



Metro



Protect and restore land

Community engagement

FINAL REPORT

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Introduction

Nature and green spaces are not an amenity, but a necessity for everyone's health and well-being. People of color are three times more likely than white communities to live in nature-deprived areas, and 70 percent of low-income communities live in areas lacking green spaces (Rowland-Shea, Doshi, Edberg, & Fanger, 2020).

Parks, walking trails, and green spaces are all considered natural areas to Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) that provide physical, social, and mental health benefits. To take their physical, social, and mental health needs into account, it is important to incorporate their input to make nature spaces accessible to their communities while understanding the specific barriers they face that disproportionately affect communities of color. It is imperative that the focus on the investments is founded on the principle that all people are entitled to benefit from green spaces.

In November 2019, voters of greater Portland overwhelmingly supported a bond measure to continue to protect fish and wildlife habitat, improve water quality and connect people with nature close to home. The bond was developed through extensive community engagement with different stakeholder groups. In response to community feedback and in alignment with Metro's goals and values, the bond centers racial equity, meaningful community engagement and climate resilience. In the protect and restore land program under the bond, Metro will use funds to buy land from willing sellers and restore them to support plants, animals, and people. The bond directs Metro to pay special attention to river and stream banks, headwaters, floodplains, wetlands, oak and prairie habitat, forests, and culturally significant sites, in 24 regional

geographies or target areas in greater Portland. Metro staff were charged with developing refinement plans, or specific action plans for purchasing land, for each of the target areas to present to the Metro Council for final approval. To do this in a way that best meets bond criteria, Metro staff applied a data driven environmental justice lens to provide additional context when making recommendations to the Metro Council. The environmental justice and equity lens is framed by the limitations of data Metro had related to bond measure criteria. These are focused on making the communities and environment of the Portland metropolitan area more resilient to the effects of climate change, protecting and restoring fish and wildlife habitat and clean water, and acquiring land that could provide potential future access to nature for people, scenic views, and community gathering spaces.

To inform the use of these criteria in decision making, Metro and Lara Media Services (LMS) organized a series of discussions with community members to learn about their experiences with parks, nature, and the environment. The project was intended to support the refinement of the protect and restore land program of the bond measure and, more specifically, provide direction on use of the environmental justice data sets. These discussions were shaped with a community-centered approach, prioritizing connecting with BIPOC, people with disabilities, and low-income communities, who have historically not benefited equitably from previous Metro investments. The discussion was framed around four themes:

- Community Need – Race and ethnicity, income, access to healthcare, linguistic isolation, access to higher education, and youth and those 55 and older.
- Access to Nature – Access to parks in neighborhood, acres of natural areas in neighborhoods, park amenities, park popularity, access to water.
- Flood Risk – Vulnerable people living in the floodplain, severity of flooding, susceptibility to climate change.
- Environmental Burdens – Urban heat islands, toxic sites, tree equity, noise pollution, air quality.

Community members entered the conversation eager to share their experiences around parks, nature, and the environment and as such, the discussions were wide-ranging and did not stay solely within the limitations of the existing data or criteria for this program area. The collaborative opportunity provided participants with a platform to express their experiences, while simultaneously providing Metro the opportunity to further connect and learn from historically underserved communities to advance the criteria of the bond.

Background

Lara Media Services believes the most efficient way to change the world is through the power of the community. Individuals need to work together, recognizing that each person is unique, and their contributions are valuable and necessary for this project's success. Celebrating diversity, honoring all cultures, and sharing our stories will give us awareness of our mutual belonging and a future to be shared with everyone; this will enable the development of a new society. A resilient society where everyone will thrive regardless of race, color, gender, religion, age, and national origin.

LMS values Metro's commitment and passion for listening and working within all communities to address communities' barriers to connecting and benefiting from nature. We recognize that Metro aims to do so in a just, equitable, inclusive, and culturally responsible manner that reaches and benefits diverse populations, especially marginalized communities.



LMS is a certified MBE, WBE, DBE, ESB firm (Certification #7923), and B-Corp. LMS is Latina-owned and composed of a team that is 100% multicultural and multilingual. LMS' vision is to create an equitable world where everyone can be seen, heard, and treated as a valuable and necessary member of society. LMS' ability to listen, respond, develop proven and effective strategies, and design culturally responsible research methods tailored to underserved communities is unmatched. LMS promotes assertive communication and engagement strategies for organizations aiming to connect with the hearts and minds of communities of color through sustainable and dynamic solutions. We are confident that LMS's unique approach and expertise on similar past projects and objectives will help Metro, see, and better understand how BIPOC and people with disabilities experience nature and environmental burdens.

Objectives

Metro's goals for this project were to:

Understand how BIPOC communities and people with disabilities experience parks, nature, and environmental burdens in their communities.

Understand how BIPOC communities and people with disabilities would prioritize environmental burdens that could be considered in the target area refinement plans.

Incorporate the goals and priorities identified by BIPOC communities and people with disabilities into the target area refinement plans wherever possible.

Motivate participants to further engage with Metro and the programs offered.

Methodology

LMS gathered qualitative and quantitative data by coordinating and facilitating virtual community sessions and implementing a questionnaire shared virtually with participants. The project implemented an intentional two-phased approach to the community engagement sessions. The two-phased approach was aimed at increasing transparency of the process while ensuring accountability for the community. Phase one included a series of discussions around the four themes in the environmental justice lens. Phase two community sessions were intended to provide a platform for Metro to report back on the phase one sessions' findings and the ways in which the communities input would be implemented within the parameters of the protect and restore land program and across the department. Phase one was coordinated between October and December 2021 and phase two was coordinated between January and March 2022. Phase one centered on the coordination and execution of six virtual roundtable sessions with the community members. The sessions were led by LMS staff with assistance from Metro staff. Phase two centered on the coordination and execution of five virtual report back community sessions. Two community sessions were coordinated by LMS and facilitated by Metro staff and three community sessions were coordinated and facilitated by Metro staff with the support of LMS in compiling participants' input.

The two-phased approach was designed to build trust with local communities, particularly BIPOC and people living with disabilities. The structure provided a platform where Metro could gather community members and request their input in the first phase and circle back after compiling the initial findings, while creating a space where community members could see how their insights were gathered and could continue to be a part of the process and provide their feedback.

TWO PHASED APPROACH QUALITATIVE & QUANTITATIVE DATA

PHASE

1

- OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2021
- SIX VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY MEMBERS

PHASE

2

- JANUARY TO MARCH 2022
- FIVE VIRTUAL REPORT BACK COMMUNITY SESSIONS



Phase 1 community sessions

The following report synthesizes the quantitative and qualitative results from the survey and the community sessions in phase one. The questions and the findings for the qualitative aspect of this project were organized by the four overarching categories of data in the environmental justice lens that was considered in the target area refinement plans of the protect and restore land program of the 2019 parks and nature bond measure: community need, access to nature, flooding and flood risk abatement, and environmental burdens.

6
TWO-HOUR-LONG
COMMUNITY
ROUNTABLES

102
PARTICIPANTS
ENGAGED IN
THE RESEARCH



Community sessions methodology

Community sessions are an exploratory research method that provides vast amounts of qualitative data. This method is used when there is a need to explore issues in-depth and understand thoughts, feelings, challenges, and aspirations. LMS encourages participants to be fully engaged and empowers them to let their voices be heard. Trust is built throughout the session as each person's opinion is vital. LMS aimed to have a diverse group of participants to capture the sentiment of multiple perspectives.

- ➔ Lara Media Services (LMS) hosted six (6) two-hour-long roundtable sessions using Zoom video conferencing, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a holistic approach to the research. All sessions were held virtually, between November 1st - November 10th, 2021.
- ➔ Qualitative data was gathered through comprehensive notetaking during the community sessions. Participants were required to access an electronic device with a camera and microphone to participate in the discussion. LMS offered to lend tablets to participants who didn't have access to an electronic device, and video conferencing training for all those who requested assistance.
- ➔ Four (4) affinity group-specific roundtable discussions were held alongside the sessions for BIPOC community members and for people living with disabilities. Specific sessions were held for members of the Latinx, Latinx who speak Indigenous languages, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Black and African American communities. A general roundtable discussion was held for BIPOC community members who could not attend affinity group-specific sessions or did not identify as part of those groups. A community roundtable session was held for those with disabilities or those who served as the primary caregiver for someone with a disability.
- ➔ Given the size of each session, the groups were subdivided into two Zoom breakout rooms to reduce the group's size, increase participants' comfort level, and allow for deeper interpersonal connection with participants.
- ➔ A total of one hundred and two (102) participants engaged in the research through roundtable discussions and community listening sessions. Discussion sessions lasted for 120 minutes each.
- ➔ All participants were provided with a \$100 stipend for their time and insights.

