

Equitable Visitation of National Parks:

Shedding light on community partner perspectives to improve park planning for all

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Abstract:

This research provides a deep dive into the lives of community organization leaders and National Park Service staff who work to promote diversity outdoors through hiking programs, the arts, advocacy, and more. The Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (outside of Los Angeles California) is used as a case study to research the successes and challenges for more equitably distributing park's positive impacts on health and well-being to its adjacent communities. This research inquires questions around sense of belonging, feeling welcome, and other factors that might impact one's experience outdoors.

Qualitative interviews with community organizations and NPS staff shed light on successes and challenges to reaching their goals of bringing more diverse groups to the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SAMO). This research culminates with park planning recommendations to make national park units more equitably visited and enjoyed by all.

Before diving into the case study at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, an overview of current literature explains why promoting diversity outdoors is important and why it can sometimes be a challenging task.

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Motivation

The key motivation for this work is to help produce research to help guide National Park Service efforts to make NPS units more relevant for the greater and diversifying population of the local Los Angeles area and more broadly in the United States. As an avid user and appreciator of federal lands (National Parks, Bureau of Land Management, United States Forest Service), I feel a personal duty to help give back to the land and the agencies managing them. I have chosen the National Park System because I believe that this agency provides something very unique to Americans and international travelers. National Park units offer awe, inspiration, and beauty, for the enjoyment of all. By balancing preservation and conservation ideologies with recreational enjoyment, the National Park Service strives to manage its open spaces to be enjoyed both today and by future generations.

In my experience, the populations represented out on the trails do not match that of nearby cities. I myself am a stereotypical hiker – plainly for the fact that I am white, educated, and middle-class. I wholeheartedly believe in the positive power of nature on our personal health, wellbeing, and enjoyment, and I want to help make these benefits more accessible to those who are not typically visiting the parks. Why are people from underserved communities and racially and ethnically diverse communities not visiting parks as often as white people? Are these personal, cultural, and/or social choices? Or are there larger institutional barriers that discourage people of color and/or lower socioeconomic status from reaping the benefits of the great outdoors? By identifying these challenges through conversation with local communities, I aspire to help make NPS planning more relevant and more equitably enjoyed by our beautifully diverse country.

The community I aspire to most contribute to are the residents of the major metro area outside of the park, Los Angeles. The National Park System’s mission is to preserve “unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.” This mission makes it clear that the federal NPS was created for the enjoyment and appreciation of all. Yet, the visitation data at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area demonstrates that this mission is not being met. I aspire to provide research to help the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area become even more equitably inclusive and inviting to all population groups.

While approaching this topic of study, I often found myself strapped by the question: who am I. Who am I to say that open spaces should be more equitably enjoyed by all people? Promoting equitable access for people of color, as a white girl, felt awkward at times. I’m not going to pretend that I understand what it means to be a person of color. With humility, I’ve approached this research with the perspective of contributing to a body of work to help support a worthwhile cause that I believe in – supporting diversity outdoors.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Before painting the picture of what visitation looks like at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, it's important to first lay the groundwork in the National Park Service's mission and visitation trends for the country as a whole. While the National Park Service (NPS) intends to provide opportunities of recreation for all Americans, in reality the visitor demographics are skewed towards white middle class users. This is an issue for many reasons, including but not limited to environmental injustice, inequity, and irrelevancy in our increasingly diversifying country. This chapter also provides an overview of various theorists' explanation for the visitor user gap and how certain factors may prevent or discourage particular groups of people from recreating at national parks.

1.1 Contextualizing the National Park Service

This section compares the historical intention for the National Park Service to benefit all people, with the reality of the white-dominated visitation, and advocates for the importance of equitable visitation of National Parks.

Historical Intention

The first National Park, Yellowstone National Park, was established by an act of Congress in 1872. Forty-four years later, the Organic Act created the National Park Service to maintain national parks and monuments managed by the department (National Park System 2018).

The mission of the National Park Service reads as follows:

*“The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system **for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations**. The National Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world”* (Park Service, 2006).

Figure 1 – National Park Service Arrowhead



(Park Service, 2006)

Today the National Park Service is responsible for managing 418 units of more than 84 million acres in all 50 states, D.C., and US territories with significant natural, cultural and/or historic resources. These hundreds of units are a public amenity that belong to all Americans (Park Service, 2006). The term “*unit*” is used to describe all of the lands managed by NPS, which includes the following (National Park System 2018):

National Recreation Areas	National Seashores	National Historic and Scenic Trails
National Historical Parks	National Lakeshores	National Conservation Areas
National Historic Sites	National Rivers National Wild & Scenic Rivers	National Cemeteries
National Monuments	National Reserves	National Memorials
National Preserves	National Parkways	National Parks
National Battlefield Parks		
National Military Parks		

Taking a step back, the National Park Service (NPS) sits within the Department of the Interior. The Department of the Interior was created by the passing of a Congressional bill in 1849 to take charge of the Nation’s internal affairs (DOI, 2018a). Back in the mid-1800’s, the DOI was responsible for a wide range of duties including constructing the nation capital’s water system, colonizing freed slaves in Haiti, exploring western wilderness, overseeing the District of Columbia jail, managing hospitals and universities, managing public parks, and more (DOI, 2018b).

The mission of the DOI reads as follows:

*“The Department of the Interior (DOI) conserves and manages the Nation’s natural resources and cultural heritage **for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people**, provides scientific and other information about natural resources and natural hazards to address societal challenges and create opportunities for the American people, and honors the Nation’s trust responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated island communities to help them prosper.”* (DOI, 2018b)

The Department of the Interior is home to the following bureaus and agencies:

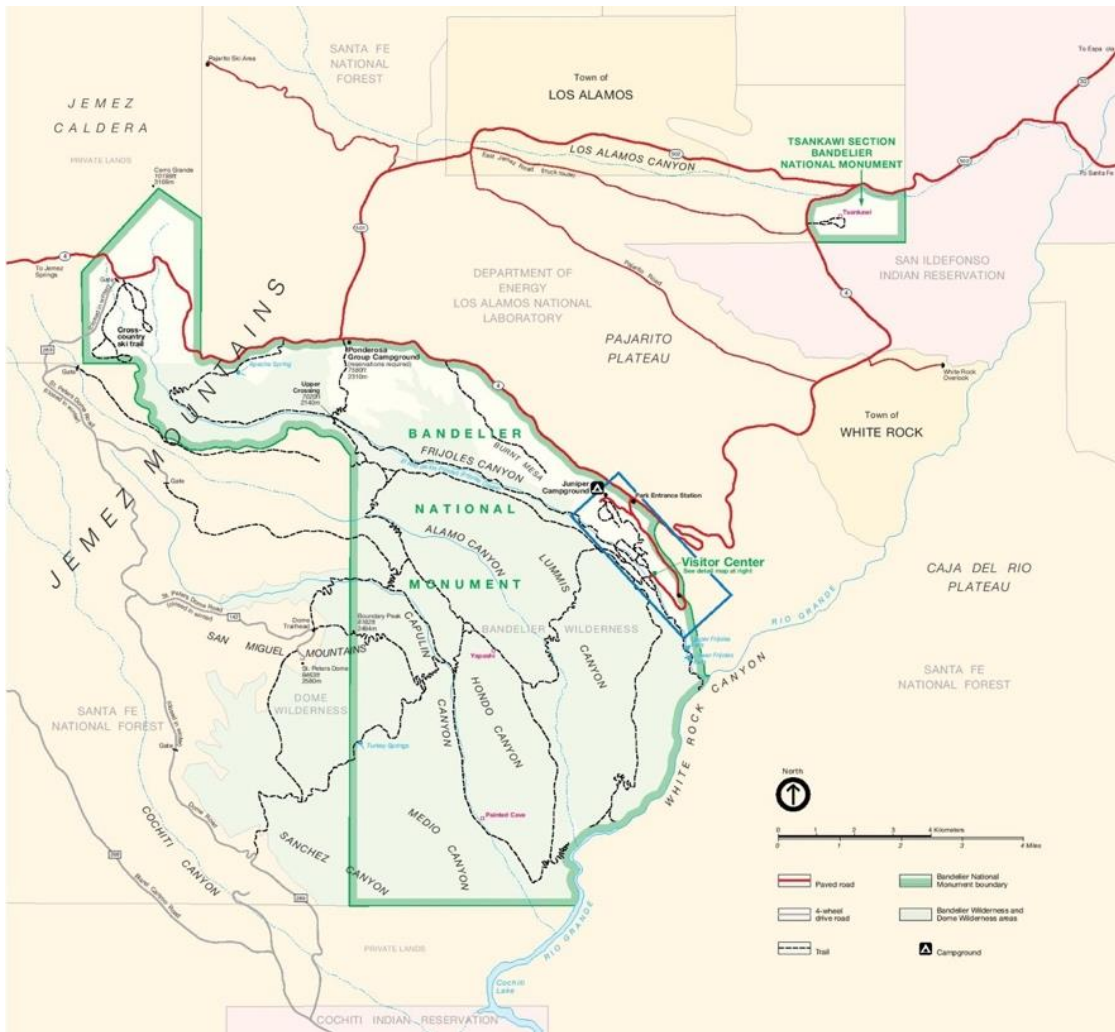
Bureau of Indian Affairs	National Park Service
Bureau of Indian Education	Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement
Bureau of Land Management	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management	U.S. Geological Survey
Bureau of Reclamation	
Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement	

The National Park Service’s primary objective is balancing preservation and conservation with recreation. This management style is unique in the broader context of other federal land management agencies which operate under a multiple-use framework. For example, timber may be harvested from USFS lands and minerals may be extracted from BLM lands, but typically neither of these activities are allowed on NPS lands. Despite these unique differences in their missions and abiding principles of management, all of the federal lands are collectively referred to as the “federal lands.” As such, agencies think of the federal lands as somewhat

interchangeable in terms of visitor use. Oftentimes federal lands of different management agencies border each other, necessitating strong inter-agency relations for the successful management of federal lands as a whole. Similarly, recreationists are oftentimes unaware of the type of lands they are on and which agency manages said federal land. When speaking more broadly about land in general, the term “*open space*” is often used as a catch-all term to include federal lands, state lands, city parks, and more. Open space refers to lands that have public access, and are therefore not privatized.

To better understand borders within federal lands, take a look at Bandelier National Monument (Figure 2 below). At Bandelier National Monument, the NPS lands border the Santa Fe National Forest, Department of Energy Los Alamos National Laboratory, private lands, San Idelfonso Indian Reservation, and Cochiti Indian Reservation. Having so many different federal agencies managing bordering lands requires deeply coordinated land management and planning practices. Even within the NPS boundary, there are sub-distinctions of National Park lands, broken down into Wilderness areas and non-wilderness areas.

Figure 2 – Bandelier National Monument



(National Park Service, 2019)

Visitation at the National Park Service units

While the National Park Service was created for the enjoyment of all, research shows that the National Parks are not being enjoyed equally by all. By discussing who currently visits National Park Service units, who is left out of the picture, what else needs to be studied in this area, and how the NPS addresses this, a more thorough understanding of visitation limitations can be garnered. Better understating these limitations is essential for moving forward into brainstorming planning solutions to alleviating these barriers to equitable visitation.

In 2016 the NPS recorded over 330 million visitors to National Park Service units including National Parks, National Historic Sites, National Monuments, National Lakeshores, and National Recreation Areas (National Park Service 2017). The metrics for visitation at national parks in 2016 represented a 19% increase as compared to five years prior, and a 156% increase as compared to fifty years prior (Pettebone & Meldrum, 2018). While the number of visitors in National Parks increases, the proportional demographic makeup of park visitors remains consistent to that of fifty years prior (Taylor, Grandjean, & Anatchkova, 2011; Weber & Sultana, 2013).

Who are the 300 million visitors at National Parks? The NPS Comprehensive survey of the American public is a nation-wide 15-minute phone survey that provides insight into the demographics of visitation to the National Park Service units (Taylor, Patricia A., Burke D. Grandjean, 2011). This survey showed that **those who had visited a NPS unit in the last two years were disproportionately white and more educated** than the American public (Taylor, Patricia A., Burke D. Grandjean, 2011). This survey also showed that visitation differences by race/ethnic group have not greatly changed since the previous iteration of the NPS Comprehensive Survey in 2000 (Taylor, Patricia A., Burke D. Grandjean, 2011).

Social scientists urge for the need to collect more comprehensive socioeconomic data including demographics, visitation characteristics, and spending (Pettebone & Meldrum, 2018). They urge that this data would help draw connections between increasing visitation and help determine whether or not this visitation is in coordination with meeting the needs of historically underrepresented groups and reaching more diverse audiences over time (Pettebone & Meldrum, 2018). Before more data is obtained though, we need to better understand the reasons for the disparities currently presented in the available data.

Why is it an issue for the historical intention of enjoyment by all to not match the reality of visitation by predominately white Americans?

1.2 Defining the Issue

This section explains what equitable visitation is, how open space is an environmental justice issue, who is at stake for this risk, and why the National Parks Service cares about being Relevant to the diversifying nation.

Equitable Visitation

Before one can have the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of nature, they first need physical access to the resource. Physical access to National Parks units takes many forms and can be provided through personal vehicles, city buses, tourist buses, boats, air travel, bikes, and sometimes even by foot. These different forms of access rely on different degrees of physical aptitude, in combination with various amounts of resources to pay for such transportation means.

This thesis does not address the physical transportation of visitors, but rather focuses on visitors' experience once inside the park. This decision was made for two reasons:

- There is a lack of research on visitors' experiences inside parks.
Current research only shows pure demographics and recreation preferences among different underrepresented populations. While this data is helpful for understanding trends, it is geographically limited and does not portray qualitative accounts to help explain *why* different demographics might behave differently.
- Just because you build it, it doesn't mean that they will come.
Improving affordable transportation options for inner city residents to National Parks is important work that needs to continue. But providing buses is only half of the work that needs to be done. Instead of focusing on improving equitable transportation options to the National Parks, this thesis researches how someone from an underrepresented population might feel once having already arrived at the park. If someone from an underrepresented population travels to a National Park, and soon quickly experiences discrimination once inside the gates, then improving transportation alone does not solve the issue.

While equitable access might entail providing free buses to National Parks for kids from all districts in a socioeconomically, racially, and ethnically diverse city, **equitable visitation entails providing similar opportunities for positive experiences recreating outdoors among socioeconomically, racially, and ethnically diverse visitors at a National Park.** As will be discussed, there are numerous factors that can hinder and have historically hindered certain underrepresented group's enjoyment of National Parks, which ultimately can influence their visitation patterns in the future.

How does one make visitation equitable? Rather than making sure that opportunities to recreate outdoors are equal among everyone, it is essential to make sure that the opportunities to recreate and benefit from the public good are equitable. Equity differs from equality in that **equity acknowledges that equal support does not necessarily garner equal results.** Different results may be a result of a variety of different factors ranging from citizenship, nationalism, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual preference, and more. **Inequity is when certain groups**

disproportionately enjoy a benefit, or when certain groups are disproportionately impacted by a harm.

Improving visitation equity in outdoor spaces involves critically thinking about one's experience, comfort, and sensitivities to various elements experienced outdoors.

Environmental Justice

The importance of ensuring equitable visitation at National Park Service units is highlighted through the lens of environmental justice. Environmental justice is both a theoretical frame and a civil-rights based social movement that (1) seeks to understand how environmental benefits and harms are ethno-racially and socioeconomically differentiated among urban populations; and (2) attempts to ameliorate incidents of inequity (W. C. Taylor, Poston, Jones, & Kraft, 2006, as cited by Byrne, Wolch, & Zhang, 2009).

Traditionally, environmental justice literature has emphasized the inequitable exposure of the poor and people of color to hazardous land uses such as toxic waste storage and the inequitable solicitation of environmental protection policies to those communities (Pastor, Sadd, & Hipp, 2001, as cited by Byrne et al., 2009). A new perspective suggests that **inequities in the distribution of public resources are also considered an issue of environmental justice**, as access to urban public spaces may privilege one group and disadvantage another (Sister, Wolch, & Wilson, 2010). Inferior access to environmental benefits ranging from fresh water to clean air and open space is an acceptable use of the terminology environmental inequity by researchers today (Heynen, 2003, Wolch et al. 2005, as cited by Byrne et al., 2009).

The benefits and value of parks and open spaces are well-recognized and are increasingly viewed as critical to public health (Sister et al., 2010). **The benefit of parks on health include reducing morbidity and mortality by decreasing heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, colon cancer, feelings of depression/anxiety, and weight, while building and maintaining healthy bones, muscles, and joints** (*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. A Report of the Surgeon General The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Physical Activity and Health*, 1996). The NPS Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention teamed up to write a report in 2017 titled "Improving Public Health through Public Parks and Trails: Eight Common Measures" which identifies eight common measures that connect park and trail planning to public health goals (Park Service, Assistance Program, & for Disease Control, 2014). This report reminds us how Central Park in New York City was described as the "lungs of the city" back when it was established in 1857 (Park Service et al., 2014).

The positive impacts of parks do not end at physical health benefits. Leisure research shows that **park visitation and recreation can also result in psychological health benefits, social benefits, economic benefits, and even environmental benefits** (Crompton & Kaczynski, 2006; as cited by Bedimo-Rung et al., 2005). Other studies show that park visitation benefits include stress relief, increased physical activity, social cohesion, improved mental health and psychological wellbeing (Byrne et al., 2009). Research suggests that the **health and wellbeing of**

urban populations is significantly impacted by their access to and use of urban green-spaces (Byrne et al., 2009).

The inequitable access and distribution of parks and opportunities for park recreation is indeed an issue of environmental justice. Minority groups have disproportionately poor geographic access to urban open space, and in turn have greater exposure to health-related problems (Byrne et al., 2009). With the environmental justice movement came a new perception among poor and minority citizens, who began to see the National Parks System as elitist and favoring the preservation of inaccessible natural areas over the welfare of less privileged communities (Di Chiro, 1996). In the United States, parks benefits are felt disproportionately by white and affluent residents who enjoy superior park access, whereas people of color have more limited access to park space, make fewer visits to urban open spaces and use park spaces differently (Byrne et al., 2009). In Los Angeles specifically, Wolch et al. (2005) found that low-income and concentrated poverty areas, as well as neighborhoods of color, had lower levels of access to parks (defined as park area per capita within a 0.25-mile radius to a park) compared to White-dominated areas (Sister et al., 2010).

One might wonder, how does equitable park visitation align with public land management principles? In 1994 Executive Order No. 12898 passed stating that all Federal land management agencies (and all federal agencies) are directed to develop agency-wide environmental justice strategies and to “identify differential patterns of consumption of natural resources among minority populations and low-income populations” (Floyd & Jokson, 2002). Prior to 1994, environmental justice was not a required or concretized consideration in the federal agencies. While this Executive Order is a step in the right direction towards progress, the likelihood of it actively being reinforced is questionable at best.

A recent study measured different racial/ethnic groups’ perceived benefits attributed to parks. The 2016 nationwide study commissioned by the National Recreation and Park Association replicates a 1992 study to demonstrate American’s current perception of, value for, and accessibility to local parks (Mowen, Graefe, Barrett, & Godbey, 2016). Among other findings, this study showed that respondents among all racial/ethnic groups perceive a high personal and community benefit from local parks, but this benefit is felt lower among black respondents compared to the benefit felt by white and Hispanic respondents (Mowen et al., 2016).

While progress has been made, inequitable visitation of National Parks remains an important and current issue of environmental justice. Ensuring equitable visitation of National is integral to remediating environmental injustices in the United States. The 2016 National Recreation and Park Association study shows that the American public views public parks not as luxuries, but as critical infrastructure (Mowen et al., 2016). This high public valuation for parks helps highlight its importance to the country.

Who is at stake?

When we talk about equitable visitation, it is integral to clearly define who is at stake, or who is most impacted when visitation is inequitable. Leisure research uses the terms **underrepresented and underserved populations** to describe those who reflect lower rates of visitation at National Park Units in the United States. When we look at who these people are, we see that they represent a diversity of racial and ethnic groups, often referred to as people of color. These people can sometimes, but not always, come from families with lower socioeconomic status, or families with less financial resources, education, and employment opportunities. Put quite plainly, in the context of the National Park Service, underrepresented and underserved populations are those who are not white and/or highly educated.

Why Relevancy Matters

Relevancy with a capital R is the National Park Service's way of communicating the need for the parks to be relevant, or relatable and pertinent, to the current population of the United States. In 2006 the NPS published a report titled "Keeping National Parks Relevant in the 21st Century." National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis identified relevancy as one of four priority areas for the NPS to address while in term from 2009 to 2016 (McCown et al., 2011). Since 2006, numerous NPS reports have been published reiterating the importance of being relevant to all Americans.

The National Parks Second Century Commission's 2009 report *Advancing the National Park Idea* declared that "**the long-term viability of the parks and the quality of life in surrounding communities increasingly depend on the Park Service building strong constituencies across the full spectrum of our population**" (McCown et al., 2011). As such, more and more national parks, NPS programs, and partners across the United States are creatively engaging new and diverse communities and seek to enhance the relevancy of parks and associated programs to all Americans (McCown et al., 2011). The National Park Service needs to reach these new audiences in order **to maintain relevancy with future US populations** (Weber & Sultana, 2013b) and **to provide the benefits that NPS offers to people who have not realized these opportunities** (Pettebone & Meldrum, 2018).

The National Parks' 2015 Urban Agenda Call to Action Initiative explains why it is important for the NPS to strategically organize its urban parks and programs towards building relevancy for all Americans (National Park Service, 2015). The Urban Agenda seeks to connect people to the parks where they live, rather than as one-off potential vacation destinations (National Park Service, 2015). The Urban Agenda argues that much of the success of the National Park Service in coming years will depend on its ability to diversify and prove its relevancy to new populations (National Park Service, 2015). The key strategies laid out in the Urban Agenda include strengthening the agency's external relationships, diversifying its workforce, and aligning with community-driven agendas that relate to the NPS mission (National Park Service, 2015).

"Be Relevant to all Americans" is the first principle in the NPS Urban Agenda (National Park Service, 2015). The NPS Urban Agenda urges the NPS to ensure that the American story is told

faithfully, completely, and accurately, despite being sometimes shameful and sad (National Park Service, 2015). **As the nation continues to diversify, the service must continually ask whether the manner in which the stories are told has meaning for all of its citizens** (National Park Service, 2015).

The following image from the NPS Urban Agenda portrays the perspective NPS embodies around relevancy (National Park Service, 2015). As the image shows, the majority of the United States population lives in urban areas, where people are more economically diverse and multicultural than in more rural areas (National Park Service, 2015). From 2000 to 2010 the Census saw an increase in the number of people from non-white racial and ethnic backgrounds in the US population (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2010). Projections show that within 30 years more than half the nation will be people of color and about one-third will be Hispanic, yet this demographic shift is not currently represented in the NPS workforce, themes interpreted in its parks, or in its visitors (National Park Service, 2015). The Urban Agenda is a set of principles on how the Parks can better engage with urban communities, and why being relevant to these populations matters.

Figure 3 – The NPS Urban Agenda



(National Park Service, 2015)

The importance of engaging with urban communities is further emphasized through the lens of equity. Since the National Parks are maintained through federal taxpayer dollars, including the majority of whom live in the urban cores, when the National Parks are only visited by those who live outside of urban cores, it is extremely inequitable park visitation. Furthermore, those who live in urban cores are more socioeconomically diverse than those living outside of urban cores. As a result, people living in urban cores are disproportionately impacted by the cost of park management since they have less opportunities for access and more structural challenges preventing their recreation and visitation of the federal public good.

