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MARIN COUNTY PARKS VISITORS STUDY REPORT

Part II,
Focus Group
Results



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MARIN COUNTY
PARKS
PRESERVATION · RECREATION



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INTRODUCTION

Marin County Parks Department (MCP), in partnership with San Francisco State University (SFSU), pursued a two-part visitor use/non-use study utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods to better understand the park-related needs of Marin County's transforming population. This report reflects Phase II whereby two focus groups were conducted. The overall purpose of the study was to assess visitor satisfaction, motivation, and future demands; and, provide new data for potential decision making. The study also aimed to offer recommendations for park programs, facilities, policies, and innovative ways to enhance community engagement and access.

The first phase of the study consisted of an intercept survey on-site at nine parks, six preserves and two bike/walking paths where use levels and visitor characteristics were recorded. SFSU helped to develop the survey questionnaire of park visitors and all results have been analyzed (see P. Tierney report). Additionally, this report represents procedures and results of two focus group interviews held in January and February 2016 with a goal of engaging in more in depth conversations with Marin County residents.

For more information about the purpose and scope of the research contact Kevin Wright, Government and External Affairs Coordinator for Marin County Parks, at (415) 497-3553 or kwright@marincounty.org. Questions about the survey, sampling, or methods for collection of information, or data analysis, can be directed to Dr. Patrick Tierney, professor and principal investigator (415) 338-2030 or via email ptierney@sfsu.edu. Questions about the focus group process and findings, as depicted in this Phase II report, can be addressed to Dr. Nina Roberts, professor and research associate at (415) 338-7576 or by email at nroberts@sfsu.edu.

Special thanks to community partners

This project could not have been possible nor successful without the help and support of the several important individuals. Thank you is not enough to convey appreciation to our two community partners: First, Anita Renzetti, Director of Program Innovation at "Whistlestop", Marin Senior Coordinating Council, of San Rafael. Their tagline is indicative of the valuable support Anita provided in helping get this group interview set up: *"We share in the responsibility to ensure that our community's older adults are able to age with dignity, independence and grace."*

Second, Florencia Parada, Health Hub Supervisor for Marin Community Clinics, was an amazing ally in this effort and her communication as a trusted leader in the Canal neighborhood, and beyond, was huge. Joining forces in service, we're grateful to Jeannette Sotomayor from the Albert Boro Community Center for hosting this other important focus group with Latino residents of the Canal neighborhood of San Rafael. We are indebted to the Spanish language Interpreter, Maria Aguila, and the two stellar child care providers Maria Rodriguez and Maria Victoria, who kept the children occupied and happy during our interviews.

METHODOLOGY

Phase II Overview

The second part of this study aimed to capture the experiences of non-users and underserved residents in order to identify substantial barriers to visitation and provide insight for increasing use and park access by these communities. This was comprised of two focus groups in San Rafael representing two distinct communities: Aging in Place/Senior community and the Hispanic/Latino community in the Canal neighborhood.

Preparation

Development of Collateral Materials & Procedures

SFSU created the materials needed to successfully set up and facilitate two focus groups such as focus group recruitment fliers, focus group protocol, and interview questions. The MCP department reviewed the materials, provided feedback and input before the materials were finalized, distributed, and implemented accordingly. The recruitment flier was used by community leaders to enlist participants for the focus groups. MCP provided SFSU with materials to distribute at the focus groups (i.e., park maps, event fliers, program brochures).

SFSU also developed a participant sign-in sheet, log for signatures acknowledging receipt of gift card, and sign-up sheet for MCP (e.g., anyone requesting a copy of the final report or wish to be added to mailing list). Other materials used during the focus groups were name tags, MCP brochures, map from One Tam, and Sports Authority gift cards (purchased). SFSU also ordered food from Panera Bread to provide dinner and refreshments at both of the focus groups. Finally, each host organization received a modest facility use fee for providing a space and Whistlestop senior center requested additional financial support to help recruit participants.

Focus Groups

The two focus groups were conducted on January 28th and February 11th, 2016, in two separate communities targeted by MCP: Canal neighborhood (Latino) and the “aging in place” (senior citizens) population. MCP felt that these communities have been previously underserved and underrepresented in MCP's planning and services provided, and believed the opinions and motivations from these groups could benefit future planning of the county's park system and services.