LMS used the following research methodology for the community sessions:

- 1** LMS engaged Metro project staff to identify the participant profile and essential considerations when developing the discussion guide.
- 2** Once Metro and LMS identified the priority audiences, LMS developed a discussion guide in collaboration with Metro staff to define the number of questions, topics and expected outcomes.
- 3** The discussion guide included nine questions about participants' experience with parks, nature, and environmental burdens in their communities. The discussion guide centered on the main themes of the environmental justice lens considered in the refinement of Metro's protect and restore land program. The main themes included: community needs, access to nature, flood risk, and environmental burdens. The discussion guide also included two five (5) minute long presentations conducted by Metro staff which included the following topics: An introduction to the parks and nature department and 2019 parks and nature bond measure, along with an overview of the protect and restore land program and the environmental justice lens.
- 4** LMS provided a survey to session participants prior to the community sessions to capture participants' demographics as well as quantitative data on the main themes of the environmental justice lens. The demographic questions were standardized questions used by Metro in other demographic surveys. A summary of the information gathered is included in this report.

Discussion guide outline:

Access to nature

1. What parks and natural areas do you most often visit near your home?
2. What do those visits look like for you? Who do you go with? What process is required for you to visit parks and natural areas?
3. Why do you think it's important for you and your family to experience those green areas? What motivates you to use green spaces?

Metro presentations

- Parks and nature and bond overview.
- Protect and restore land overview and environmental justice lens.

Community need

4. What barriers do you experience when accessing green areas?
5. What are your needs and aspirations for improving yours and your community's quality of life in your neighborhood?

Flood risk index

6. What has been your experience with flooding and water drainage in your area?

Environmental burdens index

7. How have you experienced the effects of climate change?
8. Are there aspects about the environment near your home that you think about with regard to your quality of life?
9. Are there enough trees near you? Are there enough parks and natural areas to enjoy near you? What has been your experience with flooding and water drainage in your area?

Participant recruitment and screening

LMS recruited participants for the community listening sessions and community roundtables through various methods which included connections with local BIPOC community partners, social advertising, as well as from a database from previous years of research. Additionally, LMS engaged local BIPOC community partners, advocates, and leaders in spreading the word about the sessions and directing community members to LMS. Metro staff supported participant recruitment efforts by reaching out to community-based organizations (CBO's) and partners. Each participant went through an over-the-phone screening process to ensure that participants met the participant profile requirements outlined for the project.

All participants were compensated \$100 for their time and insights. LMS used various methods to compensate focus group participants, including Venmo, Cash App, PayPal, gift cards, and physical checks.

Participant profile

1

Communities living in Multnomah, Washington, and Clackamas County.

2

Communities who have been excluded from the decision-making process and have not benefited equitably from previous Metro investments.

3

Prioritizing community members interested in parks, nature, and environmental justice.



Date & time selection

Roundtables

Monday, Nov 1st, 2021

Latinx community

Conducted in Spanish

18 participants

Tuesday, Nov 2nd, 2021

Black and African American community

Conducted in English

15 participants

Wednesday, Nov 3rd, 2021

Asian American and Pacific Islander community

Conducted in English

18 participants

Thursday, Nov 4th, 2021

General BIPOC communities

Conducted in English

17 participants

Friday, Nov 5th, 2021

Latinx community that speaks Indigenous languages

Conducted in Spanish

19 participants

Tuesday, Nov 9th, 2021

Community members with a disability or who are caregivers for someone with a disability.

Conducted in English

15 participants



Data collection

The study encompassed multiple research techniques, including qualitative engagement sessions and quantitative surveys.



Survey

Participants provided quantitative data through an online multiple-choice and open-ended survey which included demographic questions, as well as questions about environmental issues present in participant's communities.



Roundtable discussions

Before the roundtable discussion, LMS connected with participants and organized one-on-one meetings to inform and train them to use Zoom and questionnaire surveys. These meetings had the objectives of introducing the LMS team, explaining the discussion process and guidelines, and helping them with any technical matters or questions. The goal was to establish trust between LMS and the participant by making over the phone and visual contact before the roundtable discussion.



Audio recordings

Trusted community leaders facilitated conversations during the roundtables and community listening session. Following the conclusion of each focus group, findings were compiled and translated to be included in the final report.

Session recordings were collected to gather information to analyze the data, opinions, and ideas to find common trends based on what the contributors said throughout the discussion. Zoom software was used to record roundtable conversations. The recordings were used to analyze the responses gathered.

Through 20+ years of meaningful community engagement and facilitation, and our commitment to elevate the voices of communities who have been traditionally underserved by institutions, LMS has gained the trust of local communities. LMS stresses the importance of confidentiality and privacy to give participants the confidence to express their honest opinions. This dedication to privacy is one method used to ensure that LMS receives in-depth and comprehensive input.

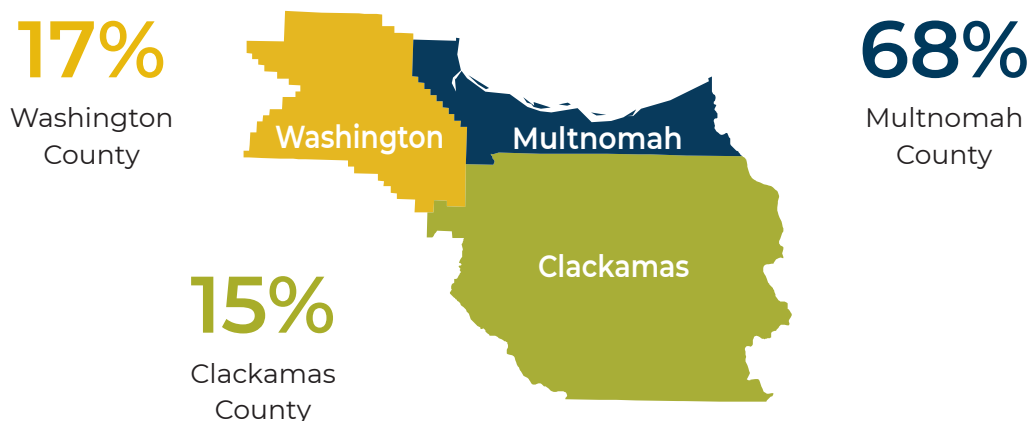
Participant data

Each participant provided LMS with the following demographic information before the community roundtable.

Please note, 114 surveys were completed, although 102 community members attended sessions. The discrepancy is due to unforeseen life circumstances that arose in community member's lives and prevented them from joining the session. Nevertheless, community members who were unable to attend took the time to share their valuable input and were included in the qualitative data findings.



1. What county do you live in?



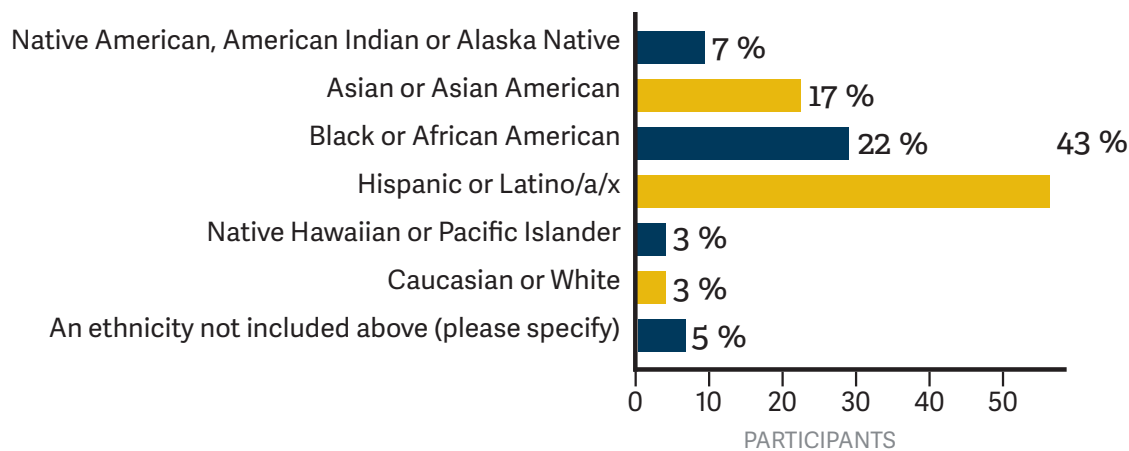
2. What is your ZIP code?

