

INTRODUCTION

Natural resource outreach programs and volunteer programs teach Minneapolis residents about natural resources, do work for the parks, and influence decisions within political, social, and economic systems. Organizations often use techniques such as canvassing, social media, door-to-door, and more to engage with the community. Interviews with Minneapolis Neighborhood Associations provide an opportunity to ask local organizations what works best for them to engage the community and helps determine which form of communication is most effective.

The purpose of this project is to answer the following questions:

1. What urban natural resource programs are active in Minneapolis Park and Recreation lands?
2. What attributes of volunteerism foster sustainable connections between community groups and the Minneapolis Recreation Board?
3. What characteristics of an organization increases overall community engagement?

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals:

1. Create a natural resource program and event inventory
2. Identify organizations' attributes that successfully engage the community
3. Determine the best methods to promote volunteerism across Minneapolis neighborhoods

Objectives:

1. Create a database of all natural resource events and programs
2. Interview neighborhood associations to identify how volunteerism influences engagement and the sense of community among Minneapolis neighborhoods



Figure 1. Land Stewardship Project. (CMS, 2018).

SITE DESCRIPTION

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's parks are found throughout the City of Minneapolis with over 140 neighborhood parks, as well as regional parks, lakes, and greenspaces.



Figure 2. Council Wards: Minneapolis Neighborhoods (Minneapolis City of Lakes, 2018)