What occurred, why, and how?

A focus group is a small group of eight to twelve people, ideally, led through an open discussion by a skilled moderator. The group needs to be large enough to generate rich discussion but not so large that some participants are left out or few people dominate the conversation. Additionally, the groups should be homogenous as homogeneity levels the playing field and reduces inhibitions among people who come together for the purpose of a group interview.

Focus groups can reveal a wealth of detailed information and deep insight. When well executed, a focus group creates a welcoming environment that allows participants to feel at ease and

encourages thoughtful, honest answers providing added meaning to question responses. As a valid methodology, focus groups were chosen as the primary approach to elicit the thoughts, feelings, experiences, and recommendations of traditionally underrepresented communities in Marin County. In addition, focus groups have the ability to generate rich qualitative data that comes from individual participants engaging in deep conversation, potentially capturing themes that would be missed from other, more quantitative, methods. Furthermore, focus groups foster a safe place for participants to be open and honest, particularly among people who use English as a second language.

The SFSU research associate (“investigator”) was the focus group moderator who nurtured disclosure in an open and honest format. The goal was to generate a maximum number of different opinions, experiences, attitudes, and ideas from as many people in the group in the time allotted. As reflected in the protocol that follows, the focus groups were structured around a set of carefully predetermined questions but the discussion was free-flowing. That is, participant comments stimulated and influenced the thinking and sharing of others.

Recruitment: Where did participants come from?

This study used a convenience sampling method that enlisted the leaders of community organizations to recruit focus group participants. MCP department initially sent out an introductory email to community leaders that could best assist with recruitment. SFSU team followed up with a more detailed email and took over the preparations from there. Community organizations were prioritized based on willingness to help and recommendations from MCP department.

Two familiar public settings, in a convenient location, with ample parking and public transportation lines were arranged. Whistlestop, a senior center in San Rafael, was the host for the senior citizen focus group and their staff recruited participants from the senior center to take part in the focus group. And, the Health Hub recruited participants from the Canal neighborhood for the second focus group and, for this process, child care was requested and provided as well as a Spanish language translator hired to be inclusive. (See Appendix A for recruitment fliers designed by the SFSU team).

Host organizations were expected to recruit 12 participants. In return, host organizations were compensated for their time, effort, and providing a space for the focus group. In addition, focus group participants were rewarded with a \$50 gift card to Sports Authority as an incentive to participate. Additionally, participants were informed a dinner-type meal would be provided and thirty minutes was allotted for general socializing (e.g., “meet and greet”) prior to the official start time of the interview process.

Focus Group Protocol

The focus group protocol used for this study was created by the SFSU team and included a description of the overall study, participant guidelines, focus group questions, and logistical information. Focus group questions were developed by both SFSU and MCP teams based on models from prior studies and questions that were desired from the MCP team (staff and key project partners).

A set of two-tiered questions were developed in which Tier 1 questions were the priority and focused on visitors' frequency of park use and experience, level of comfort and safety within parks, how information is obtained about the parks, environmental literacy, program/facility recommendations, constraints or barriers to accessing parks, importance of health, and general recommendations. If additional time remained, Tier 2 questions were asked, which involved how participants received health care in their neighborhoods and maintenance of the parks. The final focus group protocol and questions used during the study are available in Appendix B.

Data Collection

Two focus groups ($n = 26$ total participants) were held in January and February of 2016 as reflected in Table 1:

Table 1. Focus group details

| <i>Host Organization</i> | <i>Location</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Total Participants</i> |
|---------------------------|---|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Whistlestop Senior Center | Whistlestop San Rafael | January 28, 2016 | $n = 14$ |
| Health Hub | Al Boro Community Center at Pickleweed Park in San Rafael | February 11, 2016 | $n = 12$ |

As participants arrived at the location, SFSU team collected basic demographic information and primary mode of transportation for each participant. This information was administered on a brief questionnaire as part of the participant sign-in sheet before the focus group began.