ZIP code	Percentage
97218	13%
97230	8%
97220	5%
97217	5%
97266	4%
97030	4%
97015	4%
97214	3%
97221	3%
97233	3%
97225	3%
97024	3%
97080	3%

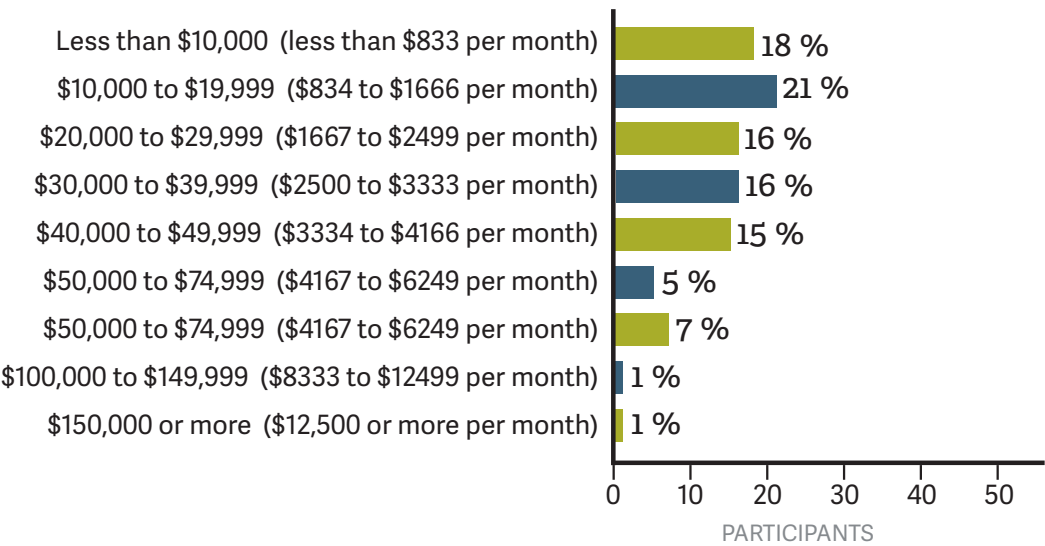
ZIP code	Percentage
97086	3%
97070	3%
97305	2%
97113	2%
97239	2%
97267	2%
97203	2%
97206	2%
97219	2%
97005	2%
97222	2%
97236	2%
97201	2%

ZIP codes with less than 1%	
97008	97106
97003	97116
97212	97045
97824	97078
97007	97008
97213	
97027	
97224	
97062	
97206	
97202	
97227	

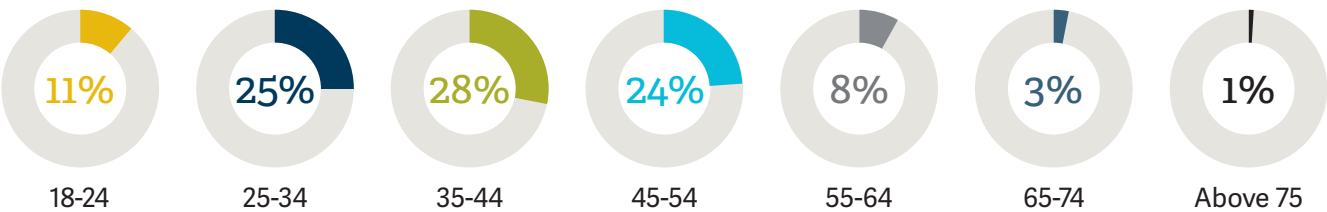
3. Within the broad categories below, where would you place your racial or ethnic identity? (Select all that apply)



4. Which best represents your household annual income before taxes?



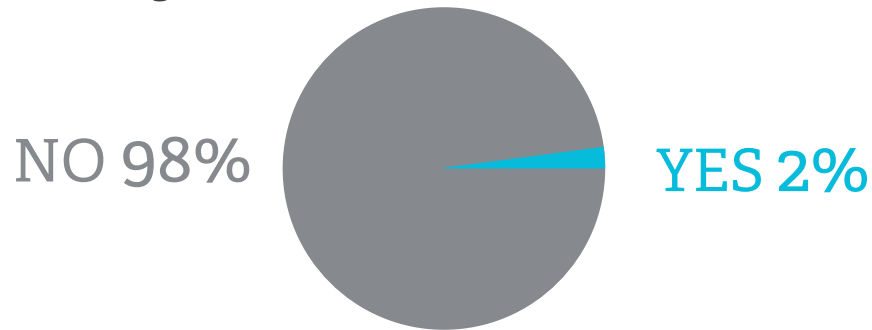
5. Which of the following ranges includes your age?



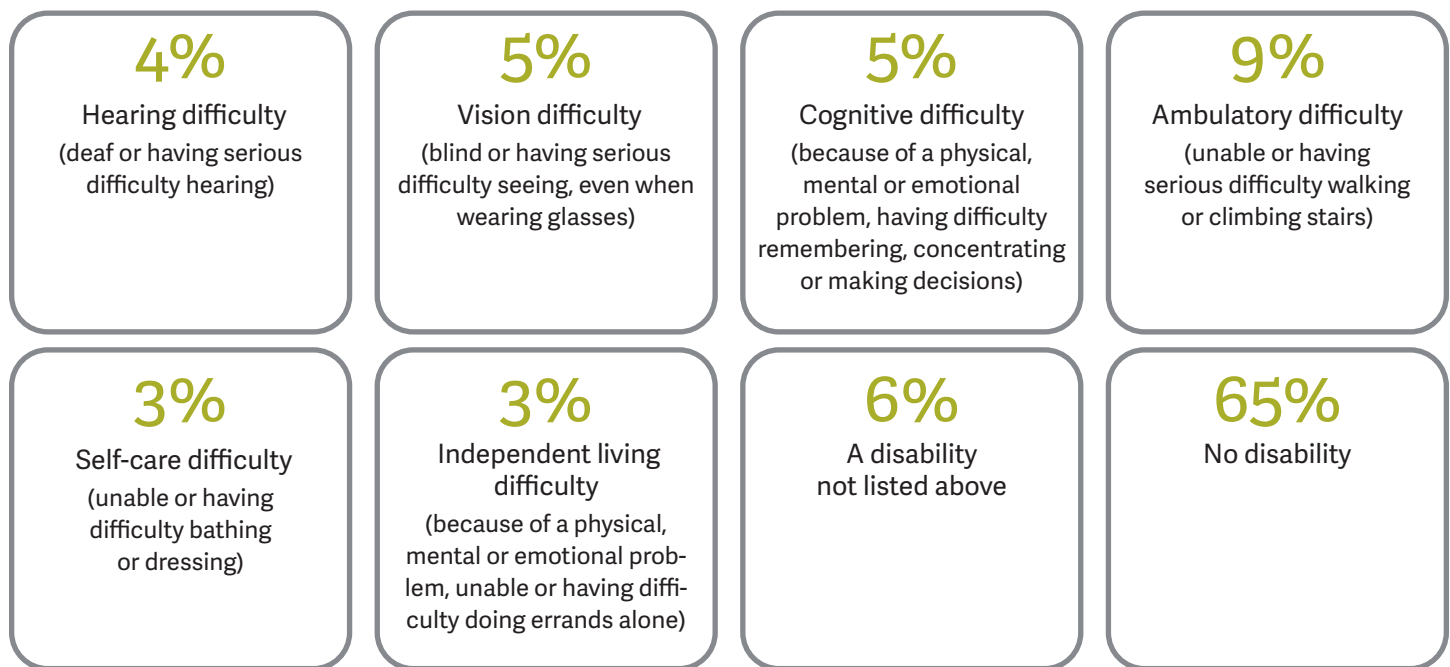
6. How do you identify your gender? (Select all that apply)



