

Oregon Metro Parks and Nature Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan



Background Information:

Among other services, Oregon Metro manages natural areas, parks, and trails, and coordinates and plans transportation investments for the three counties encompassing the Portland metropolitan area (Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington Counties). In 2016, the Metro Council adopted a Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, for “eliminating the disparities that people of color experience, especially in those areas related to Metro’s policies, programs, services and destinations.” The 2019 Action Plan covers all the Metro Parks and Nature Department’s work, “from hiring to department culture to community engagement to policy-making to contracts to daily tasks.”

Highlights: The Metro Parks and Nature Plan, given its focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) starts with the acknowledgement of the historical differences in opportunities to enjoy, work in, and live in the natural areas managed by Metro. The Plan then seeks to increase opportunities, participation, and support for those members of those communities historically excluded.

The Metro Plan encourages direct and indirect financial investments in parks, natural areas, cemeteries, trails, etc. that directly benefit communities of color, in all project phases. Metro encourages staff to examine all the ways people are able to influence and benefit from Metro’s work, like being hired as consultants, contractors, managers and staff, and serving on Metro’s committees.

Equitable Transportation Access – Metro set a framework for action to achieve racial, economic, environmental, and cultural equity. Safe, transit-accessible nature parks and trails and universally accessible park design were included among examples of environmental equity outcomes.

- In 2018, Metro inventoried locations of parks and natural areas (whether managed by Metro or others) and Metro programs. Identified geographic gaps relative to communities of color.
- In 2019, Metro released a revised ADA Transition Plan to transition Metro’s Parks and Nature facilities into environments that, when viewed collectively as one system, provide practical and meaningful access for individuals with disabilities.
- In 2019, Metro finalized the Connect with Nature resource guide for planning parks and nature with communities of color.

Strategic Partnerships – Metro seeks to engage communities of color throughout their work.

- Establish a standing Parks and Nature equity advisory committee composed of members of communities of color from across the region.
- Metro seeks to go beyond conventional partnerships by establishing a system to award grants to community members and organizations to share practices, build capacity and explore issues/solutions collectively. Grantees as well as other stakeholders design or designate what is needed, and Parks and Nature funds and supports their work.
- Partner with culturally specific programs to connect communities with career opportunities.

Conclusion:

The Metro Action plan ambitiously seeks to overhaul both internal organizational functioning and hiring as well as external community relations and project delivery. Per the Action Plan and subsequent Connect with Nature toolkit, Oregon Metro has determined that their role is to support the community while providing supporting framework and logistics. Metro emphasizes the importance of allocating sufficient resources for community leadership, starting with a budget for community leader stipends, childcare, food, translation services, and incentives. Next, Metro recommends investing time and energy to build personal relationships with community members, and to make events welcoming and fun.