The investigator facilitated the interview process using the protocol and questions (Appendix B) and established comfort during meal time as well as through a general ice breaker question when the focus group commenced to get the group thinking about parks and park use or non-use. All prepared questions were asked within the 90-minute time allotted and the investigator was responsible for getting all participants to talk and fully explain their answers using helpful probes (e.g., “Can you say more about that?”; “Help us understand what you mean”; and “Can you give an example?”). The investigator demonstrated active listening and occasionally paraphrased long or ambiguous comments, or sought clarification for analysis purposes and/or summarized responses for the whole group.

The research assistant recorded the focus group using smartphone app “SmartVoice Recorder” and took supporting notes on a laptop in case the recorder failed or any parts of the tape were inaudible. Body language or other subtle relevant clues were recorded via typed notes. Both digital audio files were uploaded to Google sites for storage and back up.

At the end of each focus group, participants were thanked and each person received the incentive (gift card) that required a signature on the receipt log for SFSU accounting purposes. If any participants wanted to receive the final report, or expressed interest in being put on a MCP mailing list, the SFSU team passed around another sign-up sheet for them to provide their contact information.



Data Analysis & Transcription

The focus groups were captured via audio and the research assistant took notes on a laptop, while the investigator moderated, and the interview was then transcribed verbatim. The research assistant transcribed the audio files of the group interview at Whistlestop (English) and an independent translator was hired to translate and transcribe the audio from the focus group conducted in the Canal neighborhood (predominantly monolingual Spanish).

In order for all participant comments to be understandable and useful, they were boiled down to essential information using a systematic and verifiable process. Hence, the research assistant completed a manual content analyses process by first identifying question content categories and emerging themes with groupings entered into a Word document. Subsequently, common themes among both groups were then extracted and explored. Participant demographics are provided in Appendix C. Furthermore, major findings from participants' comments are summarized in the results section that follows and includes a series of direct quotes highlighting relevant responses.

The investigator completed the final examination of the audio files and transcriptions for each focus group. Results were reviewed and synthesized to ensure accuracy of themes and relationship of supporting quotes.



RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This exciting interview process revealed many valuable findings. And, important to note is that, at times, participants may be thinking about, and referring to, San Rafael city parks. This is not uncommon to occur within focus group interviews. The parks literature explains that many people do not differentiate between park agencies. This further accentuates the need for park agencies to work together; and, this reveals the increasing importance to share such park use/non-use interview results with other park managers as well.

EMERGING THEMES: AGING IN PLACE/SENIORS

Host: Whistlestop | 930 Tamalpais Ave. | San Rafael | 415.456.9062



Setting: The first focus group took place at a senior community center near Downtown San Rafael. The room had multiple tables put together to make one large table near the center of the room where participants gathered around. Catering for dinner was provided by Panera Bread. The participants were recruited by staff at the community center. Some of the participants knew each other previously. In total, there were 14 participants present. Two participants (#9 and 6) had to leave the focus group shortly before it was completed yet this did not affect the results.

Health and Well-Being

This group of participants were extremely concerned with their overall health and well-being. As their age increases, they are aware of their need to spend more time nurturing their health. Many of these participants frequent the parks often, at least once a week, in order to exercise and maintain their health. They also enjoy the stress relief they experience while appreciating the outdoors; they find this time to be an important form of relaxation. The parks have a special place in the lives of these participants and their overall health.

Common Themes:

- ❖ **Exercise often in parks, at least once a week**
- ❖ **Involved with other social groups that do physical activities (e.g., hiking, Zumba, bike riding, tennis)**
- ❖ **Find tranquility in parks**
- ❖ **Stress reliever**
- ❖ **Parks indicated as one of their favorite places to relax**

Table 2. Highlighted quotes describing health and wellbeing

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| <i>"I like to exercise and go walking with others, almost every day." (Female, White, age 72)</i> |
| <i>"It makes you feel better since you're away from all the pollution. It's energizing since we live by the ocean." (Female, retired, age 70)</i> |
| <i>"...I was thinking about "re-creation." I get "re-created" in some internal way just taking in the view and watching the waves on the bay, the birds, the butterflies, the flowers, it's like all of the crap that goes on can get out of the way." (Male, retired, age 72)</i> |
| <i>"I find being outdoors in park settings, not on the streets, is very de-stressing to hear the birds and just see trees and not have a lot of things around except for the trees and nature." (Female, retired, White)</i> |
| <i>"I usually go twice a day to walk along the marsh in Corte Madera. It's important to me." (Female, age 66, pre-school teacher)</i> |