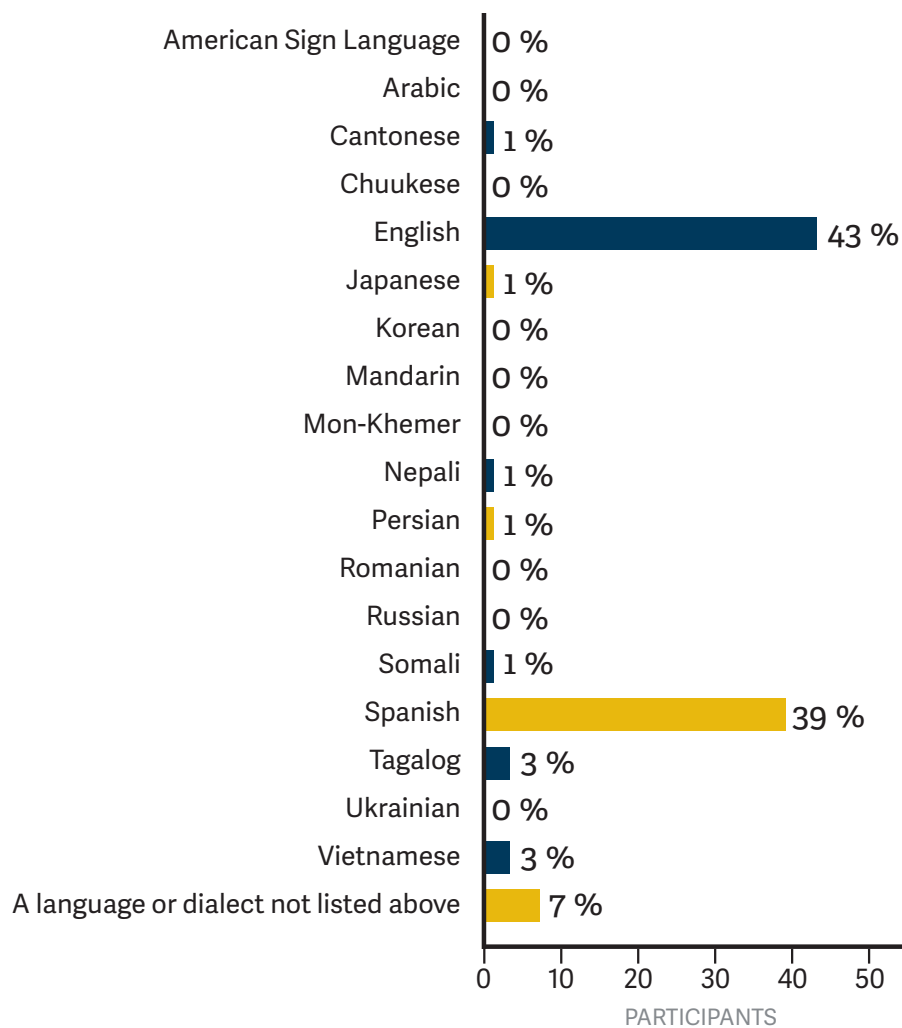
7. Do you identify as transgender?



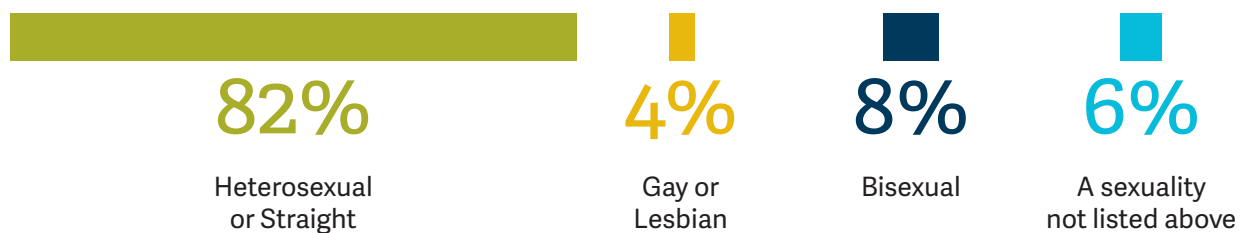
8. Do you live with a disability? (Select all that apply)



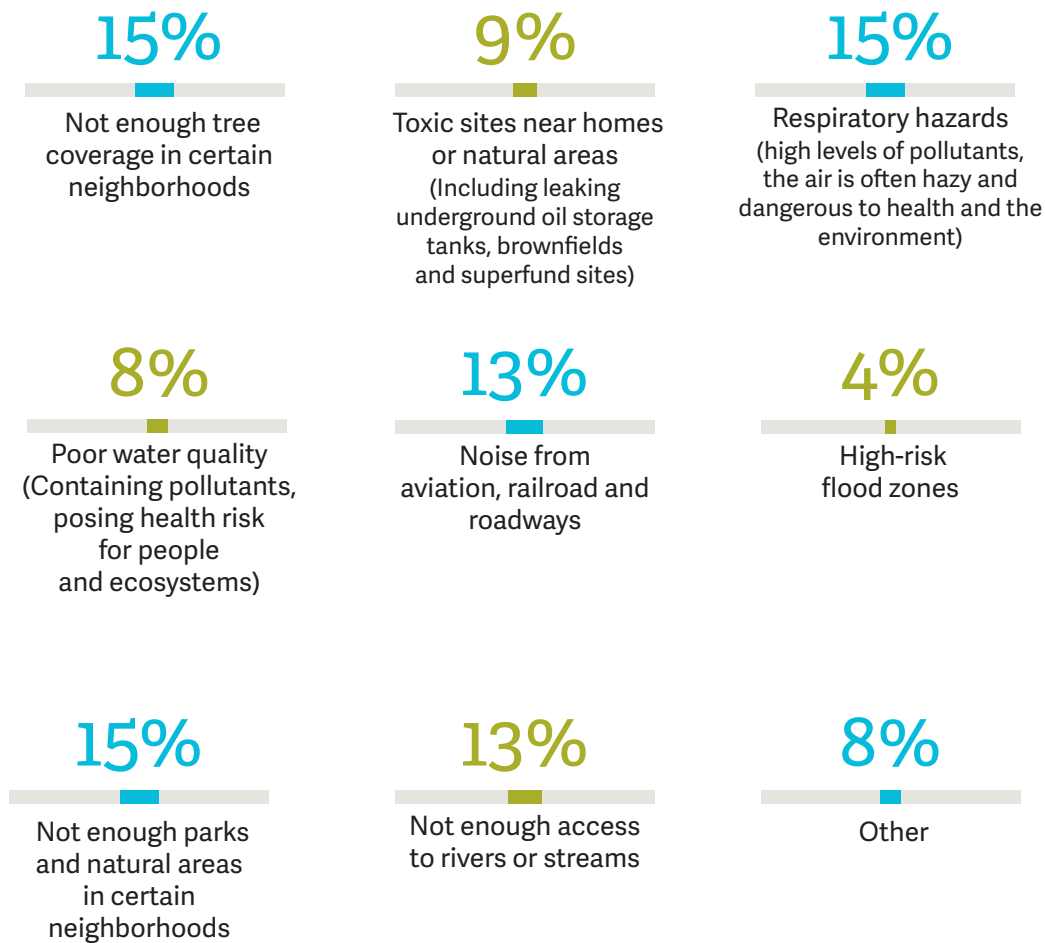
9. What language or dialect is used most in your home?



10. How do you describe your sexual orientation?



11. Which of the following environmental issues do you find to be most pressing in your community, based on your own experience and knowledge?
(Select all that apply)



Insights from qualitative methods

The following insights are derived from the community sessions and intended to provide perspective into how community members understand and experience parks, nature, and the environment before presenting an in-depth analysis of the session findings.



Community members want to see themselves and their communities represented in outreach materials that are intended to gain their engagement.



Children are the embodiment of hope and symbolize the future for BIPOC communities, and families are eager to engage with the content they learn and the knowledge they bring home. Children are an avenue to inform families about Metro, as well as the programs, services, and amenities available.



Opportunities for social interactions as well as the mental health benefits derived from accessing nature were two of the main propellers for community members to further engage with nature areas.



Participants report visiting parks and engaging in outdoor activities to be active or reduce stress, and for the sake of their children and family.



Engagement with the outdoors and outdoor activities has become associated with a high socioeconomic status, high quality of living, and perceived as a predominantly white activity that may seem unrealistic for some BIPOC communities.