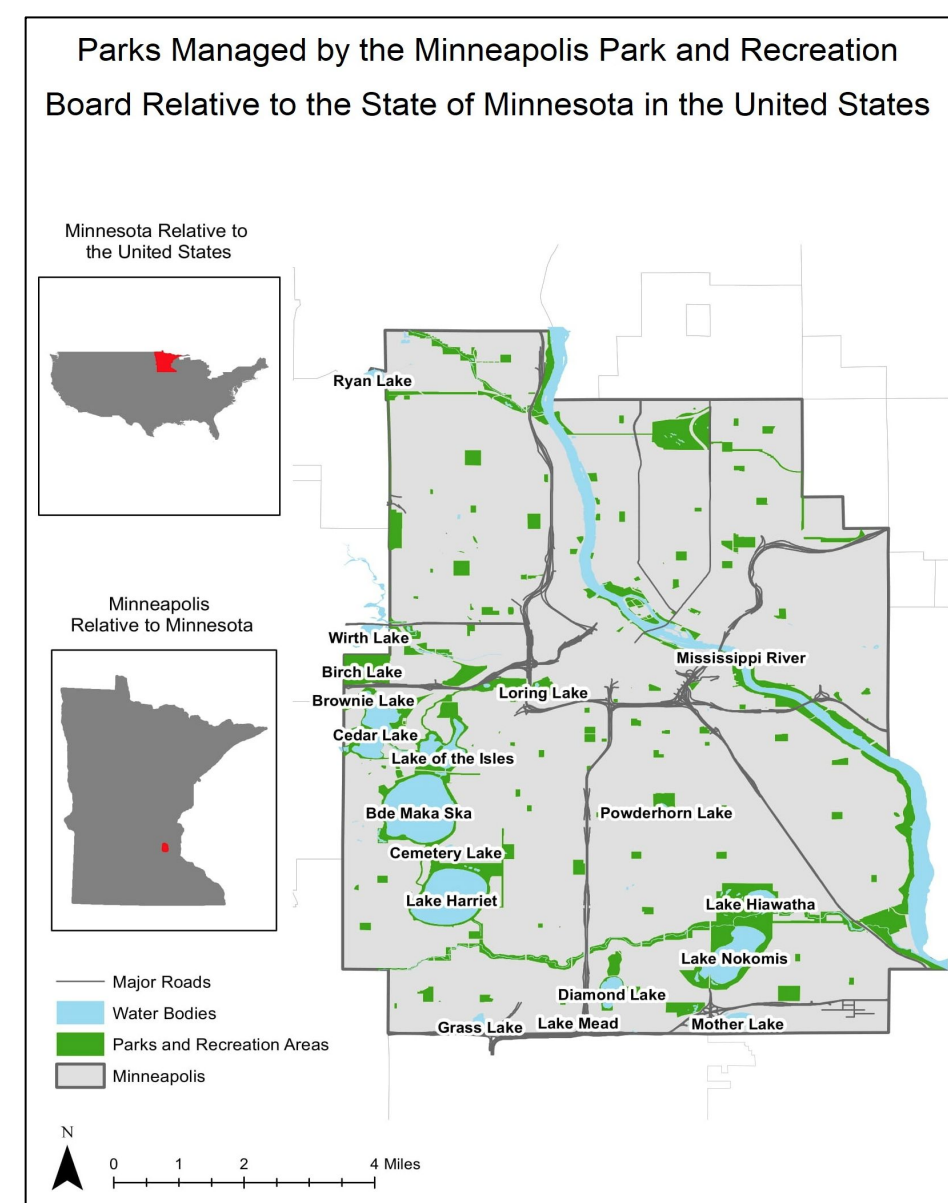


Figure 3. Parks Managed by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board Relative to the State of Minnesota in the U.S.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase collaboration among MPRB departments
 - Monthly meetings
 - New outreach coordinator to facilitate meetings, focused on common goals
2. Create a more user friendly events webpage
 - No more than three clicks to get to webpage (three-click rule)
 - Combine events and programs web pages into a single resource
3. Enhance current natural resource program database
 - Add additional categories such as better descriptions of the program. Is the program educational, provide a service, or advocate?
 - Include program attributes such as what type of engagement describes this program? What is the level of participation in the program?
4. Increase communication with Neighborhood Associations
 - Electronic newsletter (monthly or quarterly)
 - Use the Nextdoor App
 - Describe any important news, events, programs, or changes in MPRB



METHODS

Interview Method: The purpose of the interviews was to identify the key attributes, challenges, and attitudes concerning how Minneapolis natural resource programs and outreach organizations implement their programs and what methods they use to engage community members.

1. Key informants for interviews were identified through events and organizations.
2. Contacted neighborhood organizations within Minneapolis through email.
3. Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately 60 minutes where participants answered 11 questions about outreach, and volunteerism.
4. Interviews were recorded in writing by the interviewer and then uploaded to a secure file only accessible to group members.
5. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed.

Database and Interactive Map Methods: Three existing interactive systems were discovered. Two databases; one of programs that occur within Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Parks, and an "Active Communities" page in which communities could post their events to MPRB's website.

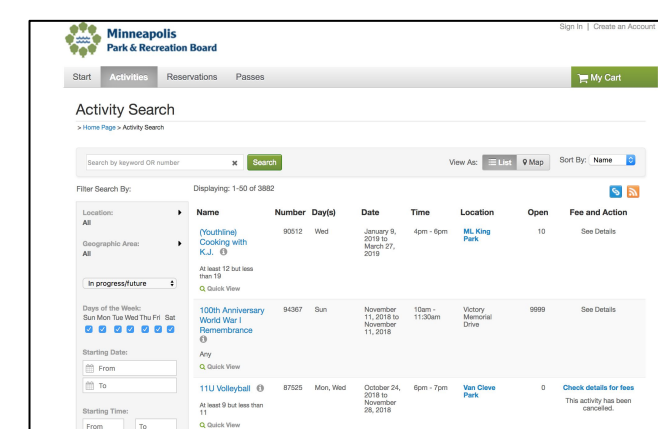


Figure 4. Active Communities Webpage (Active Network, 2018)

MPRB departments responsible for submitting relevant events and programs.

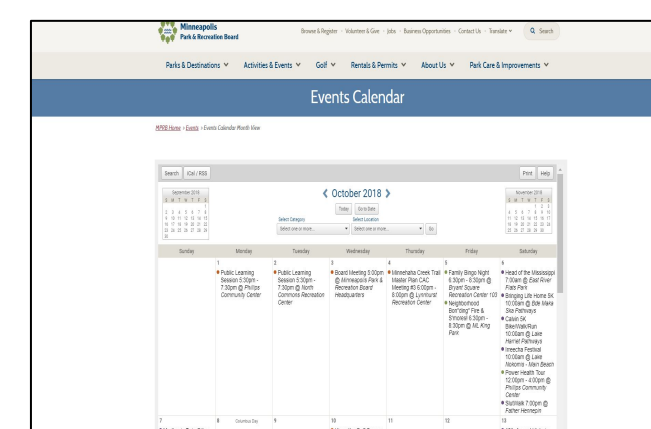


Figure 5. Events Calendar (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, 2018)

External Organizations can submit programs and events being held.

FINDINGS



Figure 6. Lack of Outreach Staff as a barrier

Figure 7. Lack of Motivation as a Barrier

1. Expected barriers, lack of outreach resources, staffing, and general interest, were rarely identified as problem.
2. The major challenge was that community members lack time to participate in any community programs or events.
 - This barrier to participation is not easily solved by neighborhood associations or MPRB
3. Most neighborhood associations expressed a desire for increased communication with the MPRB through use of a newsletter or other forms of communication.
4. Programs and events identified as successful in engaging the public had tangible results from participation.
 - Examples: Rain gardens, community gardens, tree planting, etc...

CONCLUSIONS

Minnesota is often perceived as exemplary for its availability of natural resources and associated programs and efforts strive to manage, enhance, and make these programs available to the public. Within the last decade the Minneapolis metropolitan area has experienced a dramatic upsurge in organizations and community groups that participate in programs supporting natural resource values and activities. The use of volunteerism and community outreach are crucial to the work of these organizations and for the delivery of social benefits to citizens, city parks, and natural resource management efforts. By incorporating recommendations, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board has an opportunity to engage the community and help enhance park natural resources.

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