Information and Communication

Overall, seniors aging in place like to be informed about the events taking place in their county parks. Some of them have experience using the Marin County Park website for information, while others were not very aware that this was available. This group enjoys learning about events and activities from brochures or circulars found in the local newspapers. They also rely on their senior center's newsletters for information. There were a few participants that still try to get information over the phone, but expressed that this was not as reliable a source as before and can be difficult to reach a live person. This group is always looking for activities and "things to do" since they have more free time than most other social groups; they expressed value and importance to be well-informed of what is available in their community. Many of the participants belong to groups that perform different activities and receive information about the parks from those groups.

Common Themes:

- ❖ **Receive information through local newspapers, community center newsletters, websites**
- ❖ **Eager to learn of activities, events in their community**
- ❖ **Often join social groups for special activities (e.g., photography, bird watching, foraging)**
- ❖ **Desire to learn more about natural environment**

Table 3. Selected statements highlighting information and communication

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| <i>"I just wanted to say, the Marin County Parks and Open Space website actually has a wonderful calendar, month-by-month. You can see three months ahead. And, you can do it by Ranger-led walks or by birding and all kinds of ways to look up information."</i> (Retired, age 81, female) |
| <i>"Newspaper articles, "Favorite Hikes." I'm always picking up brochures and looking at them."</i> (Retired, male, age 72) |
| <i>"Word of mouth, I'm a wanderer...or you know, from a friend."</i> (Female, age 72, musician) |
| <i>"I'm fascinated by how the environment is a community and the interactions of how one plant might support another plant's existence, and, of course, all of the plants and animals...how they assist each other in amazing ways."</i> (White male, retired, age 62) |

Barriers and Constraints

Senior citizens experienced several constraints related to their health and age. There are times when they do not have enough energy to frequent the parks as often as they used to, or cannot participate in the same activities as they did in the past. Many do not drive anymore and must rely on public transportation or carpool with others. They expressed a need for more available transportation to the parks from their neighborhood. Also, there was one participant who felt the events offered at the parks should be held earlier in the day since they cannot stay out as late as they used to. Many enjoy these events, but felt that they should not have to pay expensive fees to partake. Some participants even shared that these types of fees have kept them from attending some of the activities or immerse in amenities offered. Since this population is mostly retired and may not have replenishing income, they choose their expenses wisely and carefully.

Common Themes:

- ❖ **Don't have as much energy as they used to**
- ❖ **Cannot drive anymore so public transportation is important**
- ❖ **Time of events should be scheduled to accommodate everyone**
- ❖ **Fees relating to park events or activities should be minimal or non-existent**



Table 4. Quote highlights for barriers and constraints

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| <p><i>“It’s terrible trying to get around San Rafael if you don’t have a car. If you don’t live on the main strip and you don’t have a car, there’s no public transportation. And if you’re trying to get to another part of Marin, forget it! I have to walk a mile and a half to get to decent public transportation. I don’t drive, I can’t drive.”</i> (Mixed race female, age 72)</p> |
| <p><i>“When I was younger, I used to love to drive to West Marin and to Point Reyes Seashore, especially to Kehoe Beach and McClure’s. It’s a long drive. And then, it’s a very long walk to the beach. By the time you’ve done all that, you have to turn around and go back, then drive home. At 81, I don’t have the energy anymore to do that, but I would love to.”</i> (White female, retired)</p> |
| <p><i>“A lot of people do not have a car here. Unless a bus goes, I don’t go to it.”</i> (Female, age 72, does not own a vehicle)</p> |
| <p><i>“There could even be a modest charge, of say two dollars. But people can bring their kids there, they can have a picnic. People will come.”</i> (Male, age 76, self-employed)</p> |

Safety and Comfort

Generally, seniors expressed feeling welcome at their county parks. They spend an ample amount of time outdoors and had many positive experiences to share about the parks and the staff (when encountered). There were some instances that participants had experiences with other park users that prevent them from visiting certain parks more often. For example, there are some trails that allow both bikers and hikers on the trail. Due to some of the participant’s hearing ailments, they noted the ongoing example of having difficulty hearing a bike approaching them, which makes them feel unsafe.