While the term “relevancy” has been more and more widely used within the last decade, the idea of relevancy is not news to the National Park Service. Back in the 1970’s, the Secretary of the Interior Water Hickel led a “parks-to-people” initiative to bring the national park experience to socio-economically disadvantaged and ethno-racially marginalized urban residents (Byrne et al., 2009). The “urban national parks” were designed with the intention of serving both conservation and recreation benefits, including access to fresh air, solitude and opportunities to engage with nature (Forresta, 1984).

The National Parks Service understands the importance of providing opportunities to engage with the natural world at many different scales – be that at a city park, larger National Recreation Area, or a National Park. In addition to their differences in size and geographic accessibility, these different types of parks provide different types of recreation opportunities, depth of experiencing wilderness, and opportunities for solitude.

Relevancy is important today as much as ever before. Today Relevancy is addressed through the NPS’ multidisciplinary office named RDI for relevancy, diversity and inclusion (National Park Service, 2015). In addition, the NPS Social Science Program’s 2016 iteration of the Comprehensive National Household Survey (CNHS) now includes questions regarding relevancy, in addition to youth engagement and other topics (Pettebone & Meldrum, 2018). This study seeks to better understand the breadth and reach of NPS influence and to determine how NPS messaging is being communicated and received beyond those who visit the park (Pettebone & Meldrum, 2018).

Lastly, in January of 2017, President Obama released a Presidential Memorandum titled “Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Our National Parks, National Forests, and Other Public Lands and Waters.” This memorandum was written to “ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to experience and enjoy our public lands and waters, that all segments of the population have the chance to engage in decisions about how our lands and waters are managed, and that our Federal workforce is drawn from the rich range of the diversity in our Nation” (“Presidential Memorandum -- Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Our National Parks, National Forests, and Other Public Lands and Waters | whitehouse.gov,” 2017). This memorandum and many other federal policies written by politicians in power reemphasize the importance and need for improving the relevancy of the National Parks.

1.3 Theorists' attempts to explain the use gap

This section provides an overview of the various theories that are found in leisure literature used to help explain the use gap in the National Parks. The use gap is the gap between who the parks are intended for (all Americans) and who the parks are visited by (predominately white educated people).

While not one person's experience is ever the same in the great outdoors, there are a few different hypotheses that can help shed light on the experiences felt by certain groups of people coming from underrepresented populations. The reasons that are used to explain the use gap are sometimes referred to as barriers, as they can serve as a barrier for the public good to be enjoyed equitably by all. The various theories used to explain the use gap include the following: marginality hypothesis, ethnicity hypothesis, and feeling of belonging hypothesis.

This thesis does not assess the merit of these various hypotheses, but rather gives an overview of the different frameworks of thinking that some leisure scientists may be exposed to from an academic perspective. It's also important to remember that these hypotheses do not intend to create or reinforce preexisting stereotypes. As with any population, these hypotheses may feel relatable and/or troubling to different individuals who identify as a person of color. While there are no broad-sweeping statements that ever ring true for an entire population, leisure scientists hope to better understand leisure preferences among different populations with the aid of these hypotheses.

Marginality Hypothesis

The marginality hypothesis proposes that people of color tend to face socioeconomic barriers which limit their park visitation and use (Washburn 1978, cited by Byrne et al., 2009). Socioeconomic barriers in the marginality hypothesis include travel expenses, the cost of equipment, park entry fees and insufficient leisure time (Byrne et al., 2009).

People of Color tend to face socioeconomic barriers which limit their park visitation.

Transportation

Transportation is the most discussed barrier for underrepresented populations' visitation at national park units (Xiao, 2016). Quite plainly, if one cannot travel to a national park, they will not be able to enjoy its benefits. Breaking down transportation-related barriers and incentives among different racial/ethnic groups yields interesting findings. One study of national parks in New York City showed that Hispanic respondents perceived a significantly higher level of the accessibility-barrier than did White respondents (Xiao et al., 2017). Relatedly, Hispanic people reported significantly higher levels of agreement that transportation-related incentives would be successful in encouraging park visitation when compared to when the incentive is provided to white people (Xiao et al., 2017). In specific, the incentives of better forms of public transportation to and within parks and a less expensive means of transportation to and from parks were all found to encourage Hispanic populations to increase park visitation (Xiao et al., 2017).

Weber and Sultana's study addresses whether national parks are accessible to areas where racial and ethnic minorities live and whether park visitation reflects local minority population patterns (2013). One of their key findings showed that visitation by African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics was related to their proximity to park units (Weber & Sultana, 2013b). While transportation can serve as a barrier for any racial/ethnic group to visiting a National Park unit, research shows that the barrier of transportation is typically felt higher among people of color.

Cost

The barrier of cost associated with visiting a National Park Service unit can be felt either overlapping with transportation (expense of taking a bus/renting a car/gas), and/or as a stand-alone cost. For context, the average entrance fee for a National Park ranges from \$20 to \$30. Unlike National Parks, National Recreation Areas do not charge an entrance fee for admission. National Parks are typically one to six hours away from a major city, whereas National Recreation Areas are typically less than two hours away from a major city. These distances play a role in the amount of gas required to visit a park, and therefore the cost associated with this trip.

Related to transportation, potential costs felt might include renting/owning/leasing a car, gas needed to drive to park and gas needed to drive within park roads, car insurance, bus pass (potentially multiple), and lastly the cost of renting or owning a bicycle and associated gear (if the park has a bike-accessible entrance). Additional costs that may be felt unrelated to transportation include entrance fee, cost of any related gear that may be necessary for a certain type of recreation (hiking clothing, backpack, gear related to more specialized sports such as backpacking, mountaineering, mountain biking, road biking, rock climbing, etc), and costs for necessary food and beverages inside the park. For National Parks near New York City, studies show that black respondents perceived expense as the greatest limitation to their visitation and Hispanic respondents reported a significantly higher level of the perceived expense barrier than did White respondents (Xiao et al., 2017). It is challenging to determine whether these perceived limitations are related to / overlap with trends in socioeconomic status and therefore support the marginality effect, or whether these limitations connote an unwillingness to pay for recreating outdoors which would suggest more of a difference in valuation. Either way, this research shows that overall, cost is felt as a greater limitation to NPS access among people of color.

Ethnicity Hypothesis

In contrast, the ethnicity hypothesis proposes that people of color have distinct 'subcultural styles' which shape their leisure preferences and activities (Byrne et al., 2009). For example, the ethnicity hypothesis might suggest that some African-Americans may prefer basketball over hiking due to socialization (Gandy 2002, cited by Byrne et al., 2009).

People of Color have distinct 'subcultural styles' which shape their leisure preferences and activities.

Preferences by racial and ethnic groups

While stereotypes never hold true for everyone in a given population subgroup, there are some key preferences that can be more common among certain racial and ethnic groups that stem from their unique history, culture, and values. Some key findings around racial and ethnic preferences in recreational leisure include the following: Hispanics and Asian Americans are more likely to visit older National Parks; African Americans are more likely to visit smaller National Parks; and Native Americans are more likely to visit larger National Parks (Weber & Sultana, 2013b). Literature also shows how underrepresented populations from various racial and ethnic groups are more likely to use park spaces differently (Byrne et al., 2009). For example, one study found that people of color are less inclined to use the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area for active recreation when compared to other user groups (Byrne et al., 2009). This study defines active recreation as activities including hiking, mountain biking and jogging.

Before one can even decide among different types of leisure and recreation though, there needs to be a desire to go outside. The ethnicity hypothesis also addresses how some people from different racial and ethnic groups may think of the outdoors in different ways. While some families might see the outdoors as an opportunity for relaxation, other families may not necessarily value relaxation in the same way. Similarly, some families might be attracted to the idea of camping while other families might not be attracted to spending a night sleeping outdoors. While these differences in the desire to spend time outdoors can vary wildly among all families in the United States, the ethnicity hypothesis suggests that one's ethnicity may impact one's perception and valuation of time spent outdoors in general.

Feeling of Belonging Hypothesis

Related but different to these two hypotheses is what I call the feeling of belonging hypothesis. Many different factors can influence one's feeling of belonging in any given space. For example, a shared experience may be felt differently by different people as a result of many different factors included but not limited to one's gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, family history, or cultural associations. This section looks at how some people of color's unique experiences of safety, discrimination, and representation on the trails and among staff may impact their feeling of belonging in an outdoors space.

Safety

Safety outdoors can have many different meanings for different groups of people. For some, safety might mean protection against natural events such as lightning, human-wildlife encounter, or falling from a cliff. Some would argue that protection from others is an equal concern of safety in open spaces, simply for the fact that open spaces are typically more remote and have fewer people to enforce accountability and respect than in urban areas.

Research sheds light on the varying perceptions of safety by various racial/ethnic groups. The NPS Comprehensive Survey of the American public (2011) found that very few non-Hispanic white people saw NPS units as unsafe, whereas up to a quarter of those in other groups (Hispanic, African American, Asian, American Indian) agreed that lack of safety was a reason for not visiting. Another study found that comfort and safety barriers were reported significantly

higher among Hispanic respondents than among White respondents (Xiao et al., 2017). The reasons for different perceived levels of safety are not explained by these studies, but this research does conclude that people of color may be more likely to perceive outdoors spaces as unsafe and that this perception of safety may hinder some individual's visitation of outdoors spaces.

The reasons for feeling less safe likely vary widely among different ethnic groups and are influenced by many factors including one's upbringing and physical aptitude, among other factors. Some literature points out one potential reason why some black people might feel unsafe when outdoors. Pires (2018) explains that some black people, may associate the woods with historically repressive actions such as lynching. Different generations may or may not be prone to the fear of black people going into the woods not necessarily coming back, referring to American history of slavery (Pires, 2018). There are likely many factors that play into whether or not this fear might be felt among certain individuals, such as one's age and exposure to this history. It's never advisable to assume that a fear like this might be felt among any or all black people, but it can be helpful to be exposed to the theory to better understand where people might be coming from.

Discrimination

Experiences of discrimination can serve as a barrier for any person to return to any particular kind of space where the discriminatory action occurred. One study showed that comfort and safety barriers were reported higher among black park visitors than among black park non-visitors, suggesting experiences of discrimination or discomfort while visiting park units (Xiao et al., 2017). Another study found that all three non-dominant groups mentioned discrimination complaints, mostly by other users or police, which had occurred in the park (Gobster, 2010). Again, this research does not conclude that all people of color will experience discrimination in outdoors settings. Rather this research shows that some people of color have in fact experienced instances of discrimination outdoors, which may contribute to a lower comfort and feeling of safety while in outdoors spaces such as National Parks. These negative experiences may deter some groups of people from returning to outdoors spaces in efforts to avoid spaces that are associated with discomfort caused by discriminatory actions.

Representation - among staff members and on the trails

In addition to feeling safe and having an outdoors experience free of discrimination, seeing people like you can contribute to one's sense of belonging in any outdoors space. Seeing someone you can relate to has a lot of value for anyone in any space. Representation can hold even more weight for someone when there are few folks who look like you in a particular setting. Representation outdoors applies to two settings – among NPS staff members and on the trails.

The lack of diverse racial representation among staff in the National Park Service is well recognized as an issue that can negatively impact visitors from underrepresented populations (National Park Service, 2015). More homogenous staffing not only impacts the visitor's experience in terms of relatability on a personal level, but it also impacts their entire experience at a park since staff people make decisions that are likely communicated through programmatic, educational and interpretive materials. Since NPS staff influence and shape the educational and interpretive materials at the parks, NPS staffing decisions influence which exhibits will be

highlighted, which stories will be told, and which perspectives will be presented. The lack of diversity, cultural irrelevancy, and language constraints in land management staff can create a sociocultural barrier that may alienate some racial minorities from natural resource agencies (Flores, Falco, Roberts, & Valenzuela III, 2018).

In addition to poor representation among staff members in outdoor spaces, poor representation of people on the trails from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds can also serve as a barrier to visitation outdoors. Some sources fault media for portraying a homogeneous image of what hiking looks like, and how this can function as a barrier for some people of color feeling like they belong in outdoors spaces (Pires, 2018). If commercials and magazines only highlight a narrow group of users (i.e. typically white and highly athletic) in outdoor settings, then people who might not fit that limited image may not feel as comfortable hiking outdoors (Pires, 2018). Media aside, studies show that some people of color might associate the outdoors with white spaces that are off limits to them, which can undoubtedly impact one's feeling of belonging in an outdoors space (Pires, 2018; Scott et al. 2018). One strategy used by some people of color to address the discomfort that might be felt from poor representation on the trail is to hike in a group of people of color (Pires, 2018). Hiking with strength in numbers can not only help those in the group feel more like they belong in the space, but can also transform other user's concept of who belongs in outdoors spaces. Actively diversifying the outdoors on the trail reduces the false-notion that outdoors spaces are white spaces.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter details the research question, processes for data collection and analysis, and introduces the community organizations who participated in this study. This chapter concludes with a section on how this information will be shared with NPS folks, and how this research process was an opportunity to practice flexibility.

2.1 Research Question

Instead of producing another survey to study those who were visitors at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SAMO), I decided to look at visitation from the outside in. I reached out to SAMO staff and asked for names and contact information for community organizations who help promote diversity outdoors through programming at SAMO.

This research can be summed up into one succinct question:

What are the experiences felt, challenges faced, and successes of community partners who strive to promote racial and ethnic diversity outdoors, at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area?

2.2 Data Collection

The research question was explored through three main methods of data collection: literature consultation, site visits, and in-person interviews.

Literature Consultation

Consulting a variety of literature from public records to academic literature and media reporting was crucial to the iterative process of fine-tuning my research question, overall framing, and interview guides that shaped conversations with community partners and NPS staff.

Site visits

Before discussing park experiences in detail with community organizations, I first needed to experience what it's like to visit the park. While I had read plenty of materials about the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area including NPS materials and external studies, I believed it was only fair for me to experience first-hand, what it feels like to hike in this space. I wanted to familiarize myself with the context to better prepare myself for my interviews and to help deepen my understanding of the park, its neighbors, and its boundaries.

Over the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Independent Activities Period, I traveled out to Los Angeles with the help of MIT funding to conduct in-person research. During my in-person site visits, I collected information on the design of park boundaries, visitor entrances, trail design, typical park visitors, and park staff/visitor dynamics. These observations helped inform my interviews with community partners.

In-Person Interviews

I decided to pursue in-person interviews due to the potentially sensitive nature of the interview content with my community partners.

I targeted community organizations who help promote diversity outdoors through programming at SAMO and neighboring open space areas. Community organizations were identified through suggestions and email introductions from SAMO staff and through independent research. Deputy Superintendent Kate Kuykendall was very supportive of my inquiry and helped connect me to various community organizations with either existing or former programmatic relationships with SAMO.

After initial email communications and informal phone conversations with Los Angeles based community groups who promote diversity outdoors, I confirmed interviews with nine organizations. Interview confirmations were supported through a scheduling website where the interviewee was able to select a time and location that works best for them, within a specific window of availability. In addition to interviewing community organization leaders, I also interviewed two National Park Service staff – one in person and one over the phone at a later date.

Most in-person interviews occurred at the respective organization's headquarters, which allowed me to better understand the culture and context from which the organization was operating under. During the in-person interviews, I took digital notes and recorded audio on a handheld recorder for transcript analysis at a later date. Prior to beginning each interview, each interviewee signed consent for participation in the research at whatever level they felt most comfortable with – including their name, title, and/or allowing for direct quotes and audio recording. This consent protocol was in adherence with COUHES, the Committee on the Use of Humans as Experimental Subjects, which serves as MIT's institutional review board for research.

2.3 Community Organizations

As shown below, the community organizations interviewed range from schools to advocacy environmental groups to outdoor recreation groups to arts groups, schools, and more. Each community partner is described in more detail below.

Table 1 – Community Organizations by Focus

Focus	Organization
Outdoor Recreation	Outward Bound Adventures
	Latino Outdoors
	Black Girls Trekkinn
	Nature for All (Sierra Club)
Arts/Music-Oriented	CalArts Community Arts Partnership (CAP)
	Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA)
Law/Advocacy	The City Project
	Nature for All (Sierra Club)
School	Esperanza Elementary
	San Pascual STEAM Magnet Elementary

Outward Bound Adventures

Mission:

Leading underserved youth through meaningful nature-based experiences.

Programming at SAMO:

- Environmental Restoration Teams (ERT): Outward Bound Adventures (OBA) provides youth teams to perform restoration work at SAMO through collaborative agreements the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and the Mountains Restoration Trust. Restoration teams conduct various types of physical work outdoors including but not limited to trail construction, maintenance and upkeep, and restoration work.
- Teach Me to Camp (TMTC): OBA runs an open TMTC program (open to all community agencies) but limited by funding at locations in the local Santa Monica Mountains. TMTC teaches families the basic skills needed to successfully plan and execute a camping trip for the whole family to enjoy.
- Hikes led by OBA staff and volunteers

Website: <http://www.obainc.org/>

Figure 4 – Outward Bound Adventures Logo

OUTWARD BOUND ADVENTURES



Latino Outdoors

Mission:

We inspire, connect, and engage Latino communities in the outdoors and embrace cultura y familia as part of the outdoor narrative, ensuring our history, heritage, and leadership are valued and represented.

Programming:

- Hikes led by Latino Outdoors staff and volunteers in and outside of the Los Angeles metro area.

Website: <http://latinooutdoors.org/>

Figure 5 – Latino Outdoors Logo



Black Girls Trekkinn

Mission:

We are a group of women who take to the outdoors for three reasons:

1. To get away from the busy city life that we Angelenos have to deal with on a daily basis. It's almost impossible to escape the hustle and bustle of LA life, but we find sanctuary in the various trails that the city has to offer.
2. To promote diversity in the outdoors and show that us people of color DO go outside and do things like hike, swim, climb, and enjoy the thrill of adventure. The more we come together, the more that stereotype "black people don't go outside" becomes irrelevant.
3. To connect with other black women that have like-minded ideas and to have our own safe space where we can be outside and be ourselves without worrying if we're being stared at or possibly judged.

Programming:

- Hikes led by Black Girl Trekkinn leaders in and outside of the Los Angeles metro area.

Website: <https://blackgirltrekkinn.com/>

Figure 6 – Black Girls Trekkinn Logo



Nature for All (Sierra Club)

Mission:

The Sierra Club Angeles Chapter sponsors thousands of outings each year, including day hikes, backpacking, car camping, skiing . . . the list goes on and on. Open to Sierra Club members and non-members alike, these outings reflect our shared love of the outdoors and the Angeles Chapter's commitment to making your outdoor experience safe, educational and fun.

Programming:

- Hikes led by Nature for All Leadership Academy in and outside of the Los Angeles metro area.
- Advocates for extending park boundaries and enhancing protection of already-established protected areas.

Website: https://angeles.sierraclub.org/get_outdoors/come-hike-with-us

Figure 7 – Nature for All (Sierra Club) Logo



CalArts Community Arts Partnership (CAP)

Mission:

CalArts teaches artists to develop the skills and personal drive to reach their creative potential, question received ideas and expand forms of knowledge and experience in the world. CalArts challenges artists to create work that matters globally to the state of culture today and in the future.

Programming at SAMO:

- Teaching Artists in Residency work on their own projects at SAMO, which are shared with the public through performance. Teaching Artists in Residency also work with underserved youth, bringing students to SAMO where they practice, create, and perform musical pieces outdoors.

Website: <https://calarts.edu/cap/overview>

Figure 8 – CalArts Logo



Heart of Los Angeles

Mission: HOLA provides underserved youth with free, exceptional programs in academics, arts and athletics within a nurturing environment, empowering them to develop their potential, pursue their education and strengthen their communities.

Programming at SAMO:

- Hikes and environmental stewardship programs led by NPS Rangers at SAMO.
- HOLA staff integrates the arts (i.e. drawing, painting, etc) into the environmental programming either outdoors during field trips or afterwards back at HOLA headquarters.

Website: <https://www.heartofla.org/>

Figure 9 – Heart of Los Angeles Logo



The City Project

Mission:

The City Project believes that all people should have access to healthy, livable communities. Our multicultural, Latino-led team works with diverse allies to ensure equal access to (1) healthy green land use through planning by and for the community; (2) climate justice; (3) physical education and schools of hope as centers of their communities; (4) health equity and wellness; and (5) economic vitality for all, including jobs and avoiding displacement as communities become greener and more desirable. The mission of The City Project is to achieve equal justice, democracy, and livability for all.

Programming:

- Advocates for land stewardship and preservation in the Los Angeles area and beyond.
- Advocates for extending park boundaries and enhancing protection of already-established protected areas.

Website: <https://www.cityprojectca.org/>

Figure 10 – The City Project Logo



Esperanza Elementary

Mission:

Located in the heart of the historic Westlake neighborhood of downtown Los Angeles, Esperanza Elementary School serves more than 800 students ranging from pre-Kindergarten to fifth grade.

Programming at SAMO:

- Collaborates with NPS for environmental stewardship programming at SAMO, local urban parks, or on the school campus. Hikes and programming led by Rangers.
- Participates in the Every Kid in a Park Program for 4th graders, where 4th graders are taken on a hike by rangers in SAMO.

Website: <https://esperanzaes-laUSD-ca.schoolloop.com/>

San Pascual STEAM Magnet School

Mission:

Guided by a CLEAR vision that promotes Community, Leadership, Empathy, Academic Integrity, and Reflection, we are dedicated to cultivating brilliant minds, true leaders and creative passions.

Programming at SAMO:

- Became a Magnet school through partnership with SAMO.
- Collaborates with NPS for environmental stewardship programming at SAMO, local urban parks, or on the school campus. Hikes and programming led by Rangers.
- Participates in the Every Kid in a Park Program for 4th graders, where 4th graders are taken on a hike by rangers in SAMO.

Website: <https://sanpascual-laUSD-ca.schoolloop.com/>

Figure 11– San Pascual STEAM Magnet Logo



2.4 Data analysis

After transcribing 12+ hours of interviews, results were coded using Atlas.ti for qualitative analysis. After coding all of the notes and transcripts, results were exported for each key question into a new document. From there, results were synthesized into comprehensive overviews to give the reader depth into the interview content. Key quotes were selected from the transcript and are highlighted throughout the data analysis to give shape and personality to the interviews.

2.5 Sharing feedback among key stakeholders

From the beginning of this research process, there was a clear intention of producing a summary of findings and recommendations from the community partners to relay back to the National Park Service.

After analyzing the data and forming conclusions and recommendations, summary documentation will be relayed to the community organizations and key feedback for improving equitable park access will be relayed to both the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and to the Park Planning & Special Studies Division in Washington DC. Research findings will be relayed to NPS Planners during an online webinar as part of their Planner Chat monthly series in summer 2019.

2.6 Practicing Flexibility

These are amazing opportunities for practicing research, reflection, and flexibility. As a timeline-driven researcher, I had concrete goals and objectives with specific target dates. A couple things impacted this timeline and plan of action, proving as excellent opportunities to practice flexibility.

Woolsey Fire

After selecting the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area as a case study and communicating with both NPS staff and local community partners about my research and upcoming visit, the Woolsey Fire ignited on November 8th 2018. The Woolsey Fire impacted Los Angeles and Ventura counties, including burning more than 21,000 acres of land within the SAMO boundary, accounting for 88% of the park in total.

While forest fires are part of the natural cycle of natural landscapes, the damages to infrastructure, trees, grasses, streams, and wildlife from the Woolsey Fire were tremendous. After the fire was put out, most trails at SAMO were closed for safety concerns. While park staff were hard at work dealing with the consequences of the fire, my communications with NPS staff were understandably impacted.

Despite the impacts of the Woolsey Fire on SAMO, I continued with my research using SAMO as a case study. I tried my best to move forward with my research while honoring the tragic loss

and its impact on SAMO staff, residents, and neighbors. Here are some photos of the Paramount Ranch post-Woolsey, an iconic Western Town used as a backdrop in many feature films.