There is a lack of awareness about Metro and Metro's work and role. There is a need for Metro to continue investing in brand awareness with culturally responsive messages that explain what Metro is and the services offered.



Overarching session findings

1. Community needs index



SENSE OF SAFETY

BIPOC communities do not feel safe in nature because they have been the subject of violence, intimidation, and threats while in nature. Participants in all sessions expressed a sense of fear, discomfort and feeling unwelcome when visiting local parks and nature areas. Some have perceived themselves as being judged or feared by other visitors, while others fear potential harm towards them and their families when visiting natural areas. This in turn discourages many from visiting parks, particularly those they are not familiar with. The presence of houseless camps exacerbates this issue. Most BIPOC communities enjoy parks because of their families, and they don't want to expose them to potential harm.



AMENITIES

Many seek to see increased access to amenities, such as family restrooms, tables, and potable water to provide better access for families and people with disabilities.



ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Information regarding local parks and nature areas, while available, has not been accessible to many communities. Participants expressed a need for a centralized platform available at parks and on a virtual platform that contains information such as hours of operations, information on native tribes, plant species, and maps with clear accessibility and amenities information.



COMMUNITY AND FAMILY EVENTS

Access to parks is vital to celebrate various cultures and traditions. Parks have become an essential place where tradition and cultures are shared and observed, especially when houses and apartments do not have the capacity to host big family and community gatherings. Most participants found motivation in the social aspect of visiting parks. Engaging with the outdoors helps them spend time with their family and is seen by many as a cost-effective option. Participants expressed the desire to see community and family events and activities that highlighted different cultures hosted in local parks and nature areas to help draw the community closer together and encourage the exploration of new areas.



LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION

Visitors expressed a desire to have diverse linguistic representation in the information published about local parks and nature areas. Offering information in different languages would help diverse communities feel welcomed and be a step towards bridging access to communities with limited English proficiency.



2. Access to nature index



SAFETY & HOUSELESS COMMUNITY

Visitors want to feel safe in the parks they visit; fear of unsafe conditions often deters them. The increasing presence of the houseless population is one factor deterring many out of fear they might be attacked, particularly those who identify as women. Community members have also been concerned about the littering found in park since as some items such as needle have the potential to be dangerous. This along with increasing violence and vandalism in their neighborhoods, especially on the east side of Portland, has left many feeling like they must travel further than their local area to find safe parks; especially when taking their families.



TRANSPORTATION

Many parks are difficult to access due to the lack of public transportation and parking, handicap-specific parking spots in particular, as many parks have not been able to keep up with the demand for parking. Some parks are also hard to access with public transportation, either because public transportation routes to parks are unreliable or because the parks are not located near any bus stops or light rail stations. Since many live long distances from natural areas, improved transportation is of further importance.



COST OF ACCESSING NATURE AREAS

Affordability of parks and parking often poses a problem for communities, especially for communities with large families, children, or those on low income. Beyond the cost, participants expressed a sense of elitism that is felt when it comes to participating in outdoor activities. Many find it challenging to obtain seasonal passes because they do not understand how to procure them or because the cost is too high for them to pay. Additionally, some parks provide activities or events that are not always affordable and providing coupons or family discounts for event costs and park fees incentivize low-income communities.



MAINTENANCE OF LOCAL PARKS

Visitors are also deterred by dirty parks; this is a significant concern as many parks face a large build-up of trash due to negligence by both visitors and the growing houseless population. Participants encouraged Metro to keep parks cleaner or create programs to enlist volunteers and locals to help keep the parks clean.

3. Flood risk index



LOCAL DRAINAGE AND BUILDUP

Participants expressed regular issues with local drainage systems on roads and parks, particularly during the rainy season, which many attributed to the lack of maintenance. Heavy rain and leaves can make it more difficult for people to get around roads, sidewalks, and parks. Many felt that the public transportation services offered were ineffective ways to travel because drop off areas were often affected by local drainage and buildup. Participants attributed the difficult terrain of bus stops near parks to inefficient drainage following heavy rainfall, which often leads to flooded streets, and buildup.



4. Environmental burdens index



EXTREME WEATHER

Many community members, especially those with lower income, have difficulty accessing adequate air conditioning or heating systems leaving them vulnerable to extreme temperatures. Many also don't know how to navigate the snow and icy conditions in winter. Community members shared that this leaves many families and housing units unfit to effectively fight the heat and utility expenditures high, especially in low-income housing units which do not seem designed to reduce energy consumption.



TREE COVERAGE

Community members believe that an increase in tree coverage would be key in helping to provide shade, combat pollution, and bringing nature back to areas that are becoming increasingly developed. Participants noted that in neighborhoods with a larger presence of communities of color there tends to be fewer trees providing natural shade, and further encouraged Metro to focus on these areas when distributing trees.



AIR QUALITY

As wildfires increase, respiratory hazards have become more common over the years. The concentration of smoke and ash from seasonal wildfires often makes it hard to breathe during fire season, requiring many to wear masks or acquire air filtration systems. However, these are difficult for many to obtain due to the financial burden it poses for many families and lack of availability when needed, leaving many without protection from these respiratory hazards.



WATER QUALITY

Participants worry about the water quality in greater Portland as contamination could make it unsuitable for drinking. One particular concern involves the toxicity levels of stormwater affecting the health of the whole community — since the quality of drinking water is often affected by local rivers overflowing. Additionally, low water quality has forced some neighborhoods to rely on bottled water, creating additional monthly expenses for people living there.

Affinity group-specific findings

Latinx community

Latinx Indigenous community

Black and African American community

Asian American and Pacific Islander community

BIPOC community - general

Community members with disabilities



Latinx community

When coordinating visits to local parks and nature areas food was a crucial component of the activity due to the familial nature of the outings, making weekend park visits a more coordinated effort than weekday visits.

Participants expressed confusion surrounding the concept of reserving tables or spaces in their local parks. Some participants shared experiences of being kicked out of a table at their local park after setting up their family breakfast. Participants sought to learn more about these processes to ensure they and their families would not have to go through such negative experiences.

Many people feel that placing parks near unsafe facilities, or using products with harmful chemicals and toxins, such as fertilizer and weed killers, in parks could potentially harm visitors, cause future health risks, or trigger allergies for vulnerable communities.

Latinx Indigenous community

Some participants expressed some inherent distrust of Metro's intentions to apply any insight from these community listening sessions. They believe that Metro does not have enough direct contact with the communities they say they are trying to serve and that in the past, when sessions such as these have been convened, little if any change has been seen.

Many recommended offering easily accessible educational materials to help people understand how to care for their local parks, combat climate change, and promote local parks and outdoor activities available to the public. Such outreach should also be produced in several languages to offer accessibility to larger audiences.

A significant number of participants do not have parks within walking distance from their houses. This is especially a problem for those who lack private transportation.

Many participants work long hours or multiple jobs that leave them very little time to enjoy parks before it gets dark, or at all because of the hours that parks are open. Lighting up these parks would enable those with long work hours easier access to the parks themselves and make it easier to keep them open for longer.

Many participants expressed not feeling safe when walking to access local parks due to the lack of sidewalks. Families noted that they do not often feel safe having their kids walk or play so close to an open road and encouraged developing sidewalks in local neighborhoods.

Those who live in housing complexes have reported that their parking lots' drains tend to get clogged with leaves, flooding the housing complex, and making it difficult to go out at times. Others report local parks flooding, which often causes the rotting of gardens and plants, affecting the cleanliness of the park.

Potential toxic sites near their local parks are of concern for participants. One such park is located near a glass factory which causes it to feel very contaminated; participants are worried about potential health hazards. Participants also expressed concern over the state of the Columbia River which many report to be contaminated by oil and waste products.

City regulations for planting trees were also mentioned as a concern. One participant stated that the city required her neighbor to cut down the tree in front of his house but then would not allow him to plant another on his property. This is a problem, they say, as it restricts people from being able to plant trees and help take care of the lack of tree cover themselves. They suggest imposing more lenient laws on the issue or working together with the community to find where trees can be planted so that they too can help take care of their communities.

Black and African American community

Several participants worried that increasing access to parks and nature areas might lead to further issues, such as further gentrification and displacement of their community.

Participants are worried about the health of their family and community with their everyday needs overshadowing playing at parks.

