 2021, including:

- **Amplify Indigenous stories, histories, cultural practices and connections to land** through employment, partnerships, reconciliation planning, programming, ceremony, foraging, land management, interpretation and proactive community engagement
- **Educate staff and the community** on critical issues facing the city and region, specifically ... Indigenous acknowledgment, history, rights, culture and perspectives
- **Train staff and commissioners on** Native acknowledgment practices that incorporate the complexities of treaties, tribal differences, personal experience and layered place-based histories



IMPLEMENTING

In 2022, parks' board commissioners made the work a priority and approved the budget request for the **Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan**, acknowledgment statement development, and trainings for 2023-24.

To implement the Action Plan, the iterative MPRB process includes:

- an **Indigenous parks liaison** to facilitate the work
- a **Native Advisory Council** to advise on priorities, approach, and impacts
- consulting leaders from the 11 federally recognized **tribes in Minnesota**, Minneapolis community residents, and urban organizations and leaders
- an **internal team** from across various departments who will be responsible for designing and implementing one or more aspects of the Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan

Learn more at bit.ly/mprb-indigenous-action-plan

FOCUS AREAS

in the Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan

ACKNOWLEDGMENT: Developing a land, people and nations acknowledgment for staff and leadership in the park system.

TRAINING: Educating staff and commissioners on the complexity of tribal government-to-government relations and issues currently and historically faced by the tribes.

MAPPING: Mapping historical and contemporary Indigenous sites of significance in the park system.

AGREEMENTS: Formalizing MPRB relationships with Tribal Councils.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: Growing the Native workforce at MPRB across many different divisions.

DESIGN: Incorporating Indigenous approaches to park design.

ACCESS: Enhancing tribal access to park land or natural resources for cultural uses.

INTERPRETATION: Highlighting Dakota and Ojibwe language and culture across the park system.

ACTION: Acting on near-term projects, programs, and initiatives that have noticeable impacts to the park system, like projects already underway or recently completed like new public art at Bde Maka Ska Pavilion, the East Phillips Open Space Plan, and renaming Sibley Park.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES: Committing financial resources to continue this work long-term.

LAND STEWARDSHIP: Stewarding park land with guidance from regional tribal leadership.

APPROACHES

for engagement, healing and leadership

REJECTING URGENCY

“My grandfather said it best: We don’t connect in those tick tock kind of ways. **People want to hurry up and rush and push, and it’s just not that way for Indian people.** You can’t rush this kind of work with a community such as ours, that has been so disregarded and really disabled by many of the policies and practices of organizations like the parks board in the past.” - Carrie Day-Aspinwall

CONNECTING PERSON-TO-PERSON

“Texts and emails just won’t make the cut with our people. We need to be there. We need to be visible, and **we need to share our stories.** We’re automatic givers. That’s why we’re giving you these stories. These are important stories to us, and we give them freely. Moving this forward we have to be in-person.” - Darek Delille

INVESTING IN LEADERS

“You’re never gonna open up as widely with a non-Indian person as you will if you’re sitting next to a brother or sister of your own. I was really adamant with the Parks Board to **hire Indian people** if we want to hear that true and authentic voice and completely center our voices in this work. It’s the only way to build trust.” - Carrie Day-Aspinwall

“We have always wanted to be a part of this type of work, especially when it comes to the earth. We also want to be a part of prideful work... **We have kids. We have grandkids that are coming up into workforce age.** If you want good people in this work, come talk to us.” - Darek Delille

MAKING PARKS ACCESSIBLE

“Many of our Native kids never go [to Theodore Wirth Park]. Many of our elders don’t go there. **They don’t see themselves there in that space. Now, the parks board is opening space for us to be there.** We’re talking about our foraging policies. Will we be able to, as Native people, go in and harvest cedar? Will we be able to show our newest partners here at the parks board how to grow tobacco, how to make those plants flourish? And, how to treat the animals that are there, like nesting barn owls that are having their babies?” - Carrie Day-Aspinwall