Figure 12 – Paramount Ranch Old Western Town, fire damage



Figure 13 – Paramount Ranch interpretive material regarding fire damage



Figure 14 – Paramount Ranch Old Western Town landscape



Figure 15 – Fire damage to canyon outside of Paramount Ranch



Government Furlough

Shortly after the Woolsey Fire, December 22 2018 marked the beginning of the longest United States Government Furlough, or shut down, in history. During the government furlough, National Park Service staff (along with essentially all federal employees) were not allowed to work, and therefore not allowed to reply to emails or other forms of communication.

When the government shut down began, it was unclear how long it would last. I was even more grateful at this point that my research was centered around community organizations, external to the NPS. Thankfully, I was able to continue my research despite the government shut down.

After visiting Los Angeles to conduct in person interviews with the community partners, I planned to travel to Washington D.C. and work with folks in the National Park Service Parks Planning & Special Studies office. During a period of three weeks, I was going to share findings and brainstorm how to incorporate the lessons and ideas from community partners into park management planning procedures and policies. The idea was to loop back the research into actionable implementable findings and to attempt to embed an equity lens into the planning processes.

Unfortunately, by the time my flight was scheduled to leave Los Angeles for Washington D.C., the government was still in a state of furlough. As a result, I was not able to continue this part of my research in person over the month of January 2019.

In addition to modifying my plans to visit NPS staff in Washington D.C., the government shut down also impacted the NPS offices at SAMO. On top of the Woolsey Fire, NPS staff were not allowed to work during the furlough.

Figure 16 – Satwiwa Native American Culture Center Government Closure Sign



While the Woolsey Fire and Government Furlough both resulted in substantial impacts to my thesis research, they both provided me with the opportunity to practice flexibility in the research process. As this research concludes, my communications with NPS staff have since resumed. The NPS staff continue to be supportive of this research and have helped ideate new ways to relay feedback back to the NPS Planners.

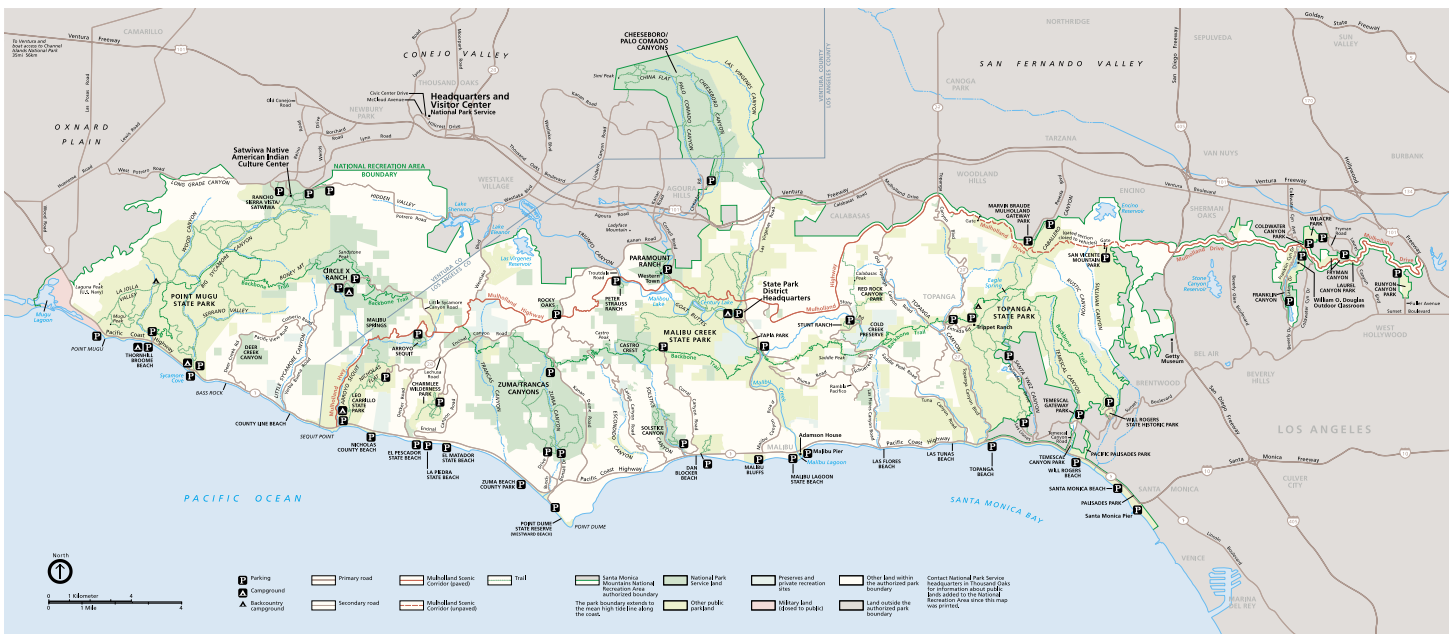
Chapter 3: Case Study – Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

The Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area is the largest urban national park in the United States, totaling 153,075 acres (61,947 ha) (Byrne et al., 2009). Created on November 10th 1978, the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (referred to as SAMO) is one of five urban national parks created under US Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel’s term (Byrne et al., 2009). Hickel’s parks-to-people initiative sought to bring the national park experience to socio-economically disadvantaged and ethno-racially marginalized urban residents (Byrne et al., 2009). The urban national parks were designed with the intention of serving both conservation and recreation benefits, including access to fresh air, solitude and opportunities to engage with nature (Forresta 1984). I chose to focus on Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area as a case study because of their interest in this topic, commitment to improving diversity of visitation, close proximity to a large diverse metropolitan area (Los Angeles), and current ongoing research around this topic with UCLA.

3.1 Geography

The Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area is a unique park in that it contains a wide variety of lands managed and owned by different land management agencies. For example, the NPS land is not contiguous but is rather dispersed throughout the National Recreation Area. In addition, the National Recreation Area includes not only NPS lands but also state parks, preserves and private recreation sites, other public parkland, military land, and other private lands. Because of the multi-level-management and shared boundaries within the National Recreation Area, NPS management cares not only about visitor use on the federal sites alone, but cares about visitor use on open space areas in the greater Los Angeles Area as a whole.

Figure 17 – Map of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area



(NPS, 2005)

3.2 Current visitation

The last published study of park visitation at SAMO is from the summer of 2002 when 912 voluntary surveys were administered to park visitors (Wolch, Jennifer. Byrne, Jason. Kahle, Chris. Zhang, Jin. Ahronowitz, Iris. Joel, Max. Woollard, 2003). The purpose of the study was to obtain trail user information to inform the development of an interagency trail management plan for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (Wolch et al., 2003).

As the tables below show, 72% of respondents were White, 17.3% refused to answer, 5.5% were Asian, 1.6% were Black, 1.3% American Indian or Alaska native, and .5% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (Wolch et al., 2003). In terms of Hispanic origin, 88.2% of respondents were not of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, while 11.8% were of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity (Wolch et al., 2003). UCLA partnered with SAMO in June 2018 to collect more thorough data on park visitation demographics, and a draft report is scheduled to be available later this year. The fact that SAMO decided to pursue this research exemplifies their commitment to improving this mismatch of SAMO visitors and the SAMO-adjacent local community.

Table 2 – UCLA SAMO Survey Data, Race

Qu. 22 Race	
<i>Race (N=912)</i>	<i>%</i>
American Indian or Alaska native	1.3
Asian	5.5
Black or African-American	1.6
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.5
White	72.0
Do not wish to answer	17.3

Table 3 – UCLA SAMO Survey Data, Latino/Hispanic Origin

Qu. 21 Hispanic/Latino	
<i>Response (N=871)</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	11.8
No	88.2

The demographics of SAMO visitors can be compared to the demographics of the city of Los Angeles from the 2000 Census, shown below.

Table 4 – City of Los Angeles 2000 US Census, Race

American Indian or Alaska Native alone	0.8%
Asian alone	10%
Black or African American alone	11.2%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander alone	0.2%
White alone	46.9%
Other race alone	26%

Table 5 – City of Los Angeles 2000 US Census, Hispanic/Latino Origin

Hispanic	46.5%
Non-Hispanic	53.5%

While the percentage of Hispanic or Latino people at SAMO is 11.8%, the percentage of Hispanic or Latino people in Los Angeles is 46.5%. Similarly, looking across all population percentages in Los Angeles, one can see that the percentage of Asian and Black populations are two and seven times larger in the city of Los Angeles respectively, than what is represented in the SAMO visitor demographics. Comparing the SAMO visitation demographics to the Los Angeles demographics clearly shows that there is a mismatch between the rich diversity of the city of Los Angeles and those who typically visit and recreate at SAMO.

3.3 Current Efforts to address Visitation Gap

The Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area is well-known for their innovative mobile visitor center, *La Ranger Troca*, their progressive Youth Employment and Mentoring Program, and their participation in the national Every Kid Outdoors program.

[La Ranger Troca](#)

The mission of *La Ranger Troca* is to “bring the parks to the people of Los Angeles” (National Park Service, 2017). Upon parking at various locations all throughout Los Angeles, Park Rangers facilitate engaging activities for all ages in three categories – Los Angeles Culture and History, Recreation, and Citizen Science” (National Park Service, 2017). *La Ranger Troca* attends a variety of public spaces and events, public schools, and urban parks in the Los Angeles area, and its appearance can also be requested for special events.

Figure 18 – *La Ranger Troca*



(National Park Service, 2017)

SAMO Youth Employment and Mentoring Program

SAMO's Youth Employment and Mentoring Program targets diverse high schoolers and gives them opportunities to explore different ways to support and steward public lands through paid summer employment. Started in 2000, this program not only provides employment but also serves as a stepping stone for diverse high-schoolers into the field of natural resource management and helps get the message across to their families and communities that these lands belong to the community and exist for their enjoyment.

Antonio explains the diversity of types of projects they offer through the SAMO Youth Program and why this is important. At one point they realized,

“We should start giving them broader work experience. That’s when it transitioned into a stronger park program where we started providing them park projects outside of just trail work. Doing interpretive skills and putting on public programs. Mentor them. Provide them with a variety.”

There are many limitations and complications when it comes to hiring new employees within the National Park Service. While improving Human Resources policies is an important step that needs to be taken, it is also quite a big task to address. The SAMO Youth Program is a great way to diversify the staffing of SAMO from an external program, without having to jump through as many unintentionally-complicated Human Resources hoops. And while these summer employment positions do not guarantee a full-time position in a participants' future, studies show that this program not only exposes diverse youth to resources they would have otherwise not had access to, but also fosters a passion for natural resources management which can stay with them throughout time.

Figure 19 – SAMO Youth cohort on a typical work day

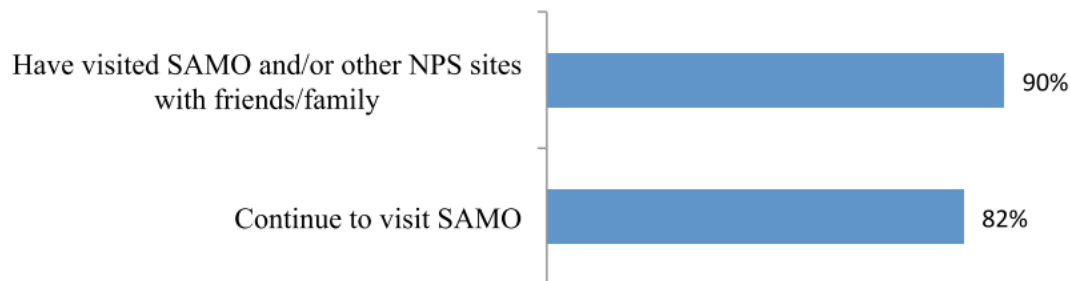


(Wisner-Carlson, 2017)

In 2014, researchers at UC Davis prepared a report titled ‘SAMO Youth Alumni Survey,’ which shows how the experience participating in the SAMO Youth Program has impacted decisions for alumni years after finishing the program. This study shows that 91% of respondents indicated they had or were considering careers in the Park Service and 85% of respondents indicated they were considering a career in environmental management related careers (85%) (Westover, Sullivan, & Rael, 2014). This study also showed that in spite of having attended mostly high needs Los Angeles area schools and being predominantly from families with little exposure to college, 95% of the respondents report attending college after their SAMO Youth experience (Westover et al., 2014).

In terms of exposure to these natural areas prior to the SAMO Youth Program, the UC Davis study showed that 99% of the alumni agreed that by participating in SAMO Youth, they were provided opportunities to engage in outdoor recreation activities they had never or seldom done before (Westover et al., 2014). These types of experiences can have rippling effects into participants’ families and communities. The UC Davis study showed that 82% of participants continue to visit SAMO and 90% have visited either SAMO or other NPS sites with their friends and/or family (Table 6 below) (Westover et al., 2014).

Table 6 – Park visitation post-program (N=78)



[Every Kid Outdoors](#)

Launched in 2015, the Every Kid in the Park (now called Every Kid Outdoors) program encourages children to visit their natural parks and public lands cores (Thomas, 2019). The program provides fourth graders with a free entry park pass for themselves and their families to visit all federally managed public lands, including National Park Service lands, Bureau of Land Management lands, and US Forest Service lands. The program also provides funding to cover transportation costs for children from Title 1 schools, which is integral for these schools in successfully bringing students to federal lands.

The Every Kid Outdoors Act passed in February 2019, authorizing funding for the program to continue for seven years (Thomas, 2019). The logistics of the Every Kid in the Park program do not change with the passing of this Act. Rather, the Act changes the program name to Every Kid Outdoors. The Act also permanently authorized the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is the largest source of federal funding for parks and playgrounds closer to urban cores (Thomas, 2019). Lastly, this 2019 Act also authorized the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, which helps strengthen career pathways for youth and young veterans in the field of natural resource stewardship (Thomas, 2019).

3.4 In-person Observations

Before diving into qualitative interview analysis, in-person observations at the Santa Monica Mountains are first shared to help contextualize the data.

During my visit to the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, I was able to visit five different sites within the park for deeper observation. At these different sites, I observed park boundaries, visitor entrances, trail design, typical park visitors, and park staff/visitor dynamics. With the exception of the first hike at Topanga State Park, every hike was done solo. Two out of the five areas were state park land within the NPS boundary, and the other three areas were federal lands.

Topanga State Park

Eagle Rock and Temescal Peak | 7.4 Miles | December 30, 2018

As one of the most popular state parks within the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, Topanga State Park had a rather full parking lot of cars. Parking at this location cost \$10 within the state park boundary, and some visitors opted to park on the residential street just outside of the park for free and walk into the park on foot. Visitor uses were separated by trail type; for example, dogs were not allowed on certain trails, but allowed on others.

My original plan of arriving in Los Angeles in early January changed when I saw that Black Girls Trekkin' was organizing a group hike at Topanga State Park before the end of 2018. I was lucky enough to be able to hike with this amazingly supportive and encouraging group of women who love to foster community among women of color hiking outdoors. Based in the Los Angeles area, this group hosts monthly hikes, promotes via Instagram, and coordinates via Eventbrite. Free to attend, Black Girls Trekkin (BGT) hikes welcome people of all identities who support the mission of BGT – promoting diversity outdoors.

Figure 20 – Black Girls Trekkin hike at Topanga State Park



Cheeseboro / Palo Comado Canyons

Cheeseboro Ridge-Canyon Trail | 9.5 Miles | January 2, 2019

With its parking lot abutting a residential neighborhood, this section of the park felt more of a local resource for the neighborhood residents than a highly publicized attraction enjoyed by a greater public. There were no orienting signs from the main streets of Aurora Hills (largest neighborhood nearest park entrance), adding to this feeling of the area being a local secret. Inside the park boundaries, NPS signs were sun-faded with the appearance of being aged.

Most visitors on this trail were mountain bikers, most of whom were white males ranging from 20 to 40 years old. Among the 16+ bikers, three people appeared to be of Hispanic origin – one male was wearing technical mountain biking gear, and one male and female were riding cruise bicycles and playing with a drone while resting from their biking time. There were also hikers, most of whom were alone. Two hikers were out walking their dogs, two groups of hikers came in friend pairs, and another two small groups of hikers were families. Overall, the deeper I went into the trail network, the less people I saw. This is pretty typical for most any open space area with trail networks.

Figure 21 – Cheeseboro Canyon



Figure 22 – Cheeseboro Canyon



Point Magu State Park

Ray Miller Trail | 5.5 Miles | January 11, 2019

After driving along the coastline of California up from Los Angeles, I arrived at Point Magu State Park. This park is very close to the ocean, with the coastline beachside close by, separated only by Route One. With a relatively empty parking lot, I anticipated to not see many other hikers on the trail. Due to the large size of this land, Point Magu State Park feels rather isolated from civilization and allows the visitor to experience a remote and wild piece of land.

The geography of this particular trail allows the hiker to travel up and down switchbacks of land that cut through hillsides. With each turn on the trail, the visitor gets to experience a new perspective and view of the Pacific Ocean. Most of the visitors were hikers, with the exception of a couple solo white male mountain bikers. Among the 20+ hikers, I was among the youngest of them. Most hikers were in their 30's-40's, white males and females. There were a couple families on the trail, but most hikers were solo or traveled in a pair. Among the 20+ hikers, four hikers appeared to be of Hispanic origin, and one female hiker identified as black.

Figure 23 – Point Magu State Park



Rancho Sierra Vista / Satwiwa

Satwiwa Loop Trail | 1.5 Miles | January 11, 2019

This piece of federal land is tucked away in a remote area outside of Hidden Valley California. The land is surrounded by agricultural farms on one side and wealthy neighborhoods on the other. Similar to the park boundaries at Cheeseboro / Palo Comado Canyons, residential properties abutted the park boundary.

Many signs helped orient visitors at this site, including information on the park geography and Satwiwa cultural history of the land. All signs were in English, with the exception of a sign emphasizing the importance of hydration in the restroom, which was in English and Spanish.

At the entrance of the park, there is reference to the Satwiwa Native American Indian Natural Area and orientational signage on how to visit this natural area and cultural center.

This area was the first time I saw rangers within the National Recreation Area. These rangers were in big black SUVs in uniform, wearing weapons on their belt. The weapons suggest they were law enforcement rangers, as opposed to educational interpretive rangers.

Visitors to this area included dogwalkers, hikers, and mountain bikers. Most visitors were around 40-60 years old and were white. Some younger and people of color were present at this park as well.

Figure 24 – Satwiwa Native American Indian Cultural Center



Figure 25 – Satwiwa Loop Trail, featuring traditional hut



Paramount Ranch

Paramount Ranch Trail | 1 Mile | January 11, 2019

Paramount Ranch has a rich history and involvement in cinema and the arts in the film industry. Similar to Ranch Sierra Vista/Satwiwa, Paramount Ranch is adjacent to what appears to be a wealthy neighborhood. Inside the park boundary the parking lot is moderately occupied and there is a bus station used for bigger groups of visitors.

Among all of the park areas open post-Woosley fire, Paramount Ranch was the most vividly impacted by the fire. The entire Western Town was closed off as a hazardous burn site. Adjacent to the Western Town, a Church and Outpost were structurally unharmed. Overall this area had a very strong and unpleasant smell, as if plastic and toxic materials went into flame. Visitors at Paramount Ranch were mostly dogwalkers, leisurely hikers, and horseback riders.

Figure 26 – Paramount Ranch Western Town sign



Figure 27 – Paramount Ranch Church



Concluding Remarks on first-hand visitation

For the most part, signs out on the trail are pretty straight forward and therefore rather universal. The moments where I wondered if signs might impact certain populations negatively were whenever historical accounts were shared, which typically occurred close to the parking lots or along the trail before more than one mile is walked from the parking lot.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter provides results from the nine qualitative interviews with community organizations and two qualitative interviews with National Park Service staff. Results are expressed as an empirical narrative synthesizing interview results overall, with direct quotes to add qualitative perspective and weight to the narrative. Prompt questions are woven into this narrative to give the reader better insight into the interview process.

4.1 Community Organization Interviews

First, I will lay out the context of who the participants are being served by the various community organizations' programming. Then I will explore the lived experiences of both the organization leaders and their program participants. The question of who belongs outdoors will also be explored as a way of measuring these groups' perception of diversity in outdoors communities. Lastly, successes and challenges will be explored in addition to recommendations for improving the National Park visitor experience.

Participants Served

Among the nine community organizations interviewed, participants served come from a wide range of ages, ethnic origins, socioeconomic status, and geography. Among the nine community organizations, a total of about 5,830 participants were served in an average year. This number includes many individuals who participated in one program and returned for additional programs, therefore includes repeating participants. As a reminder, the community organizations by focus are listed here.

Table 1 – Community Organizations by Focus

Focus	Organization
Outdoor Recreation	Outward Bound Adventures
	Latino Outdoors
	Black Girls Trekin
	Nature for All (Sierra Club)
Arts/Music-Oriented	CalArts Community Arts Partnership (CAP)
	Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA)
Law/Advocacy	The City Project
	Nature for All (Sierra Club)
School	Esperanza Elementary
	San Pascual STEAM Magnet Elementary

[“What population is being targeted?”](#)

The participant ages represented among these community organizations range from babies to adults, with most participants sitting in the elementary through high school or 20s-30s age range. Race and ethnicity of participants were largely black and Hispanic, with a large percentage of participants coming from families of immigrants. Los Angeles is a common point of entry for immigrants, especially from Central America. Common countries of origin in these organization

populations include Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and El Salvador. In addition to serving black and Hispanic populations, some of these organizations also serve Asian and white populations along with Native American populations as well.

Given the diversity of each community organization mission statements, it makes sense that the populations served represent a similar diversity. The community organizations fall into two main groups: those serving residents in highly dense urban cores who are likely living at or below poverty, and those serving residents with shared ethnic or racial characteristics regardless of socioeconomic status.

In Group A, participants often come from areas with high crime, gang activity, foster care families, high contact with police, and low family incomes. This community organization group includes Outward Bound Adventures, Heart of Los Angeles, Sierra Club Nature for All, Cal Arts Community Partnership, and Esperanza Elementary school. Families living in these neighborhoods often face tensions of gentrification in their lifetime. This group focuses on communities of color with the worst access to the outdoors, who might also have the worst health issues. Providing transportation and access to the outdoors is essential for this population because as Nara Hernandez (HOLA) explains,

“Most kids in poverty don’t leave a 3 mi radius”

In Group B, participants are targeted through their mutual interest in promoting diversity outdoors, regardless of socioeconomic status. This community organization group includes Latino Outdoors and Black Girls Trekkin. As their names suggest, these groups work to promote and empower Latino people and Black women respectively in outdoor settings, predominantly through hiking. Since their target audiences share ethnic and/or racial similarities, they tend to also include a wide range of socioeconomic statuses. It’s also important to note that while these groups promote specific racial/ethnic groups outdoors, they are open and welcoming to anyone of any race and/or ethnicity, as long as they support their organization’s mission.

Two groups interviewed did not fit into these groupings, the City Nature Project & San Pascual STEAM Magnet School. I’ll refer to these organizations as Group C. While the City Nature Project promotes equitable enjoyment of natural spaces through an environmental lens, it focuses its energy on the policy, law, and advocacy branches of environmental justice rather than the environmental education and/or recreational component of promoting diversity outdoors. The City Nature Project works to protect and create open spaces. In collaboration with other environmental organizations, these spaces can be enjoyed for programming and by the greater public. San Pascual STEAM Magnet Elementary School did not fit into either group, but for different reasons. As a magnet school, the elementary students come from a wide geographic area and include a wide spectrum of socioeconomic statuses, though mostly tending towards lower socioeconomic status. The student population at San Pascual is 90% Latino.

The following table summarizes the community organizations by their predominant group type based on who their programming serves.