This group of seniors expressed concern that they’ve seen other park users breaking park regulations without consequences, which also effected their level of safety at the park. Furthermore, some of the participants expressed that there was not enough information available on the website regarding accessibility of a particular park and/or trail. This made it difficult for them to plan ahead and know what to expect when visiting the park, which may have effected their safety and comfort at the park. The opinions from this group are similar to what is seen in national research of the senior community.

Common Themes:

- ❖ **User conflicts effect safety and comfort**
- ❖ **Enforcement of park rules and regulations desired**
- ❖ **Accessibility information not always available**



Table 5. Highlighted quotes describing safety and comfort

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| <p><i>“It’s unfortunate, but there really is a time when I’m walking the trails and I never know when a bike might be coming from behind me since I’m hard of hearing. I can’t hear the bike until he’s right there going past me. It’s scary when I think about it. I don’t want to go there as often if I have to worry about that.”</i> (Retired, male, age 72)</p> |
| <p><i>“By San Quentin, there’s a trail, there was kids there that looked like gangs. I was by myself so I was not feeling very safe.”</i> (White female, retired)</p> |
| <p>“There has been a couple times when I was out fishing and I encountered some people that made me a little uncomfortable. Nothing that made me alarmed enough to create a problem though.” (Male, age 67, retired)</p> |
| <p>“Too many people there drinking and smoking, we need more enforcement.” (Female, Latina, age 64)</p> |



**EMERGING THEMES:
CANAL NEIGHBORHOOD/LATINOS**

Host: Al Boro Community Center & Library | 50 Canal St. San Rafael | 415.485.3077

Setting: The focus group for the Hispanic/Latino population took place at the Al Boro Community Center and Library at Pickleweed Park. This is a local community center within the Canal neighborhood in San Rafael. The room was set-up with the tables arranged in a large square in the center of the room so participants could engage with each other. Catering was provided by Panera Bread. The participants were recruited by the **Health Hub**, mainly residents from the Canal community. Many of the participants knew each other either through their children or from other community events. In total, there were 12 participants present.

Safety and Comfort

Findings show safety was highly valued among this group of Latinos. Most of the participants grew up in another country that had high rates of crime and lack of enforcement. Now, living in a low-income neighborhood in California, such as Canal, brings forth memories of their past as well as similar insecurities felt during those times. While visiting Marin County parks, it seems to make them feel safer to see rangers enforcing regulations, especially when it comes to keeping the park clean. The parks are an important part of these participants’ lives and are acknowledged as places for their families to spend time together outdoors. Not only do they want to feel secure bringing their children to the parks, they also want to feel comfortable. The participants expressed that some of the parks they visited within the county are not regularly maintained, especially those parks that are nearby the Canal neighborhood. Additionally, they have experienced other park users not respecting the rules of the park and leave behind a mess. With the proper enforcement of the rules, the participants feel that their general level of safety will increase.

Common Themes:

- ❖ **Cleanliness of picnic areas (e.g., near and around tables, garbage receptacles)**
- ❖ **Level of safety around other park users**
- ❖ **Lack of enforcement of regulations**
 - **Alcohol and smoking regulations**
- ❖ **Other park users neglect to clean up after themselves and/or their pets**

Table 6. Participant statements describing safety and comfort

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|---|
| <p><i>“Lately, we noticed men gathering at the tables drinking, smoking, and playing cards. I don’t feel comfortable taking my children there and to see that kind of activity taking place at the park.”</i> (Female, age 37, homemaker)</p> |
| <p><i>“I like nature, it makes me feel relaxed and in peace with myself. However, this feeling could be better for everybody if people keep the parks clean.”</i> (Female Latina, age 38)</p> |
| <p><i>“Another point I want to bring up is the people that play cards at these parks, when nature calls, they don’t bother going to the bathroom; they do it right there! And of course, it smells during the day when the weather gets hot. That is something that needs to be brought up to the park rangers’ attention.”</i> (Female, age 36, homemaker)</p> |

Information and Communication

Overall, the Canal community does not feel well-informed about the county’s parks and programs offered. Some members from this Latino community are not technologically skilled and have trouble trying to navigate the parks’ website, especially if the information is not available in Spanish. Many of the participants relied on the news received from their children through their schools to hear about programs and events happening in the parks. Another resource of information for these participants is through word of mouth, either in person or on social media. There were several participants that expressed interest in learning more about the natural environment, but stressed that any signs, brochures, or programs offered should also be available in Spanish, whenever possible. These participants were not aware if this type of information was already accessible in Spanish.