Lack of information or awareness of parks and outdoor recreational activities is a barrier for this community. Many participants stated they would like to go out but a lack of exposure to opportunities or events prevents them. A few also said that traditionally these activities have been viewed as “white people stuff,” and that social stigma against going outdoors has left many with underlying anxiety about going out into nature. Increased outreach towards this community by community members who identify as Black or African American, and increase access to information, could help to begin bridging these gaps.

Long-distance travel or lack of secure transportation deters many from traveling to parks and natural areas. While Portland has many parks that allow their population close and easy access to natural areas this is not a reality for all communities. Compared to other parts of the city, participants have noticed a lack of green areas on Portland’s east side. They have also noted that they do not feel safe accessing public transportation and that many must go long distances to find good trails and safe parks. This limits the accessibility of those areas, especially for those who lack private means of transportation.

While flooding is not the biggest barrier experienced by this community it still plays a substantial role in affecting this community’s neighborhood quality and commute during the rainy season. Specifically, participants noted that Lombard Street and large parts of Portland’s east side flood every year due to leaves clogging the drainage system; this also causes cars to drive through puddles and splash those walking along sidewalks.

A small percentage of participants stated that noise pollution is an issue for them. Whether from proximity to airports, large roads and freeways, or constant policing in their areas; they believe that an increase in tree cover and foliage would help solve this issue, at least partially.

Asian American and Pacific Islander community

Parks are used for many different events within families or communities

Potlucks, picnics, hot pot, and family gatherings are great ways to be with family and friends during a nice day. Family walks or dog walking helped participants remain motivated and healthy after the pandemic.

Participants expressed fears of hate crimes and racism when visiting parks. Participants have also noticed drug users and smokers when visiting parks, causing them to travel farther to parks where they feel safer, which tend to be in more affluent neighborhoods.

Oregon is a rainy state that experiences almost constant rainfall; this along with the blockage of stormwater drains in the city and melting snow and ice in the winter has previously caused the overflow of raw sewage. Flooding has also caused some participants to be left without power for up to two weeks.

BIPOC community - general

Housing access and housing stability were highlighted in the session. Housing was considered more important within some communities than nature access due to the lack of affordable housing they are currently experiencing. Some noted that many abandoned buildings or properties could be used for new housing.

Many participants shared that there are little to no easily accessible parks near their homes. Some stated It's a luxury to have a park within walking distance from their home. The closest parks are school parks or small playgrounds for children which are often not well maintained.

Climate change has increased the temperatures in many of our local rivers and communities. This has caused salmon to stop spawning in these rivers during their natural cycle, and has impacted local communities' access to local foods due to their limited availability and increased cost.

Community members with disabilities

Many feel that parks are often not designed through an accessibility lens, making it difficult for those with disabilities to access nature. Many participants feel that their community has been disregarded when it comes to designing public parks or facilities as many are not often accessible, do not meet accessibility standards, or are not designed with their needs in mind.

Changes such as increasing disabled parking, allowing people to rent terrain appropriate wheelchairs in necessary areas (beaches, and parks with difficult terrain or gravel), and making park layouts more accessible have been suggested. Along with ensuring bridge railings are spaced appropriately, that covered rest areas and park benches are available at appropriately spaced distances throughout these natural areas, and that facilities such as restrooms are accessible for those with disabilities; particularly those who use wheelchairs.

It is important to make sure that park paths and trails are smoothly paved since sand, gravel, and rocks make it difficult for those with wheelchairs, walkers, and canes to maneuver. This would help many navigate better and feel more secure in unfamiliar areas. Similarly, facilities and amenities' accessibility is typically limited by its size, schedule in which it is open, and cleanliness.

One proposed change involves changing park rules to reflect the wide variety of cultural backgrounds in park visitors. Since those who use and visit parks are often very diverse, many agree that rules involved when accessing green spaces can often conflict with cultural backgrounds and traditions of different communities, and thus wish to see culturally responsible changes.

There is also a need for the resources on parks and trails to include accessibility information. Many participants shared that an integral part of planning park visits is knowing whether the park is accessible or not. At the moment, the surest way of getting this information is to visit the parks themselves and judge accordingly. While information is available by Google Maps, social media, and word of mouth many often find those methods incomplete at best and unreliable at worst. There is a need for parks to include descriptions of the terrain, facilities, accessible entrance points, and any other aspects that could both hinder and aid those with disabilities.

The increase in Oregon wildfires highlighted ineffective evacuation systems in place, with many people stating that the system needs to be more orderly and accessible for people with a disability to be evacuated in cases of emergency. People with disabilities should also be considered as many live alone and evacuation for them can be difficult or dangerous without equipment or adequate transportation that some might not have access to.

Respiratory hazards can be dangerous for those living with disabilities. As Oregon's fire season becomes more active, the smoke has become more invasive. This along with increased air pollution in Portland, due to development projects, has caused a lot of people to refrain from going outside. However, it is also a large concern for those with preexisting respiratory issues and health conditions. Many participants worry about the health of their community and the amount and accessibility of resources in place (such as access to air filters and hospitals) to help those who might be negatively affected.

As more and more people migrate to Oregon and the city becomes more urbanized traffic and area population have increased increasing noise pollution. This has had a negative impact on those with sensitive hearing or sensory processing difficulties as the amount of noise can become overwhelming.

Community recommendations

Reimagine parks as venues for cultural events and festivals. Cultural events set in nature can draw those who usually do not visit the outdoors. Participants have encouraged the addition of murals and community events that cater to BIPOC communities and outreach to BIPOC communities on behalf of parks. Participants stressed the importance of having a safe space for communities to gather and celebrate traditions, particularly the Black and African American communities. With the growing gentrification of historically Black neighborhoods in Portland many expressed that their community has become scattered, diminishing their community presence.



Hire more diverse staff that reflects the diversity in the community to help visitors feel welcome and safe visiting local nature areas.



Facilitate access to rent family and accessibility related equipment for outdoor activities at a reduced cost at local parks and nature areas.



Subsidize or provide free transportation options for low-income families and individuals. Work with other agencies such as TriMet and other ride-share companies and bus charters to offer low-cost transportation rides to low-income families, especially people with disabilities. Provide free admission for first-time visitors or families. Include one summer weekend where parks are free and heavily invite BIPOC communities to visit and enjoy.

Design culturally responsive marketing campaigns that reflect the communities Metro is attempting to reach.

Signage and ads for open parks and nature should include pictures of BIPOC and images that indicate that these spaces and activities are inclusive. Include words in different languages in signage such as a Metro welcoming sign at parks' entrance.

Name park areas with other cultural names of notable individuals or names of animals.



Increase the amount of lighting in parks and trails to increase visibility and safety for park visitors.

Find **long-term solutions** to houseless camping at the parks.

The local weather makes it difficult for people to enjoy parks year-round, as cold winters mean fewer people are willing to risk the elements to go outside. One solution suggested by participants is to create **additional covered areas** in parks so that children and visitors can enjoy outdoor activities with a measure of cover from the elements.

Depave land to expand nature parks and **increase access to parks within neighborhoods.**

Develop a system or app to **help alert the city to flooding hazards**. This way, flooded areas can receive immediate assistance and the issue keep from lingering or becoming more hazardous.

Develop a **platform specifically dedicated to sharing accessibility information** for all local trails and parks to gather the information into one easy-to-navigate database. The website alltrails.com was recommended as a resource for participants and to Metro as a starting point for this potential project since the app describes parks' accessibility features.



There was a lot of uncertainty about Metro and its services from participants. Some overarching questions participants sought answers to were:

- How are Metro's different departments working together on the interconnectedness of outdoor conservation and outdoor recreation, along with issues such as housing access?

- How is Metro collaborating and coordinating between other governments at the county, city, and state level?

- How is Metro incorporating a racial justice and climate justice lens to its decisions (budget, staffing, & other big decisions)?

- Why doesn't Metro include them? How does Metro include BIPOC communities when funding is distributed and decisions are made? How can community members participate and make sure their voices are heard?

Phase 2 community sessions

In the second and final phase of the community engagement project, Lara Media Services (LMS) worked in tandem with Metro to coordinate five (5) 120-minute-long virtual community sessions. The sessions took place between January 19th and January 27th, 2022. The goals of the community engagement sessions in the second phase included:

- ➔ To report back on the findings compiled from the first phase of the project.
- ➔ To share in more detail the work of the parks and nature department and the goals and progress of the protect and restore land program.
- ➔ To inform community members how their priorities within the environmental justice data will be used in the draft target area refinement plans of the protect and restore land program.
- ➔ To invite community members to review the draft target area refinement plans and to provide feedback through an online survey.