Table 7 – Community Organizations by Group Type

Group Type	Organization
Group A	Outward Bound Adventures
	Heart of Los Angeles
	Sierra Club Nature for All
	Cal Arts Community Partnership
	Esperanza Elementary school
Group B	Latino Outdoors
	Black Girls Trekin
Group C	City Nature Project
	San Pascual STEAM Magnet school

[“Do you feel like the group being targeted represents the LA population?
Do you feel like the group who participates represents the LA population?”](#)

In the geographic context of Los Angeles, participants from the community organizations collectively come from neighborhoods far and close to downtown Los Angeles. Among the different organizations, participants served come from Palm Springs, Beverley Hills, San Bernadino, West LA, East LA, Downtown LA, Pasadena, Westlake, and MacArthur Park.

Participants from most of these organizations represent people from more predominately Latino and/or black communities due to either the nature of the organization’s mission and/or due to the geographical location of the organization. While most of these groups typically serve people of color and/or lower economic status, they also recognize the value in serving white participants and/or people from higher economic status. Charles Thomas from Outward Bound explains,

“A lot of people think rich white kids aren’t at risk. They’re at risk of being too ignorant, have too many resources, and they don’t go outdoors either. We want them to meet how the other half lives, and we want our kids to see how they interact. It’s important to include white too, so people of color see commonality.”

Since the organizations from Group A specifically design programming for populations that are underserved and overlooked, these populations are generally lower income and more racially and ethnically diverse than the Los Angeles population. All groups that promote a certain race and/or ethnicity naturally present a higher percentage of that race and/or ethnicity than the overall Los Angeles population. For context, here is a complete breakdown of the demographics of Los Angeles from the 2000 Census.

Table 8 – City of Los Angeles 2000 US Census, Demographics

Subject	California		Los Angeles city, California	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total population	33,871,648	100.0	3,694,820	100.0
RACE				
One race	32,264,002	95.3	3,503,532	94.8
White	20,170,059	59.5	1,734,036	46.9
Black or African American	2,263,882	6.7	415,195	11.2
American Indian and Alaska Native	333,346	1.0	29,412	0.8
Asian	3,697,513	10.9	369,254	10.0
Asian Indian	314,819	0.9	24,739	0.7
Chinese	980,642	2.9	63,075	1.7
Filipino	918,678	2.7	101,062	2.7
Japanese	288,854	0.9	36,992	1.0
Korean	345,882	1.0	91,595	2.5
Vietnamese	447,032	1.3	19,747	0.5
Other Asian [1]	401,606	1.2	32,044	0.9
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	116,961	0.3	5,915	0.2
Native Hawaiian	20,571	0.1	1,379	0.0
Guamanian or Chamorro	20,918	0.1	955	0.0
Samoan	37,498	0.1	1,641	0.0
Other Pacific Islander [2]	37,974	0.1	1,940	0.1
Some other race	5,682,241	16.8	949,720	25.7
Two or more races	1,607,646	4.7	191,288	5.2
Race alone or in combination with one or more other races [3]				
White	21,490,973	63.4	1,891,358	51.2
Black or African American	2,513,041	7.4	444,635	12.0
American Indian and Alaska Native	627,562	1.9	53,092	1.4
Asian	4,155,685	12.3	407,444	11.0
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	221,458	0.7	13,144	0.4
Some other race	6,575,625	19.4	1,086,167	29.4
HISPANIC OR LATINO AND RACE				
Total population	33,871,648	100.0	3,694,820	100.0
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	10,966,556	32.4	1,719,073	46.5
Mexican	8,455,926	25.0	1,091,686	29.5
Puerto Rican	140,570	0.4	13,427	0.4
Cuban	72,286	0.2	12,431	0.3
Other Hispanic or Latino	2,297,774	6.8	601,529	16.3
Not Hispanic or Latino	22,905,092	67.6	1,975,747	53.5
White alone	15,816,790	46.7	1,099,188	29.7

[“Are participants typically first-time visitors to SAMO?”](#)

Most community groups reported that their program participants were at least 30% to at most 80% first-time visitors to the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Many of these programs provide opportunities for students and/or youth of lower socioeconomic status unique opportunities to travel to and recreate at SAMO. Without these programs, participants might not get these types of opportunities to travel to SAMO from their families alone.

Lived Experiences

This research allows one to better understand the lived experiences of people working from the community level to promote and support racial and ethnic diversity outdoors.

[“What kinds of values might you say drive this work and why do you think this work is important? On an organizational and personal level?”](#)

The overarching key value that drives this work among interviewees is promoting diversity outdoors and inspiring long term relationships with our natural world. The key value driving the work for Group A and C is to provide opportunities to populations who wouldn't normally have opportunities to recreate outdoors and empowering them to return on their own. These programs are not only about bringing and/or supporting programs for diverse populations once; rather they are intended to empower people to return to the trails on their own with their family or friends to continue developing and deepening their relationship with the outdoors. These programs seek to make the outdoors feel easily accessible.

The key value driving the work for Group B is empowering participants to feel comfortable and confident hiking outdoors within their own community organization and on their own. By fostering a strong community of people who share a passion for hiking and the outdoors, Group B organizations strive to build friendships among participants who can then feel confident enough to plan and execute their own hiking trips with people from this community and beyond.

Values supporting this work overall:

- *“Equal justice”*
- *“Democracy and access to all”*
- *“Fun”*
- *“Equality”*
- *“Human development”*
- *“Conservation and climate justice”*
- *“Cha cha values (culture history & art)”*
- *“Getting young people outdoors”*
- *“Increasing the value for nature in urban environments”*
- *“Responding to the nature deficiency in urban populations”*

A few organizations (Latino Outdoors, Sierra Club, Outward Bound Adventures, & Black Girls Trekkin) resonated on the idea that there was a lack of education around knowing that there are hiking trails near the city, how one might go about pursuing hiking, and what type of gear or equipment might be necessary in order to hike in different areas. By providing educational programming (formal or informal), planning hikes, and advertising them to their networks, these organizations work towards empowering their communities to recreate outdoors on their own or with family and friends.

While Latino Outdoors and Black Girls Trekkin draw audiences who might already be exposed to hiking, or have at least a mild interest in exploring it, Outward Bound Adventures draws audiences who might not ever think of going outdoors for fun, enjoyment, and relaxation.

Charles Thomas from OBA explains that for their target audience of underserved overlooked and avoided populations,

“We know that these people normally would not have the opportunity to get out there and do it on their own. They need someone to show them how to do it.”

And in some instances, these organizations provide unique opportunities for people to spend time outdoors in a safe way. Sharon Nakata, a Special Education Teacher at San Pascual STEAM Magnet Elementary explained the importance that schools play in providing opportunities for students to engage with the outdoors due to safety concerns of parents:

“Times have changed. Parents are not as comfortable letting their kids go play outside due to safety issues. Schools can provide this opportunity to play outdoors safely.”

Through this conversation, numerous reasons came up to explain the benefit of spending time outdoors. These are among the most potent reasons that support the work being done by these organizations:

- *“It’s good for kids to be outside physically and emotionally”*
- *“Being outside broadens kids’ understanding of the way the world works”*
- *“Kids breath more when outside”*
- [It’s important to] *“bring them [kids] to a place where they can experience therapeutic value of time spent in open spaces and wild places”*
- *“Important for people to have connection in both local open space and to bigger wilderness”*
- *“We want students to take part in the conservation movement; it’s important for them to understand the big picture of the natural world to be able to take part in conservation”*
- *“Nature is a great way to engage students in science”*
- *“Behaviorally-challenged students turn around with nature”*
- [Nature exposure leads to] *“improvements in behavior, academic skills, and focus”*
- *“Nature upgrades social and academic skills”*
- *“Kids who play in parks are less likely to join gangs and hurt people or get killed”*

One interviewee, Davy Sumner, former Visiting Faculty at the CalArts Experimental Sound Practices within Community Arts Partnership also brought up the importance of bringing students to National Parks specifically, emphasizing,

“It’s [National Parks] a part of our American heritage”

Davy Sumner from CalArts and Nora Hernandez, the Visual Director from HOLA (Heart of Los Angeles), commented specifically on the importance of combining art with nature:

- *“It’s important to get students outside of the studio”*
- *“Making art in parks can be very unifying for students coming from different types of living and school situations”*
- *“Making art outdoors is a vehicle for collaboration”*

Similarly, elementary school teachers had their own unique perspective on the value of exposing kids to nature. Sharon Nakata explained that at the beginning of the school year, kids did not have a lot of empathy or respect for nature. After months of engaging students with nature through both activities on the school campus and ranger-led programming at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, teachers noticed students' empathy and respect for nature drastically increase. Sharon attributes this to the fact that:

“Nature helps children to be calm”

Principle Brad Rumble at Esperanza Elementary agrees in the value of nature immersion during the school day. Principle Rumble leads spontaneous birdwatching during school recess, helping students connect to their local urban environment repeatedly throughout the school day.

Figure 28 – Students bird watching with Principle Brad Rumble



(January 10th 2019)

[“Can you tell me what it’s like being in this role?”](#)

The community leaders with whom I spoke communicated an overall positive experience working in this field. While some have found the process of advocating for funding opportunities to be challenging, the smiles on the faces of the people they serve make it all worth it. As Christian La Mont, Volunteer Los Angeles Program Coordinator for Latino Outdoors explained, it is quite easy to,

“Get fueled by others’ passion.”

In addition to being fueled by others’ passion, other leaders are fueled by their successes. Roberto Morales shared that he feels proud of leading a coalition around the designation of the San Gabriel National Monument, a high level of federal land protection and acknowledgement of a valuable resource.

Some of the biggest challenges that came up about being in this role was pursuing funding opportunities. Charles Thomas, Executive Director of Outward Bound Adventures, comments on the difficulty of communicating funding needs to people who don’t value this kind of work:

“I consider it a privilege to do the work that I do. What makes it so difficult is that people don’t understand how necessary the work is and just getting the funding. Our work is just as equally necessary as emergency room surgeons’ work since our work can keep someone out of the emergency room. It’s hell getting the money to do the work.”

Charles continued to explain the transformation of high school kids from Day 2 to Day 17 of a backcountry redwoods trip. The positive transformation (i.e. *“they don’t look like the same kids”*) fuels the work he does.

Michelle Race, co-founder of Black Girls Trekkinn explains how it feels pursuing something she cares about,

“I feel good doing something that matters to me.”

Michelle explains that the fast pace at which Black Girls Trekkinn has grown and gained traction in the community is very exciting. The fast growth proves the need for this community to exist and fosters her passion to continue working to build and strengthen community. As the community grows, Michelle explains,

“It’s all about building trust.”

“How would you describe the experience felt by the program participants?”

Upon being asked this question, multiple respondents replied simply,

“Smiles.”

Program leaders can tell that participants are having positive experiences when participants’ thirst brings them to ask when the next trip will occur.

The organizations that bring people together through organized hikes and programs shared that participants appreciate the sense of community built from the planned hikes. Luis Villa, Executive Director of Latino Outdoors explains the power of building community, especially among folks who experience a bilingual barrier,

“[hiking] either opens the door for more of these experiences, or reinforces their passion, or allows them to meet others who want to go outdoors together.”

In the classroom context, teachers expressed that going outdoors is a great break to the normal routine of the classroom and helps build students’ sense of confidence. Coming back from a break outdoors, teachers explain that their students become rejuvenated. Sharon Nakata, Special Education Teacher and Nature Club Co-Leader at San Pascual STEAM Magnet School expressed,

“Students have this thirst. Doesn’t take much to engage them. The children bring a special curiosity to it.”

She goes on to explain that the experiences felt by students/participants has a rippling effect, since,

“Students are ambassadors to teachers and adults.”

Nara Hernandez shares a complementary perspective, emphasizing the benefit of exposing low income youth to nature. Nara explains how the...

“The trauma of living in poverty [is] healed by being in nature”

Charles Thomas of Outward Bound elaborates on the power of exposing youth to something they wouldn’t otherwise have the opportunity to explore. Charles explains,

“It is transformational. Some kids say they like the magic we bring. Some kids say they found church in the mountains. Most of the kids say that it was something they never thought even existed. So really what we’re doing is changing the way people see the world and their place in it. Most kids would say we taught them about options and alternatives that they never even knew existed fundamentally.”

[“Do you think current programming efforts are successful in affecting long-term relationships between participants and open-space areas/natural environments?”](#)

[What percent of participants return for more programming?”](#)

These organizations understand the value of having programs where a participant can enter at one age and continue to grow and evolve with an organization over many years. Multi-year repetitive exposure forms habits that can be life changing.

Heart of Los Angeles, CalArts Community Arts Partnership, Outward Bound Adventures, and Latino Outdoors are particularly successful at supporting long-term relationships within their own organizations, increasing their chance of leaving a lasting impact on their participants. At Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA), a student can enter during elementary school and can stay involved and supported by HOLA programming through college. Similarly, at CalArts Community Arts Partnership (CAP) most kids enter while in elementary or middle school and stay for a few years. Lastly, Outward Bound Adventures (OBA) programs are designed for longitudinal engagement, with a continuing thread in them. The average resident in the OBA program is three years.

Nara Hernandez speaks to the power of these outings, even at a local park such as Griffith Park,
“These opportunities stick with them.”

Davy Sumner speaks to the power of bringing music programs outdoors, saying that it deepens the experience and value of the program. He explains,

“Work [musical/artistic work] inspired by nature has deeper layers of retention.”

Charles speaks to the importance of longitudinal program design, explaining,

“Really what we’re trying to do is to create a generation of engaged productive citizens that become users and protectors and stewards of the outdoors. The OBA programs are designed specifically for longitudinal engagement. All of our programs have a continuing thread to them. At the end of the program, we train them to become our staff.”

OBA trains participants to become staff in efforts to increase job skills and opportunities for its participants in the conservation and recreation industry. This is achieved through its program named the Diverse Outdoor Leaders Institute. Latino Outdoors also sees the long-term value of having participants continue on to careers in conservation. When facebook followers evolve to hike participants to hike leaders to then being employed by the National Parks Conservation Association and Sierra Club’s Nature for All, Latino Outdoors sees this as successfully building long-term relationships between participants and nature.

Who Belongs outdoors?

I was curious to hear what these community organization leaders thought about who belongs outdoors. By asking questions about the current “face” of hiking, what it takes to fit-in in outdoor spaces, park staffing demographics, and the impacts of media, I sought to better understand what my interviewees thought about who belongs outdoors.

“How would you describe the current ‘face’ of hiking, camping, outdoors activities?”

The current “face” of hiking was described by the community organization leaders to mean a wide range of things. Most agreed that the face is currently changing, especially in the Los Angeles area. The movement to diversify the outdoors seems to also be a relatively new one as well. Luis from Latino Outdoors says,

“[the movement is] Relatively new... [and there is a] very conscious and proactive effort to make outdoors more equitable...progress is inch by inch”

The terms, “*disproportionately white and wealthy*” (Robert Garcia, The City Project) and “*too homogenous*” (Charles Thomas, Outward Bound Adventures) came up a few times when describing the current face of hiking. While the image of an “REI-yoga-pants wearing fitness woman walking her dog” came up for some, Michelle Race from Black Girls Trekin expressed that a very diverse face came to mind because of the world she is immersed in. Michelle says that because of her work with Black Girls Trekin, she is,

“Unphased on a personal level because I’m so used to it [seeing diversity outdoors]”

The areas that folks pointed out as having more diverse representation on the trails of Los Angeles are those with easy access. Charles Thomas explained that,

“If you go out on the trail by my house, you’ll see almost all people of color. But it’s access. It’s really easy to access, drive up the street and park at the trail. But in the wilderness, I’ll be out there 10-14 days and I won’t see another person of color.”

As far as youth are concerned, those working with youth said that the kids are not aware of any sort of “face” of hiking, and are therefore likely not negatively impacted by marketing or media choices of retailers and parks.

[“What do you think has had / would have the biggest impact on reshaping this?”](#)

Community partners expressed the power of reclaiming space and redefining what it means to be outdoors have the biggest impact on reshaping the predominately white face seen in outdoors communities.

The first step of reclaiming space is having a seat at the table. By working in community organizations that promote diversity outdoors, it can sometimes give these leaders special opportunities to speak on panels and give lectures on their work. These sorts of invitations to speak at outdoors conferences can help propel progress. Being invited to diversity outdoors panels is important progress for an inclusive outdoors community.

Charles Thomas believes that smaller grassroots organizations are predominately responsible for doing the heavy lifting of diversifying the face of the outdoors through educational programs. Programs like led hikes, wilderness expeditions, environmental science camps and more not only give participants the exposure to new hobbies like hiking, but also give them the education and tools to be able to go on a hike on their own. Charles also mentioned the power of the federal agencies’ *“grand diversity initiatives,”* but thought they were working under their potential due to bureaucratic red tapes and other sorts of complications.

Another important way of reclaiming space is through social media. Multiple people pointed out the role that social media has played in helping diversify society’s conception of who belongs outdoors. For example, Black Girls Trekin was founded in 2017 and already has over 6,000 followers on Instagram. BGT has strong partnerships with similar platforms such as We Color Outdoors, blackonwhitewater, blackwomenhiketoo, curlsinthewoods, black_outside, young.black.outdoors, colortheoutdoors, and more. Through supporting each other’s work, organizations on social media are able to spread their message to audiences beyond their own following and continue to grow with time. Luis Villa, Executive Director of Latino Outdoors, which has over 16,000 followers on Instagram, shared the power of having many followers to put pressure on companies. Latino Outdoors pushes their message among private companies through,

“Asking for sponsorship but also calling out posts that are not being proactive in diversity initiatives”

In addition to educational programming and social media, the tool of the law was also noted in having impact to diversify the face of the outdoors. Robert Garcia from the City Project pointed out that communities need to implement,

“enforcement of civil rights laws.”

Robert encourages the use of the law because he believes that the

“combined strategies of organizing and law are more effective than MLK’s ‘harmless justice’.”

Robert believes that the movement to diversify the outdoors should have equal importance and legal footing to the #metoo movement, but that this type of movement requires people to,

“Wake up and realize they’re [people of color] entitled to so much more. There are parallel laws to protect people of color and access to parks, but few people of color articulate their rights in legal terms.”

As a result, Robert explains that communities often settle for less than what they’re entitled to.

While the face of the outdoors diversifying has many benefits, one partner also pointed out the potential cons to diversifying outdoor spaces when there is a lack of education around how to respectfully recreate outdoors. Nara Hernandez from HOLA spoke on the importance of emphasizing “Leave No Trace” philosophy when encouraging groups of people to recreate outdoors, especially when hiking is a new concept to them. Nara explains that more education needs to occur, and that the issue is twofold,

“LNT is not being upheld, but also stereotypes are being reinforced. [diverse groups littering] creates negative associations, or creates a standard. People are more likely to leave trash if there’s already trash there.”

She finishes her thought by saying that,

“There is an education gap: first how to access the resources, and knowing what to do when accessing.”

It should be noted that while the partners believe progress has been made over the last 5-10 years, it is still challenging to quantify because visitation demographics are not collected frequently nor thoroughly enough to capture the power of this movement. While progress has been made, there is still more work to be done. As Latino Outdoors says, we

“Can’t assume the work is done.”

[“Do you think the participants feel like it is important to have the ‘right kinds of clothes’ to fit in at SAMO or similar outdoors spaces?”](#)

Among youth populations, kids didn’t seem to know what REI and other popular outdoors brands are. Since teachers typically tell them what to wear, having the right kinds of clothes does not prove to be a barrier for kids enjoying the outdoors. Most school settings also have kids from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, so kids usually don’t have the opportunity to compare themselves and their clothing to fancier outdoors clothing with high price points. Teachers said that this type of social pressure would likely only kick in once the kids were of college age, and were exposed to people from different lifestyles and backgrounds.

Having the right kinds of clothing seems to be mostly related to educated preparation. Many groups emphasized the importance of giving participants a list of items they should bring on any hike, including comfortable walking shoes, snacks, and water. As long as folks are wearing closed toed shoes, they didn’t care how it was achieved. Partners emphasized how important it is to communicate that expensive fancy boots are not necessary in order to enjoy a hike. This type of education is just as important as sharing information on where a fun trailhead is. Davy Sumner from Cal Arts CAP explains,

“You don’t need fancy stuff from REI to enjoy a hike.”

Charles Thomas pointed out that when working with his urban youth participants, they don’t care about what some REI guy looks like because they’re likely not exposed to that marketing. OBA manages the potential barrier of clothing by providing boots, socks, pants, jackets, upper layers, hats, and gloves. But Charles explains that before they provided all gear,

“Before we supplied of this stuff, it didn’t matter that much to them as long as they were comfortable. Like you tell them, ‘don’t wear jeans’ if we’re going up in high altitude because cotton gets wet and doesn’t stay warm. They don’t care, they’d rather wear jeans. We’re dealing with urban kids. Their style is urban. They don’t care about what some REI guy looks like.”

[“Do you think it is important for participants to see people from similar backgrounds working as park staff? Why/why not?”](#)

Community partners overwhelmingly agreed on the importance of having park staff that are similar backgrounds to their visitors. These are among the reasons that were called out:

“It’s powerful to have a role model that you can identify with, and having a cultural element they can identify with” – Davy Sumner, CalArts Community Arts Partnership

“Diversifying the workforce with people who look/think/talk like them, tell stories that are personally relevant to them.” – Robert Garcia, The City Project

“Yes, it’s important for kids to meet people looking like them. SAMO has rangers from the whole rainbow.” – Sharon Nakata, San Pascual Elementary

“Absolutely. No question about it. It is important because with anybody, when you see somebody who looks like you or is part of your culture, it really allows you (especially as a young person) to believe that you can achieve the same thing. It’s not any more complicated than that. It allows you to dream and aspire to be in one of those roles.”

– Luis Villa, Latino Outdoors

“We recognize the need to diversify the environmental and conservation movement. We want to be one of the disrupters of that pipeline that traditionally is maintained by white males. We have a training institute that just trains urban people of color to become our staff. We send them out to the agencies, to create a pipeline. After they become trained by us, we send them out to SAMO, to Sierra Club, etc. Our DOLI instructors have gone everywhere, they’ve gone out to work for REI, Patagonia everywhere. OBA was created to make sure urban people of color can get into the environmental conservation field and outdoor retail sector.” – Charles Thomas, OBA

Multiple partners agreed that when there is cultural impact and relevance in education, people are more likely to be engaged. Lastly, Charles Thomas shares a personal anecdote on his own experience emerging in the environmental conservation field as a Black-Japanese man.

“I remember going to Big Sur in the 70s, and there were no people of color back then, it was all white males. Back then I had a big afro. I remember combing my hair and all the white guys lining up by me, like ‘what is he doing’? One guy asked, ‘can I touch your hair?’ I called my boss and said, ‘I need money to get on the bus and come home – these white people are crazy, they want to touch my hair!’ She said, ‘they just never seen anybody with hair like you. Let them touch your hair, give them an education.’ Ever since that day I’ve said, ‘it’s not ok that we can go into outdoor spaces and not see anyone we can relate to and anyone who can relate to us.’”

“Do you think participants are impacted by the media and marketing choices of SAMO and other NPS parks, in terms of who they show in printed/digital material? Where do you think this type of representation would have the biggest impact?”

A couple of community partners said that this wasn't terribly impactful to the communities they worked with either because their participants were likely too young to notice, or were not directly engaged with NPS materials. Alternative map sources like Alltrails and other trail mapping sites were used for navigating and learning about local hiking options, as opposed to NPS materials.

In contrast, the majority of community partners said that their participants are definitely impacted by NPS and SAMO media and marketing materials. Luis Villa elaborates,

“Yes. That applies to anything really. If marketing for NPS also includes diversity – of course its appeal will be more wide ranging. Representation matters.”