Common Themes:

- ❖ **Best resource for information: schools, after-school programs, community centers**
- ❖ **Lack of information available in Spanish**
 - **On website**
 - **Fliers/brochures**
 - **Interpretive signs and trail markers**
 - **Posted rules, regulations, and what to do in an emergency**
- ❖ **Desire to learn more about natural environment and history of the area**

Table 7. Highlights of quotes for information and communication

| |
|--|
| <p><i>"I learn through my daughter's school, they usually send home all kinds of information on activities for the children and parents, too."</i> (Female, Latina, age 35)</p> |
| <p><i>"We like to share through Facebook about these new places with other parents where they, too, can take their children to have fun. It is all about keeping informed with friends and family members about other fun areas where they can take their families to explore."</i> (Latina, age 50, housekeeper)</p> |
| <p><i>"Learning about the trees are very interesting to me. Unfortunately, a lot of the signs are only in English. I would like to see them written in other languages like Spanish. For some of us, these signs do not benefit us because we have no clue what they are about."</i> (Female, age 40, community liaison)</p> |
| <p><i>"We like to take our children to learn about the natural environment there. It's beautiful! I want my kids to learn more about the area (Mt. Tamalpais). They are learning a lot when they hear the water, when they see the birds, the trees, the wonders that are around us."</i> (Female, Latina, age 50)</p> |
| <p><i>"I get my information through my school or some programs I go to. I think this community isn't really informed about these types of things because they don't get the word out here, they only tell the kids."</i> (Female, age 20, student)</p> |

Health and Well-Being

Staying fit and healthy is vitally important to this group of Latino individuals. They strive to exercise regularly and see the parks as a place to keep up their healthy habits. When they are not working, this community regularly visits the nearby parks for recreation and maintenance of their personal health. These participants enjoy taking their kids to the park to exercise by playing soccer or just simply going for a walk. The parks also allow this community to relax from their busy lives and relieve stress outdoors. Without access to the parks, this community feels that their overall well-being would be affected. They find the parks rejuvenating and cherish the time that they can spend with their families outside. This Latino community relies on the parks for many important family events such as birthdays, reunions, and celebrations. Results show many family memories are created at the parks.

Common Themes:

- ❖ **Any form of exercise is important (e.g., hiking, soccer, basketball, walking)**
- ❖ **Visit parks to relieve stress, relax, enjoy beauty of nature**
- ❖ **Important family events held at parks frequently**



Table 8. Highlighted quotes depicting health and wellbeing

| |
|---|
| <p><i>“It is better to go outside when it is very early in the morning. Sometimes, we get to see the sunrise. What a sight! I like to take my children to see it, and just by being outdoors, breathing the freshness of the morning, it makes you feel very good about yourself.”</i> (Male, age 36, contractor)</p> |
| <p><i>“After my kids get home from school, we also walk around the bay, it’s a beautiful sight! I like to do that often.”</i> (Female, age 38, homemaker)</p> |
| <p><i>“We have fun walking and exercising, while also learning about the animals that live in that area.”</i> (Male, Latino, age 62)</p> |
| <p><i>“I also like to go frequently to the parks with my kids during the weekends. I get a ride over there from other parents. I feel really good when we’re there, we get to know each other and see things. And also exercise at the same time.”</i> (Female, age 50, Latina)</p> |
| <p><i>“It’s really relaxing and it’s a stress reliever. Just helping the community; it’s great!”</i>- (Student, female, age 20)</p> |
| <p><i>“When we visit the parks after a busy week, we go to the parks because we want to relax. We have carne asada, play music and have fun. After being there all day, we return home more relaxed.”</i>- (Latina, age 35, female)</p> |

Barriers/Constraints

Some of the barriers explored among national research are reflected in this Latino group as well (e.g., time, transportation, fees, safety). Many of the participants only have one car per household; hence, findings show a heavy reliance on public transportation or carpooling with others. According to these participants, there is little to no public transportation to many of the county’s parks, or there is not enough information available to them about current public transportation options to these county parks. Another barrier expressed by this group was the cost to visit these parks. These participants do not have ample resources to be able to visit parks that charge fees regularly; they would rather spend that money on other essentials. Although when there is a special event, they do not mind paying fees to partake. They also expressed that having a better understanding of how these fees are allocated would make them feel better about such personal expenses. Most important, the lack of signage and county park information in Spanish has been a significant barrier for this community. It is difficult for them to learn about activities or understand the rules since the information is only in English.