Metro staff shared the themes that were identified during the phase one community engagement session, and provided an overview of the 2019 parks and nature bond measure, as well as the protect and restore land program. During the presentation, Metro staff highlighted how current programs and services are addressing some of the recommendations and priorities identified in the phase one discussions. Metro staff also shared how community input informed the environmental justice analysis to the draft target area refinement plans. Through the qualitative and quantitative data collected in phase one, it was clear that all environmental factors were of equal priority and should be weighed accordingly by Metro staff. This analysis will provide additional context when making recommendations to the Metro council and will support Metro's land acquisition work across greater Portland for years to come.

The sessions simultaneously provided an opportunity for community members to clarify any doubts, add additional insights, and connect directly with Metro staff. Metro staff shared the next steps of the bond refinement process and encouraged community members to review and provide feedback on the draft target area refinement plans through a virtual survey.

Each of the sessions engaged with diverse communities and were organized as follows:

Lara Media Services organized sessions

The following sessions were organized by LMS and facilitated by Metro staff. LMS coordinated participant recruitment, screening, and training along with session logistics, participant stipend processing for all participants, note-taking, and session analysis. Metro staff facilitated all community session discussions in the second phase. The sessions were conducted in English and simultaneous Spanish interpretation was available for participants, which was coordinated by Metro staff.

LMS led recruitment efforts, primarily by reaching out to community members who had participated in the first phase of outreach during the November sessions. LMS also recruited new participants for the session for people with disabilities through an extensive network of past participants and with the support of community partners, advocates, and leaders. Each new participant went through the same over-the-phone screening process as participants in the first phase to ensure that participants met the project's intended target audience.

Community Session - for BIPOC January 19th, 2022, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.	Community Session - for people with a disability or those who serve as the primary caretaker for someone with a disability January 26th, 2022, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.
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Metro organized community sessions

The following sessions were organized and facilitated by Metro staff. Metro staff coordinated participant recruitment, session logistics and language accessibility of the session by providing simultaneous Spanish interpretation. LMS staff attended the three (3) Metro-organized community sessions and supported as notetakers as well as in the processing of stipends for all participants following each session; except participants in the stakeholder session which consisted of external Metro partners.

Community Session - General January 20th, 2022, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.	35 individuals participated in the general community session.
Stakeholder Session January 24th, 2022, noon to 2:00 p.m.	30 individuals participated in the stakeholder session.
Community Session - for Black, Indigenous, and people of color, though all are welcome. January 27th, 2022, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.	36 individuals participated in the BIPOC community session.

A total of **101** individuals participated in the Metro organized sessions.

Participants

All participants who attended the LMS coordinated sessions met the pre-selected participant profile for the project, which focused on communities who have been historically excluded from the decision-making process at Metro and prioritized those interested in parks, nature, and environmental justice.

- ➔ The session for BIPOC community members who had previously participated in the first phase of engagement consisted of thirty-six (36) community members of diverse racial backgrounds.
- ➔ The session for people with disabilities and those who serve as primary caretakers for someone with a disability consisted of twenty-six (26) community members of diverse backgrounds.

During the second phase of engagement, all participants were offered a \$70 stipend for their time and insights. LMS used various methods to compensate focus group participants, including Venmo, Cash App, PayPal, gift cards, and physical checks.



Each session had participants from the three counties that Metro serves, including Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington County.



Findings overview

In the findings section, LMS has taken many of the themes and questions proposed by participants in the second round of community engagement and attempted to weave them into a narrative that helps Metro see and understand the participants' underlying desires, needs, questions, and gaps of understanding of Metro. It is worth noting that both new and returning community session participants lacked a clear understanding of Metro as an organization and its goals, as well as the process used by the parks and nature bond measure. Participants were particularly confused about how parks, nature areas, and community members are supported by Metro in a tangible way, as well as the bond's investment distribution process.

During the community engagement sessions, Metro staff directly addressed participants' questions and concerns while providing additional insights on Metro, the bond process, and its limitations. During the sessions, many expressed enthusiasm for future increase in accessibility to parks and natural areas in their neighborhood, as well as for being included in the process, and seeing Metro circle back to the community and continue to express interest in their expertise.



Phase 2 community sessions findings

Questions and concerns

- Several participants were curious about the involvement of BIPOC, particularly Indigenous community members, and other land conservation agencies in the Protect and restore program and the role they played in influencing the program's outcomes and proceedings.
- Many participants were concerned about how their opinions had impacted the decision-making process of land acquisition. Particularly requesting more specifications on the methods and processes used by Metro when acquiring, purchasing, and prioritizing land. Several also questioned the scope of the project, wanting to know the specific target area(s) and type of land that the protect and restore project was focusing on.
 - This included a wide range of questions of varying popularity throughout the focus group sessions, including: How does Metro reaches out to landowners to purchase land? What process determines property priority? What role do public stakeholders play in influencing sellers and land acquisition priorities? What is the budget for specific target areas, and does metro also use easements?
- Some participants advocated for the acquisition of specific properties they believed would further Metro's protect and restore land program. There was a slight misconception in participants as to the purpose of the question-and-answer portion of the meeting.
- Some participants questioned Metro's ability to guarantee that the land they plan to acquire will provide long-term protection, and requested more information about the legal frame, funding, and restoration processes Metro used in their protect and restore program.
- Many participants focused on the technical aspects of accessing the survey shared during the presentation and determining the type of feedback they should provide.




Points of interest

- Many participants expressed enthusiasm for the project's goals to preserve and restore more natural areas.
- Participants expressed enthusiasm for Metro's plan to translate park and trail signs into more languages.
- Participants were grateful for the opportunity to share their opinions and provide input as part of the bond refinement process. Many were also pleased that their past feedback from the November sessions had been considered.
- Many participants were interested in Metro's plan of action moving forward with this program and sought information on how to follow Metro's progress. Mainly to verify that their opinions and suggestions had been heard and implemented as participants often feel that their community needs and priorities are lost in the process and don't make an impact.



Community recommendations

Community member recommendations were largely focused on increasing accessibility through linguistic and visual resources to information about the target areas and refinement plans under the protect and restore land program. As well as considering the different needs and ages of the people consuming it; both in and out of the context of direct community engagement.

<p>Participants believe that Metros’ programs should focus on creating more access to and preserving natural areas within the inner city and the urban growth boundary.</p>		<p>Participants suggest that more information be made available and easily accessible to the public about parks and nature areas. Ecological and biological information on local wildlife could make these areas more accessible.</p>	
			
<p>Visual elements, such as maps, were very helpful during the presentation. Participants believe that more of these visual elements should be used in a wider range of Metro’s materials to allow for better understanding and more context on the protect and restore land program.</p>			
<p>● Participants recommended that more visual elements of the presentation should be included in the translated material, and/or that translated visual elements should be included in the presentation to support visual learners in processing the information.</p>	<p>● One participant suggested adding the presentation maps to the website for reference and context when looking at the plans.</p>	<p>● Another participant recommended adding in the ability to navigate both the site-specific and large geographic pieces to the website to paint a clearer overall picture of the context that the program is working in.</p>	<p>Participants commented that there are many other languages that could be included in future translations and translation materials for presentations. They also recommended that Metro also share the presentation information in Spanish, and in other languages when possible.</p>
			

Participants believe that the more interest the public, especially youth and young adults, has in the conservation and restoration of these natural areas the better the stewardship the youth will provide in the future. Many participants are currently unaware of or confused about the resources and services Metro can provide; due in part to overly complex or vague service summaries. To cultivate this interest, they recommended that Metro provide the public with more information on the project, its goals, and (when drafted) their plan moving forward.



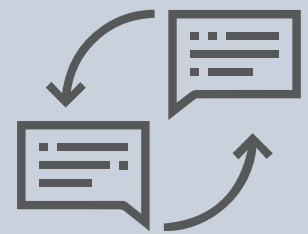
One participant recommended that Metro should share informational videos on their social media accounts with the same logistical information shared in these focus groups to make this information more accessible to the public.

Participants commented that having an interpreter is very useful for those with low English proficiency because automated subtitles don't work well in other languages. However, during the session the Spanish translation was hard to hear, and the presenter was talking too fast for the interpreter to keep up.