When asked about where these materials would have the biggest impact, the community partners had many important suggestions. Community partners recommended promoting NPS through schools, at local bus stops, in the local communities, and among groups like their own that have strong connections and trust built into their existing networks. Charles Thomas explains,

“I think what it's gonna take is getting into the schools, into the markets, and talking to people to understand what the National Parks are, and what can be done there, why it exists. Most people don't understand that. I did a survey with African American high school kids, they didn't even know what a national park was. There's an educational piece here. And it must be done at a very elementary level”

Luis Villa and Christian La Mont from Latino Outdoors also recommended tabling at community events and fairs with face-to-face communication. Again, representation was brought up in the context of outreach, and they said how important it is for the folks doing outreach to speak your language and look like you and your family so you can relate to them and be able to picture yourself in that role in the future. And while bilingual signage is important, if the direct translation has no cultural or linguistic relevance to the intended audience, then the translation does not achieve its goal, according to Robert Garcia from the City Project.

“Do you think participants are impacted by external societal marketing for brands that are outdoors-oriented, like patagonia, northface, rei, etc? Do you think that the high price points might make hiking feel inaccessible to people with tighter budgets? Do you think partnerships with brands like adidas, nike, vans, converse, etc could help redefine the face of the outdoors?”

While acknowledging that again not all people of color experience financial insecurities, but that these two can sometimes overlap, the responses to this question varied greatly among the various communities being targeted and served among the different organizations.

Outdoors-oriented marketing did not strike as having an impact (positive or negative) among the experimental music community (from CalArts) nor among children (HOLA, Esperanza Elementary, San Pascual STEAM Magnet School). In contrast, the Sierra Club, Latino Outdoors, Outward Bound Adventures, Black Girls Trekin, and the City Project affirmed that the marketing of these sorts of companies likely impacts folks’ decision to participate in the outdoors community.

In the outdoors recreation industry, not all brands are created equally. Partners were in general agreement about certain companies doing a good job diversifying their marketing materials, such as REI. Latino Outdoors said that REI is being proactive about their image, and actually invites Latino Outdoors to REI casting calls in efforts to diversify the image that they portray in the media. Similarly, partners agreed that Patagonia is aware of the need to promote diversity outdoors and is working on improving their image to be more diverse.

Latino Outdoors sees partnerships with these bigger types of companies as opportunities. For example, partnerships with the big outdoor recreation companies can lead to funding to support the nonprofit itself. Like any sort of financial agreement though, Latino Outdoors acknowledges the risk of being funded by a large company. Luis Villa explains,

“Latino Outdoors doesn’t want to be salesperson [of these big brand companies]. Because then it would be counterproductive with making the outdoors accessible to all.”

Outward Bound Adventures similarly addresses the high price points by forming partnerships and providing high-quality gear for its participants through various means. Charles Thomas explains,

“We have a partnership with REI, adidas, arcteryx, and Patagonia. So that’s sort of putting the word out for this gear. But it’s not new stuff, like REI gives us a small check to buy their gear. Patagonia gives us their puppies – returned items that’s in really good shape. Adidas and arxteryx understands this issue and is reaching out to us to get our kids wearing this stuff. If you go to the outdoor retailer conference, you’ll see they’re really trying to reach out to these communities.”

The Sierra Club Nature for All coalition approaches the topic of gear by encouraging participants to go purchase gear from stores that have lower price points, such as Big Five, or a local Army General store. This proves to be successful in making hiking more accessible to a wider socioeconomic pool of people.

It's important to remember that outdoor recreation companies are at the end of the day companies. Folks pointed out that like any business model, recreation companies say that you need certain types of gear in order to do certain types of activities. While this may be true in terms of safety concerns for certain types of recreation like kayaking or rock climbing, the amount of gear needed for hiking is arguably the lowest amount of gear among any outdoor sport. Needing less gear can help make a sport more accessible to a greater audience. While some folks brought up that these larger companies are in a good position to donate to low-income populations and to practice a good will of society, Robert Garcia from the City Project brought up that the typical outdoor brand,

“wants to sell outdoor products. Addressing civil rights issues does not sell equipment.”

Charles Thomas shares a similar sentiment, explaining the marketing trends among these big companies:

“If you look at the majority of marketing, the majority is geared towards those who are buying the clothes. They’re breaking into the upper end of the communities. Whereas I tend to serve the lower end of the communities. They don’t care if they don’t have a Northface jacket because they don’t know what that is.”

Community partners gave a few different reasons for why it might be a good idea for companies like adidas, bike, vans, converse, and others to step into the light of diversifying the face of the outdoors. Reasons included

- [these brands have a] *“bigger broadcast of getting people outside; Would be interesting... Adidas does have boots. Having the price of goods to be lower would be most helpful.”* – Roberto Morales, Sierra Club
- *“Those brands have big influence on brands and work places. Vans has a national park edition shoe”* – Davy Sumner, CalArts Community Arts Partnership
- *“The outdoors feels so niche. [These partnerships] Could help it feel less niche.”* – Michelle Race, Black Girls Trekkin

Lastly, Nara Hernandez from HOLA agrees that partnerships with companies like Vans and other skateboard brands might be impactful, and recognizes that Nike targets people of color in their marketing. She continues to explain that HOLA has a partnership with Nike, but that this partnership is focused on athletics like basketball and running. These types of activities are described as,

“More urban activities that are accessible”

This idea of urban activities and accessibility brings up an important distinction between active and passive recreation. Robert Garcia from the City Project explains that active recreation includes things like basketball and soccer, while hiking is considered a type of passive recreation. He attributes the distinction between the two types of recreation to have been sparked by the creation of Baldwin Hills Park. At this time, Robert explains,

“State parks did not want active recreation happening. Rangers enforce law, they don’t carry clipboards and whistles and referees.”

Robert’s response to this decision was to outline civil rights and policy arguments for soccer and other active recreation to be allowed in parks, by tracking the history of soccer among different ethnic groups. The City Project aimed to show that soccer has been around and needs to continue being around. They received letters of support for parks, as active parks,

“give them places to play, wilderness areas are not enough.”

This distinction between active and passive recreation is important to acknowledge in terms of where these types of products are sold. For example, most would consider Nike to sell products for active recreation. Nike is also well known for attracting a wide audience of diverse urban people. On the other hand, finding a soccer ball or basketball at REI might be challenging because selling those types of sports products is not their main focus.

While a partnership between Nike and NPS sounds appealing to help redefine the face of the outdoors, hiking is not as predominant of a focus at Nike when compared to other hiking brands like REI and Patagonia, among others. Switching up the partnerships with companies who have more urban and diverse customer bases won’t necessarily achieve the goal of diversifying the outdoors marketing if the type of recreation is a mismatch with their bottom line.

I like to think of the difference between active and passive recreation to be similar to that of city parks and wilderness areas. Neither one is more important, but they have a unique relationship as they can inspire groups of people to broaden their horizons into new recreational territories. Robert Garcia emphasizes the importance of both for achieving holistic health,

“Camping for one week isn’t going to change obesity issues. Active and passive recreation are both necessary for providing opportunities for holistic recreation.”

Successes and Challenges

As each organization has their own unique culture and mission, it's only natural that they would define success for their programs in equally unique ways. Many of the community organizations have experienced success in programs with the National Park Service at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. In this section, I describe how various organizations define success for programs and what factors were essential in order for successful programming to be attained. This section also gives insight into the challenges faced by these community partners that can get in the way of them achieving their goals of promoting diversity outdoors.

"What defines success? How do you know when the programming has reached it?"

Multiple organizations spoke to the power of building community and how nature can help foster this sense of community. Black Girls Trekkinn defines success as having members of the community plan their own hikes and find new friends to go on adventures with. Similarly, the Nature for All Coalition of Sierra Club defines success as youth advocating for their families to go outside and encouraging others to enjoy the outdoors. Davy Sumner from the CalArts Community Arts Partnership elaborates on this value for community,

"Overarching goal of program is a music concert. But this is a secondary goal. We emphasize working as a collective, having tons of people with different backgrounds and building a sense of community. Establish meaningful relationships with each other. [And make sure people understand that parks are] Within their access to be able to go."

A repeating theme was the idea of empowerment. Giving the participants the tools to enjoy the outdoors, and then take leadership in planning their own hikes with the community. Latino Outdoors elaborates,

*"Empowering people to replicate experiences outdoors, without Latino Outdoors leaders.
Empowering people with knowledge about the open spaces available.
Empowering the volunteers to broaden horizons in outdoors... continue to build leadership. Smile = enjoyment.
Empowering ambassadors/volunteers to lead their own hikes.
When an individual comes back with a plan of what to do for the next hike."*

On one side of the spectrum, a baseline of respect and empathy for nature defines one level of success for Sharon Nakata from San Pascual Elementary,

"If you can build empathy with nature and animals, they [kids] learn empathy and hopefully it transfers to their relationships."

Nara Hernandez from HOLA describes success as having many increments, starting with a successful trip to a college track based on the environment:

“Getting 40-60 kids out into the mountains for 2 hours. Coming home to share the story. Next level of success: kids seeking out outside opportunities by themselves. Next level: going to college in area with natural landscape. Having that comfort outdoors.”

Success was defined by many groups as having a participant eventually pursue a career in the conservation field:

“When we’ve taken a kid who knows nothing about the natural world, and the kid becomes an advocate for the natural world. They were intentional non-users and they became intentional users of the outdoors. And then they decided that was a career path they wanted to take.” – Charles Thomas, Outward Bound Adventures

“Pursuing environmental careers beyond college” – Roberto Morales, Sierra Club

Outside of career trajectories, teachers emphasized that success looks like improved holistic behavioral, emotional and academic improvements in their kids.

“[Nature] slows them down, added vocabulary of the outdoors is good for ESL, makes them more peaceful” – Sharon Nakata, Special Education Teacher and Nature Club Co-Leader at San Pascual STEAM Magnet School

“Thoughtful design - Canopy green spaces on campus. Added benefit of using native plants – helping native creatures. Improvements on students’ standardized tests.” – Brad Rumble, Principal of Esperanza Elementary

Teachers know that nature is having an impact on their students when they write about nature in their journals, and talk about protecting nature.

Lastly, some defined success as having a legal advocacy component and political metric as well.

“Advocating for Congress-people to campaign for National Recreation Areas” – Roberto Morales, Sierra Club

“Number of parks, number of park acres, number of people served by parks, amount of money raised for park access. Spaces opened for people of color that were not opened before (i.e. beach access). Changes in policy and law – i.e. CA coastal policy act 2016 – to include civil rights language. Smiles on children’s faces playing in parks that didn’t used to exist” – Robert Garcia, The City Project

“What are the biggest challenges to achieving these goals?”

If transportation...:

What is the difference felt between having a bus provided by NPS and having to take the city bus?

Have there ever been efforts to try to get parents involved in helping provide transportation?

What has that looked like?

What do you think would make transportation issues smoother?”

Transportation is cited among many pieces of research literature as the “number one barrier” for people of lower socioeconomic status to visiting more remote National Parks. Again, race and ethnicity do not necessarily correlate with socioeconomic status, but sometimes can. The various community organizations took different approaches to addressing the difficulty of transportation in reaching their programmatic goals.

Most organizations agreed that transportation was the first step to providing communities access to the mountains and other open spaces. Ideally, one has the opportunity to physically go to the natural space in order to be able to enjoy its benefits.

Multiple organizations shared how valuable it is to have access to NPS-provided transportation for collaborative programming. Most of these offerings have recently dwindled, which has hindered some of the organization’s ability to successfully implement programming. From their perspective, it seemed like budget cuts and understaffing at NPS put an end to the free buses being provided by NPS.

When buses are not provided by NPS, what other options might organizations turn to? Some organizations have explored the option of using public transportation. While public transportation is affordable, it turns out to be highly impractical due to the scheduling and limited stop options.

One relatively new program, called Transit to Trails, was led by efforts by both The City project and the Nature for All Coalition of the Sierra Club. This program ran as a pilot to provide an hourly shuttle stopping in low income areas of downtown Los Angeles to open space outside of the city. Funding for this program came from Metro, and the long-term goal was for funding to come from city or federal sources.

Transportation was deemed so important by Outward Bound Adventures that they decided to place transportation as one of their highest priorities. Outward Bound Adventures provides transportation for everything, which is one of their biggest operational costs. Charles Thomas elaborates,

“We found out in the 1960s that when you provide transportation, you increase participation rate by 80-90%. Taking public transportation and having people use their own cars, attrition was horrible. So, we started providing buses and vans a while ago...”

Two reasons why we provide transportation:

- 1. Some families have cars they can use, but we didn't want them getting outdoors to be a conflict with what has to happen in the communities. Like the dad has to take the car to work, and then the mom has to go and get the car, if there were 2 parents. But traditionally 90% of the people we work with are single parents.*
- 2. When you take kids out and they historically have not been outdoors, we always ask that they bring a friend so they feel more comfortable. So if we have a big bus or a series of vans, we have enough room. Otherwise it just doesn't work."*

Davy Sumner pointed out that for organizations who serve people from a wide geographic span, getting kids to the organization's site can be a big challenge in of itself. Davy Sumner from CalArts CAP explains,

"Getting kids to CalArts was a challenge in of itself... because students come from such wide geographical range... In LA transportation is a huge thing...figuring out how we can get everyone home safe because they live maybe 30-40 miles away, and then going even farther away [to SAMO] was crazy."

Nara Hernandez added the importance of providing transportation through the community organizations, as opposed to solely through NPS. Nara recognizes that while some families might be scared to go as far as the mountains, this fear generally doesn't arise anymore since the families trust HOLA and have an existing relationship with them.

"They're signing up as members of HOLA. They already have a relationship with and trust HOLA. They know HOLA will take them somewhere good. Families trust HOLA, so they know they'll be safe. If HOLA were taken out of the picture, I'm not sure families would sign up for a bus. There needs to be a relationship to make that initial connection. Could be schools/churches/soccer teams. There needs to be buy-in."

[“Putting the logistics like buses and food aside, are there any other materials that prove to be challenging?”](#)

Second to transportation, a few items came up as proving challenging to promoting diversity outdoors and providing access to the outdoors for folks who otherwise would not get the chance.

When it comes to coordinating efforts between SAMO and the community organizations, having consistent contacts is important. Multiple community organizations brought up the fact that many rangers are employed seasonally or have two-year positions, resulting in lost contacts over time. Without having consistent contacts year after year, it can be challenging for the community organizations to build and sustain relationships with SAMO staff.

The organizations understand and/or suspect that budget cuts have led to some of the staffing changes at SAMO, but also expressed the negative impact it has on them, and that...

“Making connections in the [SAMO] office is a challenge.”

In addition to staff contacts, the community organizations expressed a desire for NPS to be more willing to work with the partners in terms of scheduling. Sharon Nakata from San Pascual Elementary expressed deep passion and happiness with SAMO partnerships. She also highlighted the importance of working with their schedule, since for example, a typical Saturday program doesn't work for the school since,

“Saturday am conflicts with soccer.”

Charles Thomas elaborates on this point, explaining,

“Most challenging thing is getting the people/agencies on other side to understand what we're trying to do, be sensitive to their needs, granting us access into these areas. To work not under the agency's schedule, but to be more flexible with our schedule.”

A few groups brought up the issue of cost as a serving as a barrier. Since the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area does not require a fee for entrance (unlike National Parks), costs associated with trips typically come in the form of parking fees and/or paying for gas. Charles Thomas spoke about the value of requiring financial buy-in from participants in order to participate in a program. He explains the philosophy as having ‘skin in the game,’

“We make every kid pay for our courses – they don't pay much, maybe 3 or 5 dollars – but they need to have skin in the game. If you don't teach them why they need to have skin in the game, then there's no value in it. If they don't know what's in the park or what they can access, and they don't have that kind of pre-education to know why that's valuable, it is a deterrent. But you say this is what \$20 gets you, you get to see the highest waterfall in Northern California, sleep under the stars, might get to see a bear, whatever it is. Then it becomes ‘I'm going to do something I've never been able to do.’ Then they're willing to shell out \$20. Until then it's a deterrent – ‘I'm not going to shell out \$20 to go sleep in the dirt.’”

Safety concerns can sometimes come up for folks who are unfamiliar with what to expect in an outdoors context. It isn't uncommon for new hikers to have irrational fears about wildlife, lightning, or getting lost. The best strategy folks have found to combat these fears is education. Very intentional frontloading of information allows participants to have a thorough understanding of what type of journey they are about to embark on, which allows folks to mentally prepare for potential dangers. More often than not, dangerous wildlife encounters do not actually occur outdoors. But empowering someone with the education around what to do in the special instance of an encounter gives them the tools to walk into the woods with more confidence than they would otherwise have without this knowledge.

Some people would argue that the most dangerous thing about hiking is other people. As Christian La Mont from Latino Outdoors Morales reminds us,

“You never really know what you're gonna encounter on the trail, and it won't always be a wildlife situation now. There's other points of antagonism too.”

He says that in his experience safety from other humans comes up as a concern more often among people who identify as females, LGBTQ, and/or people of color. Concerns around safety from other people is definitely subdued through hiking in groups of people you trust. This is where the power of community really steps in and allows hikers (especially newer hikers) to feel more confident and comfortable outdoors.

Lastly, poor signage on large federal lands has served as a challenge for folks leading hikes of various depths into the woods. Most cell phone carrier networks do not extend service to the deep woods, which leaves the low-tech hiker at a loss. This pattern reinforces the necessity for having thorough wayfinding, orienteering, and planning prior to any trip with depth in the woods or mountains.

[“Does anything come to mind when you think of not so great experiences outdoors?”](#)

Most groups interviewed seem to have overall positive experiences outdoors; some with the occasional uncomfortable moments of discrimination. The uncomfortable discriminatory moments derived from various sources, mainly from other hikers, and even sometimes from park staff. This section sheds light on what some of these experiences have looked like for the community leaders and their organization.

Sometimes discriminatory comments or actions are very subtle and may not be noticed by all parties in the area at the time. Similarly, certain people may have a very different experience than others around them. We are all unique individuals. Luis Villa from Latino Outdoors reminds us,

“The trail can be a very different place for different people.”

Some groups brought up how stereotypes can create uncomfortable situations outdoors. When folks bring stereotypes into outdoors spaces, it can sometimes lead to potentially discriminatory commentary and hurtful impacts. Roberto Morales explains a situation where he was leading a large group of Latinos on a hike and encountered folks projecting stereotypes onto their group. He explains,

“There’s the microaggressions of people giving us weird stares since we have a big group of people, looking to make sure we’re not going to leave trash, hitting us up saying, ‘hey you guys are going to take care of your trash, right?’ Us saying, ‘yeah obviously’ ...people insinuate that you’re not educated about that.”

Sometimes large groups can get funny looks from other hikers who might not be used to seeing such a large group of people hiking outdoors. Christian La Mont from Latino Outdoors feels fortunate to not have experienced verbal confrontations from other hikers in the Los Angeles region, but has definitely seen people gawk at large groups of Latinos on the trail, with sideways glances on their faces.

While hiking with Black Girls Trekin (BGT) in Topanga State Park, the group definitely got a few looks of confusion. One hiker even asked out of confusion,

“Are you all a big family?”

It’s unclear to comment on the intention of that question, but its impact was known. The question rolled off the shoulders of some BGT hikers but definitely rubbed other BGT hikers in a less than ideal way. Just because there is a large group of black women hiking together, it doesn’t mean that they are all related. This is common sense. Perhaps the hiker was not used to seeing a large group of people hiking all together, let alone a large group of black women hiking all together. Perhaps the hiker was genuinely confused. Either way, the impact of their question irritated some of the BGT hikers due to its discriminatory nature.

Since many federal lands border private property, it is common for trails to travel on private property at times. Roberto Morales mentioned how hiking on private property can sometimes be scary for big groups like Sierra Club Nature for All, recognizing that they have walked into a

different demographic than what they're exposed to in the urban core of Los Angeles. One such example is seeing signs on private property representing a particular political ideology and folks recognizing,

"This is Trump land."

Just because you're walking on a Trump-supporter's land, it does not mean that the land owner necessarily agrees with President Trump's stance on immigration or even intends to harm any folks who may be immigrants themselves or of immigrant heritage. That being said, for people who have been socialized to fear Trump supporters due to potential political ideologies that may discriminate against them, encountering Trump land while hiking can be far from an ideal experience for some people.

Instances of discrimination can come from many different sources, including staff people. While there are many NPS staff who understand the cultural sensitivities required for working with different racial and ethnic groups, Charles Thomas from OBA explains,

"There's a lot of groups [of staff] that are ignorant about working with groups of color."

Christian La Mont from Latino Outdoors shared one such experience. He and his Latino friends who work in the outdoors/environmental education field went on their first trip to Yosemite. The excitement on their faces quickly changed to silence and sadness after an unpleasant encounter with the park ranger at the entrance gate. Christian elaborates,

"We were going into Yosemite, and there was a much much much less than friendly and welcoming park ranger that we were greeted by. It was really sort of a sad occasion, just witnessing the level of enthusiasm tank. People were saying 'I'm so excited I've never been here before I'm going to cry,' to, 'did anybody else think we were being talked to like that just because we were Latino women?' ...from singing songs and being excited, to dead silence. It was palatable. I was ashamed, embarrassed because I know that is not the experience I have when I pull up with my white wife at the NPS gate. It [this experience] was enough to hinder some of these people from going back, so that was a barrier. Just the greeting was a barrier ...And now their impression is, 'I'd rather not. Why go to a national park, when I could go to a city park?'"

It's hard to say whether or not that Park Ranger was even aware of the manner in which they engaged with this particular group of people. I doubt that they are aware of the lasting impact it had on the Latino people in the car, and I bet they would be surprised to know that the story is still told to this day. Though expressions can sometimes be small, experiences like these can have a lasting impact. Luis Villa from Latino Outdoors adds to the story, commenting on discriminatory experiences' impact on protecting federal lands, saying,

"And who knows how many advocates for the protection of lands have been lost due to these sorts of experiences."

“Bigger society as a whole regarding discrimination outdoors. What’s the solution?”

When the topic of discrimination outdoors came up with community partners, we spoke about different strategies for combating discrimination for their community groups and for combating discrimination in society as a whole. Ideas for combating discrimination took shape in four forms: education, strength in numbers, reinforcing trail community, and cultural sensitivity.

To combat the stereotype of Latinos littering the outdoors at big family picnics and similar events, Nara from HOLA recommends focusing on education. She thinks that the best way to address this type of stereotype is to ensure that the groups traveling on the land understand and adhere to the Leave No Trace (LNT) ideology, which is seven principles for enjoying nature respectfully without leaving an impact on it. Nara hopes that promoting LNT education will help minimize the association of Latinos and littering in the outdoors.

Second to education, there is great strength in hiking in numbers. Even though traveling in large groups can sometimes elicit strange stares from other hikers, participants on Latino Outdoors and Black Girls Trekkers hikes have found it to be

“Empowering to be in bigger groups”

Traveling in a larger group gives individuals the opportunity to feel like they’re part of a community. Having a community you can relate to can be essential for ensuring a positive experience outdoors for some people.

The third strategy mentioned by community partners is to reinforce the sense of trail community and shared values. By aligning on the shared values of nature protection and love for the outdoors, differences among different hiking groups can be minimized. Reinforcing the similarities can help combat someone potentially feeling like an outsider. Luis Villa from Latino Outdoors points out the importance of reinforcing this common ground and need for community on the trail, especially from a practical safety standpoint, since,

“You may need to relay life/death message to that same person on the trail later on.”

Lastly, having staff members at NPS who have sensitivity for the populations they’re working with is essential to promoting long-term positive relationships between diverse communities and the outdoors. Christian from Latino Outdoors shares the importance of having staff being bilingually welcoming, saying a simple ‘hola,’

“Sometimes it’s as simple as saying hello/hola. If NPS people were more bilingually welcoming, then more shy people would be more comfortable in those spaces. NPS needs to share the message of, ‘I see you.’”

Partnering with SAMO

“Why has your organization chosen to partner with SAMO in past/present programming? What about visiting SAMO appeals to your organization’s mission?”

Community organizations have partnered with SAMO at various times for the following reasons: extended periods of support for diversity outdoors, a willingness to modify programming to meet community organizations’ needs, and logistical aspects such as long amounts of sunlight due to SAMO’s geography and buses being provided.

When it comes to the staff at SAMO, community partners had really great things to say about them. Roberto Morales, Sierra Club Nature for All, speaks about SAMO’s dedicated staff:

“NPS has staff dedicated to listening to community advocates, share programming, interpretation/education... the feedback loop is open.”

Charles Thomas from Outward Bound Adventures has similar positive feedback when it comes to multilingual staff and signs at SAMO:

“SAMO has done a good job at making their staff and interpretive signs multilingual.”

Davy Sumner from CalArts Community Arts Partnership speaks about their music program as well. The CalArts CAP program had a Teaching Artists component involving a residency. This program involved three major field trips out to SAMO for music projects. The projects involved rehearsing, collecting, developing, and performing music pieces with hikers as their audience.

As mentioned before, securing transportation to open space areas outside of the city can be a big challenge for community partners. Nara Hernandez, HOLA, speaks about how NPS was able to provide buses for their programs,

“Because the park was offering resources we didn’t have. Buses. Was able to be modified to the needs of HOLA’s program. Program felt true, not generic.”

Nara continues, speaking about how NPS successfully met their organization’s programmatic needs for their artist in residence program, day trips, and overnight camping for science days in the past. She explains that the programs had a

“Nature focus - geology, animals, plants, typical ranger education. Turn it into doing a sketch of plant. HOLA integrates art piece. HOLA’s rock band and jazz band has played at SAMO as well.”

The two elementary schools also commented on the great ability of having free transportation provided by the park through the Every Kid in the Park program. This program offered Los Angeles and Ventura County Title I schools free bus transportation for free field trips to the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, in addition to providing free federal lands passes for each fourth-grader.

Sharon Nakata from San Pascual Elementary explained how the Every Kid in the park program worked for them,

“They’d give us a bus to Paramount Ranch [in SAMO] for activities. Take families for astronomy night to see the dark night sky. Most of the families would not necessarily venture out there on their own for two reasons: 1) cost 2) most do not drive. Ranch is 30-40 min drive away.”

Sharon also explained that their school first became involved with SAMO through the magnet school program, where NPS was their partner for being established as a magnet STEAM school. Because of this partnership, the school has been able to work together with NPS for other projects and partnerships as well. Sharon explains that they try their best to make the relationship reciprocal,

“Rangers come for career day, to nature club, other activities. They toured the school. El pueblo had a tree lighting ceremony. With their truck. Cheer team cheers for them. La Ranger Troca provides info and activities. Whenever there’s a nature event with their school, they usually see the truck come there. We try to make the partnership reciprocal. We went to P22 day (October 22) – with the national wildlife federation. NPS was there too. A day to celebrate the mountain lion who lives in Griffith park. They all work intertwined together. Kids are going to make P22 buttons to help fund the wildlife crossing.”

Lastly, the geography of SAMO allows for long days of sunlight and therefore more hours for activities outdoors. Charles Thomas from Outward Bound Adventures speaks about the sunlight and geography of SAMO,

“Close, more sunlight access, easier to get kids from south/central LA to SAMO than into De Angeles of United States Forest Service. Especially during winter course since there is less sunlight.”

[“Do you think anything could be changed around the relationship, park amenities, facilities, park design, etc, that could help support your efforts? What kind of change do you think might help?”](#)

In general, folks felt like the facilities and park amenities were overall meeting the needs of their groups. There was an overall high value for continued strong maintenance protocols, since clean facilities are essential for an enjoyable visitor experience. There was also a high value expressed for having accessible water for hikers, especially on hot days.

Roberto Morales from Sierra Club expressed being against building more facilities. With regards to the recent fire, he thinks that the restoration process must be driven by nature. While some species were harmed by the fire, others were benefited. He sees the fire as an opportunity for getting the community more invested in the land. He recommended to,

“Rebuild whatever needs to be rebuilt. What would be better though is to put more money into programming to get volunteers to plant native plants. Get the community more invested in the lands.”

In terms of making sure that the park facilities will meet the community needs, Roberto Morales suggests,

“You have to take your time, get into the community, and do listening sessions. I think that has worked for state parks too. They said, ‘we’re building this state park, what would you like to see in it?’ And from that came large picnic tables – Latino communities, we come in large group – we need bigger campsites, more group sites. But I think that is going to be challenging for NPS if they don’t get into the communities and have these listening sessions. I think there was a very diverse group who was advising NPS on leadership, the next 100 coalition – it was awesome. They were saying, ‘we want to listen to you, we want to be more diverse in all kinds of ways.’ If we want to do this, we need to listen to folks and have listening sessions.”

Robert Garcia added that the facilities at parks need to be friendlier,

“Quit making the spaces look like hospitals. Need to make them more friendly.”

Davy Sumner mentioned that on their final field trip for CalArts CAP, it was a very hot day with limited shade options.

“Wasn’t a very cool place to eat lunch. No shade to regroup really.”

Roberto Morales also highlighted the importance of making trails more accessible. He thinks that SAMO is pretty good, but could definitely use some improvements in terms of physical accessibility for people with physical disabilities.

Overall, Robert Garcia highlighted the value of having park planners and staff understand the axiology and epistemology of people of color and how Native Americans interact and assign value to things. By understanding the cultural philosophies of these groups and more, the parks can be designed in ways that are more relevant to different groups of people’s cultural norms.

“Asians don’t wanna go [hike] in 1 or 2. Latinos are the same way. They need to understand the cultural philosophies of these groups ... A lot of ethnic groups prefer to have vault toilets and structures. Park service is getting better at that. Understanding the way people assign value to outdoor spaces and how they learn. Affective and effective learning. If they understand how African Americans and Native Americans learn, then they can design around that too. Because I’ve seen some interpretive signs and was just like ‘oh god no, this is boring. It ain’t working.’”

“Park planning and management includes the following: education/interpretation, transportation planning, visitor use management, facilities management, commercial services, tourism programming, RTCA (rivers trails conservation association – community led conservation and outdoor rec projects), and human resources. What from this list do you think has the biggest potential for positive change in increasing diversity efforts? Why?”

The community organization leaders were full of great ideas on where and how planning efforts could help support their efforts to diversify the outdoors. The suggestions fell into five main categories: outreach and marketing, transportation, education and interpretation, and human resources.

Outreach & Marketing

Among the many ideas for improving equitable access, outreach and marketing came up as something that is necessary before any other improvements can be felt. Nara Hernandez from HOLA explains the importance of,

“More marketing to the right audiences.”

Before anyone can even think of going to visit SAMO, they first have to know what it is and what it can offer them. She explains that the message of the National Park Service is currently not reaching a key demographic, which she describes as,

“inner city areas where more families [are] living below poverty line.”

Building upon this idea of exposure, Latino Outdoors brought up the example of Disneyland and how they effectively market their materials to different cultural groups through bilingual outreach and programming. Chrisitan La Mont explained,

“Disneyland has a great bilingual outreach program. Their marketing is tailored towards them [diverse communities]. Signage/audio allows bilingual people to feel at home there. Highlight the package experience. Instead of people having to be in the know. Planting seed of idea before people get there.”

As elaborated upon in the cultural sensitivity section, outreach and marketing in languages other than English needs to be very intentional and deliberately executed. Direct translations are oftentimes irrelevant to the intended audiences. Translations need to be tailored by a speaker of the language to ensure cultural relevancy for the intended audience.

Transportation

After getting exposure to a resource such as outdoors recreation opportunities at SAMO, transportation is essential in providing a visitor physical access to enjoy the resources at SAMO. Nara Hernandez agrees, saying,

“Transportation is huge.”

Obviously, it is impossible to move a park. Despite the intention of the National Recreation Area providing outdoors opportunities for urban communities, the community partners pointed out that because SAMO is so far west of Los Angeles, it is therefore the hardest to reach by those living in central and east Los Angeles. These are also the areas with a higher concentration of people with lower socioeconomic status.

Robert Morales from Sierra Club shares that there are only a couple hiking spots accessible by bus in the San Gabriel National Forest, and Nara Hernandez from HOLA talks about the success of diversifying the beach once buses started providing access,

“People have seen the beach become diversified once the metro started going straight to the beach. I think that gave a lot of our families access to the beach who didn’t have access before. There used to be trolleys that went straight up to Los Angeles forest. I’m sure something like that that was regular and consistent or connected to a larger partner would definitely bring more people.”

According to Davy Sumner, the ideal transportation system would first discover what excites visitors most about going, tailor marketing to meet this, and then provide free passes on the metro to those who are interested and engaged. He explains,

“Ideal transportation: getting in touch with what gets these kids excited about going. Free pass to the metro. Gets you closer but doesn’t get you there. To make transportation simplified so you’re not sitting on bus for 4 hours with many transfers. Tying it into their passion.”

Education and Interpretation

After getting exposure and transportation to outdoors recreation opportunities at SAMO, education and interpretation play an integral role in shaping a visitors' experience at the park. Many folks brought up the fact that effective interpretation and education are essential in a visitor feeling safe and well-prepared in a less urban environment.

As mentioned in the outreach and marketing section, education and interpretation materials need to be culturally relevant to the intended audiences for the messages to be heard and understood. Latino Outdoors explains that it's all about representation, and the impact on the would-be users of the park, the future fans of the park.

There are two main avenues for education and interpretation. That which is provided by the park, and that which is provided by external organizations. The human resources section touches upon thoughts on internal changes. Community leaders also elaborated on the importance of organizations like theirs in providing these educational and interpretive services.

As mentioned in other sections, the value of working through various community organizations is that they have existing relationships with the community. These community organizations are likely to be plugged into the groups of people who might have the biggest need for access and could most benefit from the offerings of the national park service.

Multiple folks brought up the importance of having not annual partner events with the national park service, but rather reoccurring ongoing programming. Charles Thomas from Outward Bound Adventures explains,

“It would be great if the federal agencies create ongoing programs, like once every month or every two months, like this is an OBA day, instead of doing these one-off programs that happen 4 or 5 times, then 3 years go by, ‘hey we got another program.’ They should be doing Agency days, and understand their curriculum, add it to their ranger curriculum.”

Some organizations, such as the schools, were happy for the rangers to provide the interpretive services, while others would prefer to provide the interpretive services themselves to ensure their participants have relevant and enjoyable experiences. Charles Thomas shares about OBA's cultural curriculum and its value,

“We have a real strong cultural component. That would be helpful if they [the rangers] incorporate some of our curriculum. They think they're the best – NPS. They don't understand, but we're down here queuing up people to go to them [the NPS lands]. If people go without us, they come back and say ‘I'm not going back there, they said some crazy shit.’ I've just had too many bad experiences. They say, ‘oh no, you don't have to do it, you can just send them to us’, anyway it's that kind of attitude.”

Human Resources

Human Resources came up as an important area for planning interventions for two reasons. First, community partners identified the need for staff to represent a diversity of racial and ethnic groups to ensure visitors of similar racial and ethnic backgrounds would have higher likelihood of finding common grounds and relatability.

Roberto Morales from the Sierra Club highlighted the importance of the National Park Service having a diverse workforce, and the importance of human resources being,

“Intentional about engaging low income communities of color [in job advertisements]”

Robert Garcia from The City Project adds to this by saying,

“It’s important to get the right people to be ambassadors to make people feel welcome. We need better leadership at the top.”

Second, community partners identified human resources as a great doorway for integrating cultural competency into current staffing and onboarding of new staff. When the NPS staff represent a diverse demographic of backgrounds and cultures, they can better ensure that the messages being relayed by NPS is representative of different cultures.

[“It’s important for park planning to be aware of and educated about cultural differences and traditions of different types of groups, without creating stereotypes. How do you think this balance can be met?”](#)

Cultural competency on behalf of the parks service came up numerous times throughout interviews as important and relevant for successfully promoting diversity outdoors. Ensuring cultural competency without furthering stereotypes can sometimes be challenging.

Christian La Mont from Latino Outdoors shares his solution,

“What you do is bring on board people who are familiar with the culture to help craft the message. Just as you would do, trying to craft message to other places. For example, there was a lead ranger on kayaking trip – you could tell in his day job the cultural aspect of his heritage wasn’t very strong, but once he got onto the river, there was a very healthy kind of dialogue about his Latino and Hispanic upbringing. Ranger took that and was part of that. They [NPS] were giving him a platform for engaging in this connection. Employing several Fernandos so that the people - so it’s not an overt stereotypical effort. ‘Can u give it a glance/does it feel right?’ Authenticity. Representation”

For those who would like to support diversity outdoors while they themselves are not a person of color, earning trust came up. When asked about the experience of working with lower-income youth of color as a white man, Davy Sumner from CalArts CAP shared,

“Earn trust, build relationships. Not always easy, but it’s possible to overcome that.”

Directly related to cultural competency is language. Robert Garcia from The City Project explained how he’d like to see a standard operating procedure for bilingual material. He explains,

“SOP – for park agencies to translate park materials into Spanish. Translating directly – cannot just be the words, has to also be culturally and linguistically appropriate...Just translating it is not good enough. Languages don’t always match one to one. There is no word for hike/camp in Spanish – might not be one word, but it is a phrase. And yet, Chilean mountain climbers are among best in the world. If the word does not exist, doesn’t mean the item doesn’t exist.”

At the end of the day, educating park staff about historic events that may or may not have relevancy for different visitor groups can be very valuable. Robert Garcia explains,

“Black people in the woods might elicit lynching trauma. The way to address it is to inform rangers. One irrefutable counter is that the buffalo soldiers were original rangers at Yosemite. Answer = better education.”

At the same time, it’s important to educate staff without furthering stereotypes. Robert Garcia emphasizes the importance of structural competency, saying that,

“Stereotypes only grow if they’re stereotypical premises”

Feedback for the National Park Service and the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

These community organizations spend a great deal of time working to promote diversity outdoors in their own unique ways. This section presents feedback from the community organizations on what works well, and what could use improvement, in terms of supporting and promoting diversity goals. The following responses derive from overall conversation about NPS and SAMO, many of which were sparked by this particular prompt:

[“What would you say the Santa Monica Mountains does well in terms of partnerships to get kids outdoors that other parks could learn from? What are some of the highlights that you’ve seen?”](#)

Many community organizations attribute SAMO’s success in engaging diverse populations to their commitment to having strong community partnerships and being creative about programming. Individuals spoke about SAMO’s strong community involvement, outreach, volunteer recruitment, and commitment for healthy relationships with their community partners. In addition to getting many youths out on the trails through these partnerships, Roberto Morales from Sierra Club Nature for All commented positively about the NPS staff, funding, and community engagement by saying,

“NPS has staff dedicated to listening to community advocates and share programming. The interpretive materials and education feedback loop is open...”

We were really fortunate to get funding from SAMO to provide programming. Going out into the communities. Instead of them trying to enter the community on their own, they pick the partner who is already a part of the community. That is awesome. I hope that they’re doing this in other places too...”

SAMO is very community oriented. They understand that need. It’s a very affluent area with federal land bordering it, they understand that not a lot of people from these areas are going out there. So, they have been really intentional about their efforts to connect to these communities. They understand the need.”

Nara Hernandez from HOLA comments on SAMO’s interdisciplinary approach to creative programming,

“I think they’re thinking outside of the box, with the artist residency, with bow tie park and doing the artist projects there with clock shop, doing the sleepovers, building the campfire. I think they’re definitely thinking interdisciplinary and I think it’s very smart of them to be doing that. I don’t have a sense of what other state and national parks are doing to compare. But I think that the fact that they’re integrating different sciences, different arts, architecture, kind of experimenting and also looking at what we can do within inner city parks is great.”

Nara also applauded NPS Rangers for working collaboratively with state park Rangers,

“I applaud that when the state parks are low on funding, NPS rangers were able to assist and work with them. We’ve been at events with state park and NPS rangers and I think that seeing that kind of collaboration is really great, to see them working together. Because they’re stronger as a whole than working independently and I think that’s a good best practice for them, for other areas to see.”

A few folks responded positively to the National Park Service’s attempt to engage with more urban populations, commenting on their engagement effort with their downtown Los Angeles office. Brad Rumble, Principal of Esperanza Elementary School, explains his appreciation for this downtown engagement,

“NPS has some really cool things – like setting up downtown. Go where the people are. Getting into the city, working with local groups. Their spaces are a canvas for various community groups and schools to use.”

Sharon Nakata from San Pascual Elementary agreed,

“It’s smart of NPS to have an office in downtown Los Angeles. Wearing the NPS uniforms, doing outreach.”

Another way that NPS has been able to engage with more urban populations is through their truck, *La Ranger Troca*, and by coming to events at the schools. Sharon Nakata, from San Pascual Elementary School admired,

“La Ranger Troca – mobile PR office, take it to all these events, like LA county fair, Alvera street tree lighting. NPS comes to the elementary school whenever invited to festivals.”

In terms of the NPS diversity, Michelle Race from Black Girls Trekin acknowledges that “*an attempt is being made*” on behalf of NPS. One such example is how NPS acknowledges native communities’ lands. Robert Garcia from The City Project agrees, pointing out that,

“in L.A., the handouts for every kid in the park are very good at featuring pictures of readily identifiable Latinos.”

He says that depending on the part of the country,

“NPS brochures are better at including more diverse people.”

Other miscellaneous positive feedback includes having well marked trails, making big steps with deaf/hard of hearing populations, and the ‘find your park’ campaign with bilingual stickers and hashtags.

[“What do you think the Santa Monica Mountains and/or the National Park Service could do better?”](#)

Overall, the community partners believed that increased efforts to be community based would benefit the National Park System and its relevancy to diverse communities in the Los Angeles region and beyond. Charles Thomas from Outward Bound Adventures suggests for SAMO to,

“Be more community based. I don’t think they quite get it. It’s not a function of ‘build it and they will come.’ Outreach is outreach. They don’t understand the spirit of influence. They need to be out on the reservation, working with the Native Americans like we are, they need to be deep in the heart of Compton, not just saying ‘we’re at La Plaza.’ ...Really doing some aggressive outreach. Antonio Solorio’s got it. He’s been a guest speaker at DOLI [OBA’s Diverse Outdoors Leaders Institute].”

Sharon Nakata from San Pascual Elementary commented on how the Every Kid in the Park program was great at getting fourth-grade kids out to National Parks, but she explained that,

“It would be worthwhile if they did outreach to school groups and not just 4th graders. Better to do outdoor education with children than with adults, need to instill it at an early age. If they could open it up 2nd-5th graders, it would allow the teachers who are passionate about nature to help lead trips.”

She elaborates by saying that it would be worthwhile for NPS to prepare pre-trip information sessions to help students acclimate to the idea of outdoors education:

“It would be good if NPS can do pre-field trip info sessions. Make little booklets, field guide, agenda, interactive activities, let’s look for this kind of tree, etc. Kids at P-22 day get stamps, get raffle entry after 10 things. This kind of program makes kids go to different booths they wouldn’t normally go to.”

When it comes to ensuring that the community needs are being met, Roberto Morales and Charles Thomas comment on the need for community decisions to be made in a more grass-roots method. Roberto explains,

“This is all very top heavy from the executive directors, trying to decide what the community needs. There needs to be more grassroots engagement.”

Charles Thomas elaborates, drawing on his experience from when he worked at NPS,

“Dismantling some of the bureaucratic processes would be helpful. They need to put power into people who work on outreach, like Antonio. When I worked for NPS I had GS-11, but I couldn’t go down into the community. So, I fought constantly trying to go to reservations, but what happens is these people lose touch with what’s going on in the real world. There’s not even an approach to thinking outside the box. It’s just, ‘hey we have a protocol for dealing with that, and that’s dangerous’ ... They need policy protocols developed around the groups they’re trying to serve, and having charrettes. The people

who have the power and authority to make the change it are the people no one is getting to. They're the hardest to reach. They need to be down there so they can see what's happening."

While the National Park Service does acknowledge and make an attempt to tell the story of Native Americans, a few community partners commented on the inaccuracy and white-washed perspective of some of the interpretive materials. Robert Garcia from The City Project believes that being able to "*accurately, truthfully, and faithfully tell histories*" is a very important element of interpretation at NPS.

Having consistent programming and funding opportunities is also important for prolonged partnerships. Nara Hernandez explains,

"NPS used to provide a bus for science days. Have had 6 good years of regular field trips. And then the residency was cut from the budget. When this happens, 2-3 field trips are cut from HOLA... we haven't done anything in over a year. My sense is that their cutbacks have been so great that their outreach public programs have been defunded. Artist residency was canceled one year due to funding. HOLA is eager, not sure what their capacity is now with the new administration.... My sense is that they are understaffed at NPS."

Charles Thomas speaks to his frustration with federal agency management while he worked at NPS,

"I was there to serve underserved audiences and serve as their technical expert. I got so frustrated because of the inertia of bureaucratic processes. I couldn't believe what you had to go through to get certain things done. I said, 'I could do better being poor and working from the outside in instead of working from the inside.' I worked for 5 years and had to turn in my flat hat."

Related to staffing is the impact of the NPS uniforms on the communities they seek to engage with. Community organizations who have experience with NPS rangers in combination with Latino populations pointed out that the NPS uniforms can sometimes be misinterpreted by some members of the community as United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.), or *la migra*. Robert Garcia from The City Project explains how some Latino people may see the NPS ranger uniform and think,

"White men in uniform are not meant to serve them, instead harass and throw in jail"

Charles Thomas shares his experience wearing his NPS uniform while working at NPS,

"And not in the damn uniforms, paramilitary uniforms. They look nice, but when I was in NPS I walked into the park service wearing one of those uniforms. You shoulda seen the Latinos scramble, they thought I was la migra. They thought I was immigration. You walk around all proud in your hat and uniform. Ya but you look like a god damn cop, don't go into the project looking like that."

4.2 NPS Staff Interviews

In addition to interviewing community organizations asking about their experiences implementing programming at SAMO, I also connected with park staff at SAMO and Los Angeles Historic Park. Due to the fire and shutdown, communication with NPS staff turned out to be more challenging than planned. That being said, I was able to interview two NPS staff, Heidi Jimenez, Park Ranger at Los Angeles State Historic Park, and Antonio Solorio, Park Ranger and Youth Program Manager at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

Driving Values

To contextualize the conversation, it's important to first start out with where folks are coming from value-wise.

"Why do you think promoting diversity outdoors is important?"

Antonio Solorio explains his perspective on this question from an ecological point of view:

"From an ecological perspective, we know that an ecosystem is strong when it is diverse. Diversity in species and richness. If we parallel our organization to an ecosystem, we can stand benefiting from a diverse ecosystem when we have a variety of folks with different backgrounds that enrich NPS and help us better serve our communities that makeup our diverse and rich country. Although there are programs who are doing really awesome stuff, we can stand to improve our representation of the American public. Otherwise we won't be reflective of the American people. If we don't welcome and inspire them, we will become obsolete. We can't afford to not support and provide programs that help diversify our community."

"Can you tell me what it's like being in this role?"

Antonio Solorio explains that he is very proud of the work that they're doing, but he doesn't want to settle on their progress. In the SAMO Youth Employment and mentoring program, he explains how important equity is in the program structure and how essential it is to pay youth fairly for their work. He explains,

"It's so important to provide compensation for their work. In order to help youth out and to be fair for the work we're getting from them. We make sure we're able to pay them and be fair, equitable. That is a key factor in trying to ensure a solid bridge to careers to other outdoor agencies and organizations. When we're reaching out to diverse communities, we understand that economically, our communities are more disadvantaged ... It's really important that we pay our youth, interns. Not only to demonstrate that they can pursue a career, but also to demonstrate to their families, to parents... Knowing their economic background/stories, a lot of these kids help keep the lights on and pay rent."