● Another participant suggested that information on the flora, fauna, and weather of the target areas be accessible to the public in multiple languages to increase awareness of how people can better protect the wildlife in these areas: especially information on native and endangered species in these regions.

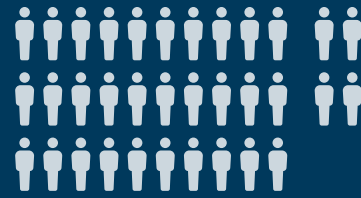
● One participant also commented that translators should not focus on translating the zoom chat as it is largely unnecessary.



Group-specific key findings

Community session - for BIPOC

Lara Media Services organized
January 19th, 2022
5:30 to 7:30 p.m.



34
Attendees

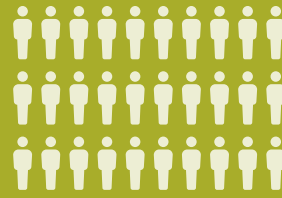
In the BIPOC session, findings ranged from overall lack of trust and confidence in Metro's ability to take their input and needs into consideration, to curiosity or confusion about specific elements not clearly mentioned in the presentation. Some also provided genuine suggestions about how to better meet their needs in the future.

- Due to past experiences some participants in this session did not trust that their opinions and suggestions for this project would be taken into consideration by Metro.
- Several participants were curious about the process Metro went through when choosing park names. One participant expressed that parks and nature areas are oftentimes viewed as sanctuaries by certain communities but are not often treated as such; they further suggested that Metro consider the symbolic and cultural value park names carry when selecting them.
- Several questioned if Metro would be compensating Indigenous people equitably throughout the process, and how their community would be considered in the development of the program policies and plan of action. One participant suggested that when it came to equitable compensation of communities, Metro should also take into account the value of their cultural knowledge, which in many cases pertains to the Indigenous communities' knowledge and understanding of restoring land, in addition to the emotional labor required of them.
- Some participants struggled with the idea of having public natural areas devoted to habitat and land restoration instead of parks or trails. A few participants asked questions about the type of infrastructure that would be built in these areas and questioned how the public would be able to navigate them without signs or trails.
- Participants wanted to know whether Metro was working with Clark County or other organizations outside their target areas and the urban growth boundary to protect land holistically.

- Participants were concerned about who would be held accountable if land acquired by Metro was misused, and about the individuals in charge of acquiring land.
- Several participants wanted more information about Metro's plans to create/increase biodiversity in their selected target areas through their protect and restore program. They believe that this aspect of the program should focus on protecting native and endangered species.
- One participant wanted to know if the protection and restoration work provided by Metro through this program also extended to the river on or adjacent to the properties they plan to acquire.
- Participants expressed some level of confusion surrounding the survey that Metro asked participants to fill out after the presentation to collect their feedback on specific topics.
 - Some wanted clarification on how to access the survey and the timeframe during which it would be available.
 - Many sought specifications about the type and level of detail of feedback they were able to share with Metro, as well as how they could know if their comments were taken into consideration.
 - Several others wanted to know if and/or what type of maps (environmental burden maps, habitat type maps, etc.) were available on the website, or if they would have to reference those used in the PowerPoint slides.

Stakeholder session

Metro organized
January 24th, 2022
Noon to 2 p.m.



30
Attendees

During the stakeholder session participants focused on land acquisition and environmental justice, as well as gaining clarity on the avenues stakeholders could use to review target area plans and provide their input.

- Some participants were concerned about the program's impact on environmental justice. They asked, what assumptions are made when developing their environmental justice reports? What number of identified areas are focused on ensuring that their and the program's environmental justice goals are met?
- One participant presented the opportunity for Metro to acquire West Hayden Island in the urban growth boundary.
- Another participant placed a strong emphasis on the upper reaches of Mt Scott Creek, and access to nature along Kellogg, Rinearson, and Boardman Creeks.
- A participant presented the possibility of a bond funding a currently ongoing project to greatly improve safe public access to Milwaukee's significant investment in park lands along the Willamette River: NCWC's work to remove Kellogg Dam.

Community session - for Black, Indigenous, and people of color, though all are welcome.

Metro organized
January 27th, 2022
5:30 to 7:30 p.m.



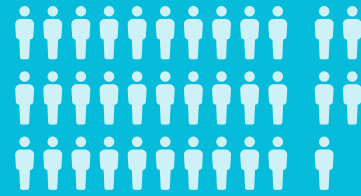
36
Attendees

Participants from Metro's BIPOC community session expressed concerns about the prioritization of land and projects, as well as Metro's use of the bond measure to delegate conservation priorities.

- Some participants were concerned that certain types of land such as Indigenous foraging grounds and beaver habitat were not being rightfully prioritized.
- One participant was anxious that Metro was using third-party organizations to serve as a justification for not engaging in conservation work as an organization.
- One participant was perplexed as to why recreation had been removed from the Multnomah Channel area's list of uses; his organization had advocated for the bond's passing particularly because it provides opportunities to improve access to nature for people close to an urban area, and they had already created about 25 miles of trails for recreational use in that area.

Community session - general

Metro organized
January 20th, 2022
5:30 to 7:30 p.m.



35
Attendees

In the general community session participants' focus was on access to nature; their expressions ranged from curiosity or confusion, to genuine suggestions regarding specific projects and properties, and the land acquisition process.

- Due to the bond's strong emphasis on access to nature, some participants questioned if this would mean the development of more formal access to, and connections between, Metro-owned properties; as well as what form those connections might take.
- Some participants questioned how prudent it is for Metro to begin allocating funds to buy new properties before completing previous bond initiatives. Participants worry that this will decrease the amount of funds allocated to current projects and delay, or potentially halt, their completion; or result in lower quality products due to Metro's split attention.
- A few participants were curious about the possibility of new cycling trails being created since Metro indicated that some of these properties would be recommended for off-road cycling, and that some targeted properties would include, or be connected to, lands that already support recreational trails and bike paths.
- One participant expressed their concern about the fact that inner-city communities lack a connection to wildlife and recommended that Metro prioritizes further investments in the inner city to bridge the gap.
- Participants were specifically focused on increased access to properties along the Tualatin River, as well as connecting the existing McCarthy Creek and North Tualatin Mountains properties to Tualatin Hill Park and their natural areas
- The Baxter and McCormick property was suggested to help expand the effect of Metro's current properties in that area.

- One participant pointed out that a big problem in the lower Willamette is that migrating salmon need a resting area about every one-fourth mile and that between Linton and Ross Island there aren't any rest areas. For Metro to maximize the return on their investment in the Clackamas River (and surrounding habitat), they need to help ensure that fish will survive to get there.
- Others questioned whether certain properties such as Kelly Butte, West Haven Island, and Fanno Creek watershed have already been considered in the refinement plan.
- One participant argued that Metro should support a project connecting the Albina Vision Community with restoration work on the Willamette River.
- One participant requested contact with Multnomah County officials to encourage the land-use hearing for McNamee Road area property off-road cycling usage to move forward.

Community session - for people with a disability or those who serve as the primary caretaker for someone with a disability.

Lara Media organized
January 26th, 2022
5:30 to 7:30 p.m.



26
Attendees

Community member comments revolved around accessibility for those with disabilities and ensuring the long-term sustainability of Metro's funding.

- Participants were particularly grateful that Metro has made it a priority to provide additional resources where parks' accessibility features will be listed.
- One participant suggested that benches and rest areas be listed on trail and park maps so that people with disabilities (specifically those with a hard time breathing) can plan their hikes based on that information.
- One participant was particularly worried that funding might fall through for priority projects if there was not enough funding to continue restoration efforts.

Acknowledgment

Lara Media Services thanks Metro for this opportunity to connect with the hearts and minds of community members who identified as BIPOC, have a disability or serve as the primary caretaker for someone with a disability in the Portland Metro Area. From doing this outreach and research, it is evident that there are many opportunities in the future waiting to unfurl.

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Rowland-Shea, J., Doshi, S., Edberg, S., & Fanger, R. (2020, July 21). The Nature Gap: Confronting Racial and Economic Disparities in the Destruction and Protection of Nature in America. Retrieved from [Americanprogress.org: americanprogress.org/article/the-nature-gap/](https://americanprogress.org/article/the-nature-gap/)