Representation

The following questions discuss NPS staff representation and internal diversity efforts.

[“Do you think it is important for participants to see people from similar backgrounds working as park staff? Why/why not?”](#)

Heidi Jimenez found out about this seasonal Park ranger position from a flyer at graduate school, where she studies Outdoor Recreation. She explains that she works for the Every Kid in the Park program, which is intended to expose 4th graders to the National Parks, most of whom go to title one schools. These schools are underserved, and most of the students are typically Latinos, Hispanics and African Americans, with some Caucasians. She explains one experience and the power of language for bonding with the kids,

“One interaction that I had was with this Latino girl. She told me, ‘where are you from’?... She was like, ‘you talk like me,’ and then she started talking in Spanish, ‘tienes el mismo acento, you have the same accent,’ and I was like, ‘yeah that’s cause my mom is from El Savador and my dad is Mexican. She was like, ‘ya, I’m from El Salvador.’ It’s those valuable encounters that makes it special for them, makes it memorable, ya know I think that’s what they need, somebody that they could relate to”

Antonio Solorio agrees, remembering his own experiences of having a Mexican-American teacher in high school and how it met a need he hadn’t even realized existed. He explains,

“When I was in high school and college, I had some awesome teachers and mentors who encouraged me, they were allies and conscious and super supportive, not people of color. That being said, I had a history teacher one year, he has a male Mexican-American Chicano teacher. Finally! Just the fact that I could identify with that teacher, I think we were starving, we didn’t know that we were.”

Relating back to his work at the National Park Service, Antonio explains,

“We need to provide staff that are relatable role models. Young women, men. People they could see and identify with, and think, ‘I could do this too.’ In order to make the recruitment real, we need staff who understand and can make this even more phenomenal. Just by seeing someone you can identify with, speaks volumes. In order to be legit, to have street or trail credit. We need to have people from the communities that we serve.”

He recounted an experience at a workshop with a good friend of his in the National Park Service. His friend is African American and insisted on wearing his uniform during a training to help make others feel comfortable and identify with him. Antonio explains,

“The workshop didn’t require uniform since it wasn’t for the public. People asked why he was wearing uniform and he said, ‘Hey I’m still walking through the paths and the roads, every opportunity I get to be out in public in uniform to help people feel more comfortable and identify, then you bet I am going to be out in uniform.’”

“How would you describe the current racial and ethnic makeup of park staff?”

As a Ranger at Los Angeles State Historic Park, which she described as the ‘central park of Los Angeles’, Heidi Jimenez occasionally goes to SAMO Headquarters for administrative purposes. She explains,

“Honestly, even right now, I notice that, going to headquarters, everyone is mostly Caucasian. It’s very intimidating. No African Americans were there. The only brown person I saw was interns here. It’s very intimidating to go into a field where you feel like you don’t belong.”

“What types of efforts, if any, are being done to increase the diversity of the staff racial and ethnic makeup?”

There are a few leadership programs intended to help bring diverse staff into NPS from young ages, including the following national programs: Geoscientists in the Park, Mosaics Internship, Latino Heritage Internship Program, NPS Academy, and more. As the Youth Program Manager, Antonio genuinely believes in the power of introducing youth to careers with NPS at a young age,

“Hook them when they’re young, in high school. That is a result of meeting with the counselors with the schools. They’re already demonstrating interest in the outdoors. You’re really giving them these ideas of what they can explore. In college, you shop around. There’s a big gap by the time people finish college, 5-6 years. Educators teaching kids – you really you won’t know your impacts until 10 years after.”

As one example of the success of exposure at young ages leading to careers down the line, Antonio shares,

“I’m getting ready to hire a crew leader and driver, a student who was in the youth program 8 years ago.”

“Is there any staff training around diversity? What does that look like? Is it during onboarding, or ongoing?”

Antonio shared that there are a variety of trainings offered around cultural fluency, how to be a strong ally for inclusion, and how to lead and facilitate diverse groups of visitors. Unfortunately though, these trainings are not required and are therefore self-selecting. He mentions that the people who typically attend these types of trainings are “*already on board*” with the messaging. Antonio shared that while some folks are interested in diversity training offerings, there is still some confusion from some staff when diversity workshops are proposed. For those who opt into the programs, it’s,

“Preach[ing] to the choir. Then there’s the other camp who says, ‘didn’t we do this last year?’”

Outside of the SAMO context and within NPS culture broadly speaking, Antonio explained that there can sometimes be a weird attitude around these types of programs. He explains,

“Some people think that by bringing these types of trainings and discussing it, it’s creating more divisiveness by talking about equity.”

Antonio mentions that he feels more comfortable bringing up this topic among NPS staff because he is either more confident now, or because there are executive orders and more research and support within the last 5-10 years to back up the need for diversity and inclusion trainings.

Heidi Jimenez shares that her prior experience working with underserved youth was definitely valued in her hiring process, and she felt like this experience was *“definitely a skillset they look for.”*

[“Do you think that the demographics of visitors represent the socioeconomic diversity of Los Angeles?”](#)

Heidi and Antonio agree that Los Angeles is more diverse than those represented at the Santa Monica Mountains National recreation Area. Antonio shares,

“There are certain park sites that get visited more from diverse populations. Based on my experience, still don’t feel like it’s reflecting the communities. Don’t feel that it’s truly reflective of what I know is out there. Part of that is because we need to continue to do a better job of letting people know, ‘these are your parks,’ knowledge and access to parks. Also having an understanding that folks, not everyone in LA, may want to go for a 12-mile hike, but may want to have more passive recreation like barbecuing or a picnic. Not all folks want to go into the backcountry – it doesn’t mean we don’t appreciate the outdoors though. We need to appreciate and acknowledge the differences in how we recreate.”

[“What would you say defines success in terms of reaching relevant audiences in visitation?”](#)

Similar to the community organizations, Antonio Solorio described success as having multiple different tiers, all of which have great value and positive impact. He describes these levels as,

“Perhaps initially bringing on a group, creating a safe space for a place you want to introduce them to, and then they become the leaders, the folks who come out and are bringing a group on their own.

It’s happened to me, where a young woman was with some friends. Someone who used to be a participant years ago. That was so satisfying, made me so happy, a proud moment. As she walked away, I told a new cohort of 22+ youth, ‘she was one of you, and now she’s out here bringing her friends hiking’. Role modeling.

How are we shaping their attitudes? Are we inspiring them to be stewards of the open space overall? Parks are super popular, it’s hard to make reservations at certain places. Wonderful that we’re inspiring them to go to parks. What’s more important is nature nearby home.”

Park planning as a tool

This section shares the NPS staff interviewee's perspective on how park planning can help support efforts to diversify outdoors and make NPS lands more equitably visited.

[“Park planning and management includes the following: education/interpretation, transportation planning, visitor use management, facilities management, commercial services, tourism programming, RTCA \(rivers trails conservation association – community led conservation and outdoor recreation projects\), and human resources. What from this list do you think has the biggest potential for positive change in increasing diversity efforts? Why?”](#)

Heidi feels like marketing is the most important area that needs to be improved. As someone who grew up in Mid City Los Angeles, she only discovered the National Park Service lands recently. In response to why the visitation diversity is so low, she says,

“Everything I know right now I didn't know until 2018. Imagine me, a graduate student. Someone without education probably doesn't know. People don't know. There's no advertisement.”

Antonio replies saying that he thinks all of the planning specialty areas are important, especially recruiting diverse candidates. He speaks about the value of having a strong career track available for youth,

“Have students interested in art, design, administration. By hitting all targets and not just focusing in one area. Career paths overall, not just resources. There is an interest also in grooming youth/college students into leadership roles. We've done an okay job running youth programs. If there isn't a career ladder/path, over a 4-year period, GS-5/6, then what happens? Interest in grooming college and post-college into leadership tracts. Diversify the age range of leadership.”

[“Putting the logistics like buses and food aside, are there any other things that prove to be challenging?”](#)

Antonio expresses that the HR process can make hiring quite challenging from the inside of the National Park Service. He explains,

“They're limited by the policies, guidelines. It's the bigger structure, bureaucracy. I understand that they're in place for a reason. There's history for why certain policies came into being. It is so complex, hiring and reaching the candidates who you know may have the right experience, but who do not make the cert [list of certified, qualified candidates]. Want to reach folks who wouldn't consider a career in NPS. Takes a lot of time to go out, do presentations, establish rapport at schools, do recruitment. A lot of time and investment. Takes a lot of mentoring, it's hard work outside of the park doing that community engagement and outreach.”

[“Do you think anything could be changed around the relationship, park amenities, facilities, park design, etc, that could help support diversity outdoors?”](#)

Antonio Solorio talks about how facilities need to meet the diverse needs of its users, and should be a collaborative process involving the community perspective,

“Instead of coming up with a program and then inviting the public. Going beyond outreach, collaborate with groups. Having this cooperative work, community integration.

Partnering up with universities who are doing this kind of research. Using this research and seeing what are the needs and services of other community groups, instead of just saying ‘we built it, they will come.’”

Both Heidi and Antonio spoke to the differences in how different groups recreate. Heidi explains her perspective on Latino culture, and the sometimes-common preference for active recreation,

“Latino and Hispanic community – we are big families. But we’re not interested really in like having like a log. Just relaxing. What we like is having an active park, not a passive park. They want more of like a big field so they can play soccer. Cause MacArthur Park, it used to be a passive park. Starting in the 90s and 2000s, there was a lot of migration from central America and Mexico, and then it went from a passive park to an active park. So I don’t think they would need more benches. I mean it would be cool for parties and such but that’s not really what they want.”

This is of course one perspective, and further reasoning for involving a wide demographic of stakeholders in the planning process to ensure a variety of voices are heard and understood. While it is important for park design and planning to be aware of potential cultural differences, it’s also important not to unintentionally reinforce stereotypes through planning. Antonio explains,

“I don’t want to reinforce the idea that people of color do not recreate. Don’t want to contribute to that false-belief. City park playing basketball/soccer. I myself as a person of color love to go spend time alone, don’t always want to be socializing. Love to go backpacking, rock climbing.”

When it comes to diverse groups enjoying outdoor spaces equitably, there needs to first be a desire to recreate outdoors. Heidi Jimenez discusses the strong work ethic that can often be felt in Latino culture and families. Speaking to the ethnicity hypothesis, Heidi explains how in her experience, this high value for work ethic among Latino populations has often been counter-productive to the idea of relaxing or recreating outdoors,

“Something in the Latino community. We are really good at work ethic. And when we have to be at work, wake up super early, work throughout the whole day, and at the end of the day we are very tired. So that’s why we don’t do recreation. So our recreation time is resting because all we do is work. It’s a learning process, I’m still getting out of the cocoon, telling myself it’s okay to sit down and relax.”

In terms of relaying the importance of relaxation to audiences who might not necessarily already value it, Heidi talks about the significance of the audience being able to relate to the person sharing the message. She explains,

“Teaching them, ‘why am I here, why am I in this area?’ ‘Because you need to take some rest, enjoy how therapeutic nature can be.’ And I think with that, it all goes to being able to translate and doing the interpretation. Because my body obviously needs to relax. Working too much and not dedicating time for yourself. I notice that a lot of Latinos suffer from obesity and they just work work work and they don’t have time for themselves. It would be nice if they could go for a hike and relax. Just exposing them, the right person doing the interpreting, and translating. It’s all a matter of how you expose and interpret things and tell them ok you need this because you need to take time off for your body. Language barrier. The undeserved community and how they are not exposed to it, or are not accustomed to it.”

[“What is your perception of Latinos being intimidated by Ranger uniforms, confusing them for ICE \(Immigration Customs Enforcement\)”](#)

Antonio Solorio shares his experience and his lessons in when to wear his Ranger uniform and when to intentionally wear either his NPS polo or no NPS attire at all. He explains,

“That’s real. When you’re going out into the community, you become aware of when you wear it and when you wear non-uniform, and when you wear the polo with the arrowhead instead of the green and grey.

That’s for the initial meetings. But then afterward, I think it’s important to wear the uniform. Because then you’re representing the organization and helping to change the attitudes out there. You want to make it a point, ‘look at me, I’m part of your community, I want you to feel comfortable.’ How wonderful when we could go out to the public, meet with the public, instead of feeling intimidated or concerned, that they can connect, they don’t need to be in the shadows.”

Antonio continues by sharing a story of being stopped by the police as a sixteen-year-old boy in East Los Angeles, and how his own feelings around law enforcement have changed now that he works for NPS,

“As a sixteen-year-old boy in East Los Angeles on my way home from a mom-n-pop shop, I got stopped by the police. My neighbors stood up for me. Found \$6 cash in my pocket. That experience really made an impression, created big distance with law enforcement bodies. Now working for NPS, being mature and confident, I have no problem reaching out and establishing connections. Once we break that barrier and show up and represent in our NPS uniforms, we’re not here to reinforce any negative experiences, we want to represent, show you that parks belong to you. That is in our benefit to establish those strong relationships.”

“What would you say SAMO does well in terms of partnerships to get kids outdoors that other parks could learn from?”

Antonio sums up his experience by encouraging others to staying committed to this work,

“It’s good work. A lot of the times it could be overwhelming perhaps if in a small park, or if visitation doesn’t represent diverse groups...Being aware, being educated, conscious, sensitive, open-minded to the different visitors or folks coming. It’s good work, necessary work.

By 2041, people of color will be in the majority. It’s important because of its intrinsic value, but if we don’t make efforts to do this kind of work, we could say goodbye to all of our science and sound. Everybody needs to be concerned about being relevant. We need to make this everybody’s work. It’s critical work, we need to do it. Otherwise we will become stagnant and irrelevant. For the natural landscapes, environment.”

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter offers discussion of findings, revisits the theorists' attempt to explain the use gap, and provides park planning recommendations.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

Given the wide range of community organization types that were interviewed, it makes sense that there is a wide range of experiences in outdoor settings among different groups of people. What unites these groups is their shared value for conservation and preservation of natural resources for the enjoyment of people today and in the future. While a teacher might see success for students as developing respect for insects at school, which should eventually translate into empathy in their relationships, recreation-based organizations see building community and friendships as a measure of success. Many groups recognized that there are many different levels of success, and that they all have merit and value – from feeling relaxed outdoors to a hiking participant growing into a hiking leader, or even having a participant pursue a professional career in the environmental sector in the future. At the core of these folks' work, they all believe in the value of providing access and opportunities for recreation in nature for underserved communities and communities of color.

5.2 Revisiting the Theorists' Attempt to explain the use gap

How does the interview data either support or contradict the various theories that are often used in leisure literature to help explain why certain groups of people may not take advantage of parks as a public good?

Marginality Hypothesis

As a reminder from Chapter 1, the marginality hypothesis states, *people of color tend to face socioeconomic barriers which limit their park visitation* (Byrne et al., 2009). This theory is confirmed by what I learned about participants from organizations in group A – those who live in highly dense urban cores who likely live at or below poverty. Group A includes Outward Bound Adventures, Heart of Los Angeles, Sierra Club Nature for All, Cal Arts Community Partnership, and Esperanza Elementary school. Among these organizations, leaders expressed that transportation is one of the biggest hurdles in their programming. A few of these programs were only able to provide programming to their participants when NPS provided transit (CalArts CAP, HOLA), while others have managed to ensure that they can provide transportation for their participants independent of NPS (OBA).

Second to the logistical challenge of transportation, cost is another factor often cited in marginality hypothesis literature. Given the data available from the interviews conducted, cost did not prove to be a huge limiting factor in whether or not a program would succeed for community organizations in group A. Aside from transportation fees, the next item that costs money is typically clothing. Program leaders encouraged participants to either wear clothing they

already owned, or suggested purchasing low-cost recreational clothing from more affordable stores. Luckily, entrance fees are not a deterrent at SAMO since park entrance is free to everyone.

In comparison, participants from group B include those who have a shared ethnic or racial background, regardless of socioeconomic status. Organizations in group B include Latino Outdoors (LO) and Black Girls Trekkers (BGT). In both of these groups, transportation did not appear to be the biggest challenge in providing successful programming and hikes. While not all families or individuals participating in either group own cars, transportation is typically not provided by the organization because most people are able to provide their own transportation or carpool to the trailhead. While a program leader in CalArts CAP would typically need to coordinate logistics for either an NPS bus or public transportation for its participants, program leaders for LO or BGT typically tell participants directions to the trailhead location and expect that folks can reach it on their own. Latino Outdoors occasionally helps coordinate transportation efforts when trying to engage a larger group of people, like multiple families. Another reason why these two organizations do not face as much difficulty regarding transportation compared to those in group A is that their participants are on average older. Older participants (i.e. college-age and older) are more likely to be financially independent and secure, and are therefore more likely to be able to drive and/or provide their own transportation.

Similarly, cost did not serve as a substantial barrier for those in group B. This is again likely due to the fact that participants are older and are therefore more likely to have financial independence and potentially have an income as well. Black Girls Trekkers makes sure to tell their participants about parking fees at trailheads in advance of hikes so that participants can take the opportunity to carpool if the parking fee proves to be a financial burden for any of their participants.

Participants from Group C do not lean one way or the other due to their makeup. Nature for all Coalition does not lead hikes and therefore does not have participants to assess the validity of the marginality hypothesis. Students from Pasadena STEAM Elementary represent a high proportion of Latino students coming from a wide socioeconomic status, making the barriers of cost and transportation have no one clear consensus on impact.

Ethnicity Hypothesis

The ethnicity hypothesis states, *people of color have distinct 'subcultural styles' which shape their leisure preferences and activities* (Byrne et al., 2009). This theory is partially confirmed by the interviews conducted, but with substantial nuances that must be considered.

Some community organizations, especially those that serve predominately Latino populations, acknowledged cultural differences that can sometimes contribute to differences in recreational preferences. Some of these potential cultural differences are discussed in Chapter 4. While these cultural differences were acknowledged as potentially impacting recreational preferences, every single leader of these organizations made it very clear that these stereotypes are just that – a stereotype. Not every single individual fits into the stereotypical mold. In fact, the leaders of all

of these organizations who were interviewed stand to defy the ‘norm’ and help redefine what is normal, what types of people hit the trails, and what they might look or act like.

It is possible for hiking to be absent from one’s vocabulary and lifestyle for a large number of reasons. While some people of color might grow up in families where hiking may not necessarily a part of the family culture, this does not always serve as a barrier. There are endless stories of individuals growing up and growing out of various family cultures in the process of finding their own unique values and lifestyle. While nurture can sometimes impact one’s exposure to hiking, it does not ever deter one from discovering hiking at another point in their life. Nurture has huge impact on one’s trajectory, but nature also plays a key role in one’s destiny.

Feeling of Belonging Hypothesis

One’s feeling of belonging in any space is impacted by many different factors. Literature suggests that one’s feeling of belonging in outdoors spaces such as on a hiking trail may be impacted by the following factors: safety, experiences of discrimination, and representation on the trails and among staff. The interview data mostly confirms that these three factors can contribute to one’s feeling of belonging in an outdoor space.

Safety

In terms of safety, some of my data supports the findings of Xiao et al (2017), which states that safety barriers are reported significantly higher among Hispanic respondents than among white respondents. It is unclear what reasons contributed to the feelings of safety in the 2017 study, but one key reason for concerns of safety among leaders of Hispanic organizations was the current political climate in the United States. A few hike leaders shared stories of how hiking on land with views of ‘Trump’ signs impacted their feelings of security and safety. While not all Trump supporters agree with his stance on immigration, and particularly Latino immigration into the United States, it is not surprising that Latino hikers might feel uncomfortable or unsafe in this type of environment.

Among the community organizations who serve predominately black participants, Pire’s (2018) theory that some black people may associate the woods with historically repressive actions like lynching, did not seem to be felt in the SAMO climate. It seems like standard hiking safety (i.e. weather, wilderness encounters, etc) arose as the main concern among participants, and only when minimal education was provided to the participants prior to or during hiking programs.

The issue of the NPS uniform came up multiple times as potentially impacting residents’ feeling of safety in both the urban and open space contexts. Due to the design and coloration of the National Park Service uniform, it can sometimes be mistaken as a uniform of someone from Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Multiple interviewees expressed how this can cause concerns of safety for some individuals in Hispanic or Latino populations who may themselves be immigrants or who may live among immigrants in their family or community.

Lastly, numerous individuals brought up the issue of safety on the trails as something that can impact or hinder one’s participation regardless of race or socioeconomic status. Community

leaders discussed how safety can sometimes be more of a concern for certain populations that might experience more social vulnerability than others, including but not limited to women, youth, and the LGBTQ community. While safety concerns may possibly impact people from different cultures and ethnicities differently, safety concerns are also something that may possibly impact many different groups for various reasons.

Discrimination

Second to safety concerns, experiences of discrimination can serve as a barrier to someone feeling like they belong in an outdoors space. Interview accounts prove that discrimination outdoors can sometimes serve as a barrier for some people of color to return to certain outdoors spaces. It's important to note that discriminatory remarks impact every individual very differently. There is no one blanket statement that can express the experience or reaction to discrimination outdoors among people of color. What can be said though, is that instances of discrimination can sometimes hinder people of color from returning to outdoors spaces.

Similar to how issues of safety are not unique to people of color, issues of discrimination can also be felt among many people, including individuals who do not identify as looking like a 'stereotypical hiker.' Pop-culture's reaction to these instances of discrimination is to normalize and diversify what it means to be a hiker, reclaiming the space that was once believed to not be made for them. Groups like the "unlikely hikers" are growing with popularity on social media and helping strengthen a movement of people who are more comfortable and confident hiking outdoors, fostering an inclusive and supportive space.

Representation - among staff members and on the trails

Representation among staff members proved to be important to all community organizations. There was overwhelming agreement that relatable representation is integral to their participants feeling a sense of belonging outdoors. Like any population, it's important for people of all ages to see older figures with whom they can relate to and look up to. It can be especially valuable for some people of color to see staff with similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds to them, as staff can play a heavy role in making a visitor feel comfortable.

Representation on the trails definitely proves to be integral to one's feeling of belonging outdoors as well. We know this based on the existence and success of groups such as Black Girls Trekkin and Latino Outdoors, among many others. In addition to fostering values for recreation and preservation, these organizations provide a space for people of similar background to recreate all together. It can be very powerful to hike in a group of people similar to you, especially in a space that has historically been perceived as a white space. Through representation on the trails, the feeling of belonging is satisfied and others' perception of who belongs outdoors is also successfully diversified.

5.3 Park Planning Recommendations

Given the results from the community and NPS staff interviews, here is a compiled list of recommendations for Park Planning to support diversity outdoors. These particular recommendations are particularly relevant to the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area today. Due to the Woolsey Fire and its widespread impact on SAMO, there are immense efforts still underway to rebuild and restore the park. Instead of rebuilding SAMO to its original status quo, I recommend using the fire as an opportunity to rebuild with more consideration for the diverse neighboring community being served. Instead of building equity into design retroactively, equity should be built into the design and rebuilding of SAMO.

Park Planning Recommendations include five parts: build strategic partnerships, diversify staff, boost transportation efforts, disperse intentional media and marketing, and ensure cultural competency.

Build Strategic Partnerships

As proven successful from the SAMO model, having strong partnerships is essential for ensuring that the community's needs are being met. There are so many amazing nonprofit groups who work towards promoting diversity outdoors, and their influence can be multiplied through creating and strengthening partnerships with NPS units across the United States. In order to facilitate stronger partnerships, I recommend the following:

- Consistent Parks Contact:
 - Since there can be high turn-over with seasonal and term positions in the field of natural resource management, it is really important to ensure that there are consistent parks contacts for the various partnerships with different community organizations ranging from nonprofits to schools.
 - Make sure that the main park contact for community outreach is a full-time permanent staff.
 - Create a centralized email address for outreach communications so that community partners are still able to communicate with NPS staff even when staffing changes do occur.
- Collaborative Scheduling:
 - To the extent possible, NPS staff need to work collaboratively to find times that work for both NPS staff and their partner organization for collaborative programming. This will prove to be more effective to meet the needs of the populations that the community partner organization has strong relationships with, instead of operating under a standardized programming schedule.
- Longer term programming:
 - While annual events are great at exposing the community to the benefits of the parks, the once-a-year events lack traction for long-term engagement. Partners prefer to have more regular and consistent programming with NPS, fostering multiple opportunities to build passion and excitement among participants.
 - Scheduling monthly community partner days is one way to ensure regular programming occurs with key community organizations.

Diversify Staff Representation

Having NPS staff who represent the diversity of the communities they serve is essential to ensuring that visitors can relate to park staff and feel like they belong in park settings. Diversifying staffing is a challenge within any federal agency, where the process of posting to hiring an individual can take up to eight months, if not longer. While the process of hiring an individual into NPS definitely needs an overhaul, this policy upgrade may feel outside of the scope of a Park Superintendent. These particular actions can be implemented at the park level to help support diversifying park staff while larger Human Resources amendments continue to be worked on. In order to ensure that NPS staff represents the diversity of the United States, I recommend the following:

- Diversify Staffing:
 - Diversify staffing through internship programs such as the SAMO Youth Program, ensuring that a fair wage is being paid to the underserved youth.
 - Partner with programs like the Diversity Outdoors Leadership Initiative (DOLI) with Outward Bound Adventures, who help train diverse people on how to be an effective leader in the outdoors context including environmental science, interpretation, retail, and more.
 - Partner with local cultural and ethnic organizations to advertise positions that are ‘open to the public’ so that more diverse candidates are exposed to the various opportunities for potential employment and apply for positions with the National Parks Service.
 - Educate the public that careers with the National Park Service meet a wide range of interests and skillsets, with potential to climb the promotional level into positions of higher power.
 - After a candidate makes their way onto a Cert list (list of qualified candidates), Supervisors and Hiring Managers should prioritize diverse candidates.
 - Supervisors should strive to ensure that the demographics of their office/park better matches the diversity of the United States, or that of the park’s closest urban area, whichever is more diverse.

Boost Transportation Efforts

Having an effective way to arrive at a National Park is essential for being able to reap the benefits of outdoors recreation. In order to ease transportation for underserved communities, I recommend the following:

- Partner with local transit:
 - Partner with the nearest city's public transportation system to ensure a direct transportation option from the urban core to the National Park entrance.
 - Have downtown pick-ups with regular schedules for all shuttling services.
 - Provide free or highly subsidized tickets for youth and anyone with a public transit pass.
 - Different versions of this model have been successfully implemented in Los Angeles (Transit to Trails) and Seattle (Trailhead Direct), among other cities.

Disperse Intentional Media & Marketing

Marketing and media came up numerous times as essential to getting the word out about parks available for recreational use. In order for media and marketing materials to be intentional, I recommend the following:

- Representation through media:
 - In order to attract more diverse audiences and ensure that visitors feel like the resources are intended for their benefit, it's important to portray diverse representation in media and marketing materials.
 - To ensure representation in media is met, NPS marketing efforts should include:
 - Demographics that matches the national ethnic and racial diversity seen in the United States, or that of the park's closest urban area, whichever is more diverse.
- Strategic disbursement:
 - When it comes to marketing, disbursing the media in targeted locations is key. By disbursing marketing materials in the following locations, it will be more likely to spread the word about NPS to those who could most benefit from it, and those who might not yet know about the resource.
 - School take-home fliers, libraries, soccer games, churches, and bodegas / local corner stores and markets are potential locations for disbursing marketing materials.
 - Each park should check in with local community organizations to identify specific locations for successfully reaching more diverse audiences.

Ensure Cultural Competency

Lastly, and arguably most importantly, ensure cultural competency among staff and interpretive and educational materials, and make sure cultural competency is intertwined into the very fabric of NPS culture. The most direct way to improve cultural competency is through diversifying staff makeup. When staff are diverse, then the messaging being created is more likely to be relatable to more diverse audiences. Hiring one black person or one Hispanic person isn't going to solve the problem of cultural incompetency in NPS though, as one person cannot speak for an entire race or ethnic group. In addition to diversifying staff, steps need to be taken to ensure cultural competency among all NPS staff.

When discussing cultural differences and preferences through cultural competency trainings, there is a fine line between understanding different potential preferences among people from different cultures and backgrounds, and making stereotypes about certain groups of people. While strengthening attendance and quality of diversity and inclusion trainings, it's important for staff to stay open minded and judgement-free, never assuming that someone coming from one particular cultural or ethnic group might hold any particular characteristic based on how they look, talk, or dress. This requires a true balance of cultural competency and not pre-judging visitors and recreators in the parks.

In order to ensure cultural competency at NPS sites, I recommend the following:

- Review educational and interpretive materials:
 - In order to see potential cultural incompetencies, this review must be done by those representing different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This can be achieved through two ways:
 - Hold a workshop to update materials, where key stakeholders are invited from local organizations and groups, representing a wide cultural and ethnic diversity.
 - Within the post-fire context of SAMO, community engagement is essential in the rebuilding of SAMO and the redevelopment of its educational and interpretive materials.
 - Ensuring staff represent a wide racial and ethnic diversity, so the folks presenting current materials can identify and update necessary changes, and can help create future materials that are relevant to a wider audience.
- Boost efforts in the Office of Relevancy Diversity & Inclusion:
 - Standardize and implement trainings for all staff on relevancy, diversity, inclusion, and cultural competency.
 - Hold trainings at all NPS offices at least annually with mandatory attendance.
 - Ensure that all trainings are engaging and present new materials at each training.
 - Diversity training around inclusion and tolerance should also be included into the onboarding process, which is already standardized and in operation.

5.4 Limitations

One aim of this research was to supplement UCLA's quantitative surveys on park visitation at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area with qualitative social science data. As with any body of research, this work comes with limitations, which include the following.

By the nature of selective interviewing as the main methodology, the perspectives presented are limited to the experiences felt by those who I reached out to, and those who opted in to being interviewed. Qualitative interviewing allows for depth, helping a reader have a more personable understanding of others' experiences. Qualitative interviewing does not however provide breadth, which is also valuable in establishing a strong understanding for making recommendations about any research topic of interest.

The different ethnic and racial groups represented by the community partners and NPS staff interviewed do not represent the wide diversity that exists in Los Angeles, let alone in the United States. Groups that were unintentionally left out of the conversation include Asians, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders and more.

This study focused on a National Recreation Area as a case study. Given the large number of different types of National Park Service Units, there are so many different kinds of park and facility designs, interaction with local communities, tourism pressures, and differences in operation and management among different parks. This study gives insight into how diverse visitor groups might experience one particular National Recreation Area, but does not shed light on potential experiences, successes, and challenges in visiting National Historic Sites, National Monuments, National Parks, and more, in different geographies in the United States.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This research sheds light on the different types of potential experiences that might be felt among people from underrepresented and underserved populations in the context of National Parks. By discussing these community organizations' challenges, successes, and ideas for improving diversity efforts outdoors through intentional planning, these recommendations can serve as well-founded rationale for making internal changes at the National Parks Service.

6.1 Further Research

During the process of formulating my research questions, many park staff discussed the need for more survey data being collected at park entrances to shed light on park visitor use demographics. I agree that having more statistics on park visitation demographics would help park management and planning be able to better assess how effectively they are meeting the needs of the local communities and the American public as a whole. These types of statistics would also be helpful in advocating for specific types of programming to support more diverse visitation.

That being said, a fine line must be walked around collecting demographic information. When one thinks about the logistics of collecting this information, the most feasible location within a NPS unit would be the entrance station. In order for any visitor to recreate inside of a National Park, they must first pass through the entrance station. There are many potential issues with adding demographic sampling to the entrance station process.

First, not all National Parks have entrance stations. For example, at Acadia National Park, there are a few roads that lead to the official NPS land without requiring a car to pass through an entrance station. Second, National Parks do not staff entrance stations after park hours, which allows visitors to enter some National Parks in off-hours without NPS staff interaction. Third, adding an additional responsibility onto NPS staff to disperse and collect demographic information would be challenging to standardize. Best practices for collecting demographic information include voluntary responses, out of respect to surveyors. Unfortunately, this type of data collection would place the data reporting burden on the visitor. Popular National Parks, such as Rocky Mountain National Park, can experience long lines at entrance stations at peak hours. Requesting park staff and park visitors to adhere to the demographic survey procedure at the entrance station could potentially increase traffic delays and cause traffic backups at popular parks. In addition, filling out demographic information upon entering a National Park could potentially result in a less inclusive welcome-experience for visitors. Fourth, this type of data collection would be voluntary and therefore less accurate than if it were standardized among all visitors.

Fifth, and most relevant to this study, is that National Recreation Areas do not have entrance stations. Which leads to the question – where then would be the best location for collecting demographic information of visitors? To answer this question, one needs to think about locations that have direct park visitor and park staff interaction. Visitor centers often have visitor sign-in sheets, asking for name and state/country of origin. Perhaps this could be one location that would not provide an additional burden on the park visitor or staff, but would rather deepen a system of information collecting that is already in place.

In addition to collecting more demographic data on park visitors, more research needs to be done around the impact of transportation and cost on marginalized communities. Further research should be direct and explicit in asking community partners about how much of a challenge the factors of cost and transportation are for their programming. A potential question might look something like, “from a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the highest), how much of a challenge does cost hinder programming options.” Repeating the question for ‘transportation’ in place of ‘cost’ can allow the research to include comparative metrics for the challenges being faced by community partners doing this kind of work.

6.2 Reflections

I am so grateful for the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations with these Los Angeles-based community organizations and NPS staff. All communication with my interviewees, from initial email introductions to initial phone calls to in person meetings went very smoothly. I was welcomed with warmth and openness by people who were genuinely passionate about the work that they do. I am sincerely grateful for the depth and vulnerability of stories, experiences, and feelings shared with me.

I am also very grateful for the opportunity to share this feedback with the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and the Park Planning & Special Studies Division of the National Park Service in Washington DC. By relaying this information back to the National Park Service, hopefully I can help inform the planning process so it can be more relevant to and inclusive for our diversifying society.

In terms of experiences of discrimination, I am really grateful for my interviewees in sharing personal anecdotes. As some of them mention, racial discrimination and undertones of bias are not always necessarily perceived or heard by all. By sharing their experiences, hopefully less individuals will have similar experiences as a result. I hope that this thesis can help influence how NPS staff think of, approach, and address visitor use management.

I also hope to inspire more NPS staff to serve as allies to their coworkers and park visitors who may not look like them. Through doing the work of internal reflection, checking one’s own privilege, forming genuine friendships, and by serving as allies, everyone can help alleviate the burden of discrimination that is often solely felt on the shoulders of people of color.

As I embark on my own journey pursuing a career in natural resources management at the National Park Service, I will take these lessons learned into my professional path and do my best to ensure that these lands are equitably visited by the rich diversity of people in this country we call home.

Figure 29 – Latino Outdoors (Christian De Mont (L) and Luis Villa (R)) with Tessa Buono



Appendixes

Appendix A – Park Planning Recommendations

Park Planning Recommendations include five parts: build strategic partnerships, diversify staff, boost transportation efforts, disperse intentional media and marketing, and ensure cultural competency.

Build Strategic Partnerships

- Consistent Parks Contact:
 - Since there can be high turn-over with seasonal and term positions in the field of natural resource management, it is really important to ensure that there are consistent parks contacts for the various partnerships with different community organizations ranging from nonprofits to schools.
 - Make sure that the main park contact for community outreach is a full-time permanent staff.
 - Create a centralized email address for outreach communications so that community partners are still able to communicate with NPS staff even when staffing changes do occur.
- Collaborative Scheduling:
 - To the extent possible, NPS staff need to work collaboratively to find times that work for both NPS staff and their partner organization for collaborative programming. This will prove to be more effective to meet the needs of the populations that the community partner organization has strong relationships with, instead of operating under a standardized programming schedule.
- Longer term programming:
 - While annual events are great at exposing the community to the benefits of the parks, the once-a-year events lack traction for long-term engagement. Partners prefer to have more regular and consistent programming with NPS, fostering multiple opportunities to build passion and excitement among participants.
 - Scheduling monthly community partner days is one way to ensure regular programming occurs with key community organizations.

Diversify Staff Representation

- Diversify Staffing:
 - Diversify staffing through internship programs such as the SAMO Youth Program, ensuring that a fair wage is being paid to the underserved youth.
 - Partner with programs like the Diversity Outdoors Leadership Initiative (DOLI) with Outward Bound Adventures, who help train diverse people on how to be an effective leader in the outdoors context including environmental science, interpretation, retail, and more.
 - Partner with local cultural and ethnic organizations to advertise positions that are ‘open to the public’ so that more diverse candidates are exposed to the various

opportunities for potential employment and apply for positions with the National Parks Service.

- Educate the public that careers with the National Park Service meet a wide range of interests and skillsets, with potential to climb the promotional level into positions of higher power.
- After a candidate makes their way onto a Cert list (list of qualified candidates), Supervisors and Hiring Managers should prioritize diverse candidates.
- Supervisors should strive to ensure that the demographics of their office/park better matches the diversity of the United States, or that of the park's closest urban area, whichever is more diverse.

Boost Transportation Efforts

- Partner with local transit:
 - Partner with the nearest city's public transportation system to ensure a direct transportation option from the urban core to the National Park entrance.
 - Have downtown pick-ups with regular schedules for all shuttling services.
 - Provide free or highly subsidized tickets for youth and anyone with a public transit pass.
 - Different versions of this model have been successfully implemented in Los Angeles (Transit to Trails) and Seattle (Trailhead Direct), among other cities.

Disperse Intentional Media & Marketing

- Representation through media:
 - In order to attract more diverse audiences and ensure that visitors feel like the resources are intended for their benefit, it's important to portray diverse representation in media and marketing materials.
 - To ensure representation in media is met, NPS marketing efforts should include:
 - Demographics that matches the national ethnic and racial diversity seen in the United States, or that of the park's closest urban area, whichever is more diverse.
- Strategic disbursement:
 - When it comes to marketing, disbursing the media in targeted locations is key. By disbursing marketing materials in the following locations, it will be more likely to spread the word about NPS to those who could most benefit from it, and those who might not yet know about the resource.
 - School take-home fliers, libraries, soccer games, churches, and bodegas / local corner stores and markets are potential locations for disbursing marketing materials.
 - Each park should check in with local community organizations to identify specific locations for successfully reaching more diverse audiences.

Ensure Cultural Competency

- Review educational and interpretive materials:
 - In order to see potential cultural incompetencies, this review must be done by those representing different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This can be achieved through two ways:

- Hold a workshop to update materials, where key stakeholders are invited from local organizations and groups, representing a wide cultural and ethnic diversity.
 - Within the post-fire context of SAMO, community engagement is essential in the rebuilding of SAMO and the redevelopment of its educational and interpretive materials.
- Ensuring staff represent a wide racial and ethnic diversity, so the folks presenting current materials can identify and update necessary changes, and can help create future materials that are relevant to a wider audience.
- Boost efforts in the Office of Relevancy Diversity & Inclusion:
 - Standardize and implement trainings for all staff on relevancy, diversity, inclusion, and cultural competency.
 - Hold trainings at all NPS offices at least annually with mandatory attendance.
 - Ensure that all trainings are engaging and present new materials at each training.
 - Diversity training around inclusion and tolerance should also be included into the onboarding process, which is already standardized and in operation.

Appendix B – Interview Guides

Questions for community organizations:

- Confirm info is correct:
 - From what I've read online about your organization, you guys _____. Other details about how many are served, what the program is called, etc.
 - Is there anything you'd like to add to this?
 - Can you describe the SAMO program at your organization?
 - What do you call it?
 - How did this program get started?
 - How do you describe this program to someone without exposure to or experience in this kind of work?
 - How do the logistics of transportation work?
 - How often is transportation provided?
 - Are they provided at cost or are they subsidized?
 - If subsidized, where do these funds come from?
 - Are there any programs you wish you could take on, if more resources were available?
- Finer details on program/participants:
 - Approximately how many individuals typically participate each time?
 - What types of activities/recreation opportunities do you perceive to be most enjoyed by participants?
 - How can you tell that these activities are being most enjoyed? Is there a mark that indicates enjoyment?
 - Are participants typically first-time visitors to SAMO?
- Lived experience:
 - What kinds of values might you say drive this work and why do you think this work is important?
 - On an organizational and personal level?
 - What defines success?
 - How do you know when the programming has reached it?
 - Can you tell me what it's like being in this role?
 - How would you describe the experience felt by the program participants?
 - How do you validate/confirm that this experience is indeed the one being felt?
 - What about your relationship with the participants allows you to better understand this?
 - Do you think it is important for participants to see people from similar backgrounds working as park staff? Why/why not?
 - Do you think the participants feel like it is important to have the "right kinds of clothes" to fit in at SAMO or similar outdoors spaces?
 - How would you describe the current "face" of hiking, camping, outdoors activities?
 - What do you think has had / would have the biggest impact on reshaping this?

- Do you think participants are impacted by the media and marketing choices of SAMO and other NPS parks, in terms of who they show in printed/digital material?
- Do you think participants are impacted by external societal marketing for brands that are outdoors-oriented, like patagonia, northface, rei, etc?
 - Do you think that the high price points might make hiking feel inaccessible to people with tighter budgets?
 - Do you think partnerships with brands like adidas, nike, vans, converse, etc could help redefine the face of the outdoors?
- Do you think current programming efforts are successful in affecting long-term relationships between participants and open-space areas/natural environment?
 - What percent of participants return for more programming?
 - Is this being actively measured? Do you currently have a way to measure this?
- Does your organization have a feedback mechanism in place?
 - What does it look like?
 - Can I have access to it?
- Barriers to success:
 - Putting the logistics like buses and food aside, are there any other materials that prove to be challenging?
 - How does that play out?
 - Give me some stories of how this affects their visit
 - What are the biggest challenges to achieving these goals?
 - If transportation, FU:
 - What is the difference felt between having a bus provided by NPS and having to take the city bus?
 - Have there ever been efforts to try to get parents involved in helping provide transportation? What has that looked like?
 - What do you think would make transportation issues smoother?
 - If gear, FU:
 - What kinds of gear are typically encouraged for participants?
 - What kinds of gear are maybe more challenging for students to get access to?
 - If other, FU:
 - What do you think would make ___ issues smoother?
 - What has proven to be supportive in reaching the program goals?
- Partnerships:
 - Do you have relationships/partnerships with similar organizations doing this kind of work?
 - Do you see potential benefit in these types of relationships?
 - Why has your organization chosen to partner with SAMO in past/present programming? What about visiting SAMO appeals to your organization's mission?
 - Park planning and management includes the following: education/interpretation, transportation planning, visitor use management, facilities management, commercial services, tourism programming, RTCA (rivers trails conservation

association – community led conservation and outdoor rec projects, and human resources.

- What from this list do you think has the biggest potential for positive change in increasing diversity efforts? Why?
- Recruitment:
 - Have you faced any challenges/barriers to recruitment; what does that look like?
 - What tools and methods have proven most successful in recruitment efforts?
 - What population/catchment area is being targeted? How is this area determined?
 - Do you feel like the group being targeted represents the LA population?
 - Do you feel like the group who participates represents the LA population?

Questions for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area staff:

- What has been your involvement with promoting diversity outdoors at SAMO?
 - Have you been involved in establishing/maintaining relationships with community partners, or does that responsibility typically fall under someone else? Antonio perhaps?
- Why do you think promoting diversity outdoors is important?
- Can you tell me what it's like being in this role?
- How would you describe efforts for increasing socioeconomic diversity of park visitors at SAMO?
 - What types of programs and partnerships exist around increasing diversity of visitors?
 - How would you describe the park's relationships with community organizations dedicated to this line of work?
 - How did these types of programs begin, and what sparked their beginnings?
 - Have efforts changed over the last 5-10 years?
 - Has this changed as a priority over the last 5-10 years? If so, how? Why do you think this has changed?
- Do you think it is important for participants to see people from similar backgrounds working as park staff? Why/why not?
 - How would you describe the racial and ethnic makeup of park staff?
 - How would you describe overall feelings of staff about the current makeup?
 - What types of efforts, if any, are being done to increase the diversity of the staff racial and ethnic makeup?
- How would you describe the readiness of park staff for engaging with visitors from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds?
 - Is there any staff training around diversity? What does that look like? During onboarding, or ongoing?
 - Do park staff typically come to SAMO with prior experience working with diverse communities? Is this an evaluation criterion for hire?
- The last published report in 2003 showed that SAMO visitors were 72% white. Does this sound right, given your experience and perspective as a seasonal ranger?
 - Do you feel like socioeconomic diversity of visitors has changed since 2003?
 - If so, has it improved or gotten worse?

- What do you think, if anything, might be correlated with this change?
 - Do you think that the demographics of visitors represent the socioeconomic diversity of Los Angeles?
 - How do you know if it is / is not representative?
 - What have you observed?
 - Do you see this at other parks where you have worked or visited?
- How would you describe group visits with socioeconomically diverse populations provided by community organizations? How would you describe their experience?
 - How are these types of group visits different from other types of visits at SAMO?
 - Is there a typical type of group that might visit SAMO? What does that look like? Families, friends, etc?
- What would you say defines success in terms of reaching relevant audiences in visitation?
 - How do you know when NPS has reached success, what measures success?
- What kinds of inclusivity goals does SAMO hold around visitation?
 - What types of steps do you think are necessary to reach this goal?
- Clothes/media:
 - Has it ever come up that kids feel like it is important to have the “right kinds of clothes” to fit in at SAMO or similar outdoors spaces?
 - How would you describe the current “face” of hiking, camping, outdoors activities?
 - What do you think has had / would have the biggest impact on reshaping this?
 - Do you think participants are impacted by the media and marketing choices of SAMO and other NPS parks, in terms of who they show in printed/digital material?
 - Do you think participants are impacted by external societal marketing for brands that are outdoors-oriented, like patagonia, northface, rei, etc?
 - Do you think that the high price points might make hiking feel inaccessible to people with tighter budgets?
 - Do you think partnerships with brands like adidas, nike, vans, converse, etc could help redefine the face of the outdoors?
 - Yes. In latino/Hispanic/afroam urban am.
 - Do you think community partnership programming efforts are successful in affecting long-term relationships between participants and open-space areas/natural environment?
- Planning:
 - Are there specific things in how trails are designed/managed that would help make you feel more comfortable/safe outdoors?
 - In what areas of park planning do you think change could be most effective?
 - Transportation, landscape architecture, interpretation, education, marketing, media materials, staffing, staff training, etc?
 - Park planning and management includes the following: education/interpretation, transportation planning, visitor use management, facilities management, commercial services, tourism programming, RTCA (rivers trails conservation

association – community led conservation and outdoor rec projects, and human resources.

- What from this list do you think has the biggest potential for positive change in increasing diversity efforts? Why?
- Putting the logistics like buses and food aside, are there any other materials that prove to be challenging that you're aware of?
 - How does that play out?
 - Give me some stories of how this affects their visit
- What would you say SAMO does well in terms of partnerships to get kids outdoors that other parks could learn from?
- Do you think anything could be changed around the relationship, park amenities, facilities, park design, etc, that could help support diversity outdoors?
 - What kind of change would you think might help?

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