Common Themes:

- ❖ **Need more public transportation from their neighborhood to county parks**
- ❖ **Sometimes, they cannot afford fees related to visiting parks on a regular basis**
 - **Only for special occasions (birthdays, family events, etc.)**
 - **Other personal / family expenses are more important than visiting parks**
- ❖ **Concern for safety in parks**
- ❖ **Time is a factor with priorities revolving around meeting core family needs first**

Table 9. Selected quotes representing barriers and constraints

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|--|
| <p><i>“I had gone to other parks with my children where I have been able to carpool with other families. I wish there were more areas like those around here so we won’t have to go that far.”</i> (Female, age 37, homemaker)</p> |
| <p><i>“Some parks charge, sometimes we don’t have many resources and we are trying to save. I don’t have a car, so that makes it hard.”</i> (Female, age 62, housekeeper)</p> |
| <p><i>“Some families would rather spend the money on new shoes for their children than fees to go to a park.”</i> (Female, age 38, homemaker)</p> |
| <p><i>“If it’s a reasonable cost, then I don’t care. If there is not a good reason why the cost exists, then I do not understand.”</i> (Latina, female, age 40)</p> |
| <p><i>“We’re having a hard time understanding why we have to pay to get in. I think if they educate people on why these expenses exist, it would make me feel better. For a family with children going to the park tends to get very expensive. However, if it’s for a special occasion like a birthday, then the costs aren’t that big of a deal to us.”</i> (Male, age 62, landscaper)</p> |
| <p><i>“One of the reasons people like to go to the mall is because there are many ways to access it through public transportation.”</i> (Female, age 38, housekeeper)</p> |

Aggregate Themes across both Focus Groups

Marin County is becoming increasingly diverse; each group, such as the Latino and senior communities, has different needs and expectations of what their county parks should provide for their respective community. Although there are many differences between these two groups, there were some similarities that became apparent from the focus group interviews held. Both groups believe the parks are an important place to relax and escape the bustle of city life. They see the parks as a way to relieve stress and improve their mental well-being. They also believe that the parks are a place to enhance their physical health, as well, and strive to include the parks in their day-to-day habits whenever possible.

The senior and Latino communities, both, rely heavily on public transportation during their daily lives; this means public transportation is a way to reach the county parks. One of the main reasons why these groups do not visit the parks more often is due to limited public transportation available to these locations and from their neighborhoods. Furthermore, one other aggregate finding that was also apparent is that these groups want to feel represented at their county parks. While analyzing the interview transcripts, it was difficult to find many common attitudes, experiences, etc. between these two groups. It was clear that these communities’ differing backgrounds played an integral part in their opinions and use of the parks. Improving the understanding of the various cultures that make up Marin County will only aid the parks department in reaching out, engaging, and increasing visitation across these communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are a direct result of the data analysis procedures:

1. Parks information needs to be bilingual (English and Spanish) to the greatest extent possible. In some cases, pictograms may be an effective communication tool when dealing with limited communications space and multiple languages.
MCP should prioritize where bilingual information is most important (e.g., maps, visitor information, rules and regulations). MCP should increase bilingual physical and educational activities serving a greater cross-section of the public.
2. Coordinate with local transit providers to look for opportunities to expand bus service to parks. MCP would have to weigh benefits versus costs. Park information (e.g., maps) that show all local and regional parks, regardless of jurisdiction, would educate residents about park opportunities nearest to them. This could possibly eliminate the need for transportation to parks they may be familiar with, but are farther away.
3. Many participants enjoyed completing work outside and would like to see Internet available at the parks through Wi-Fi access. Wi-Fi could also increase access to parks information on the web including free park outings, maps, and rules and regulations.
4. The aging residents would like accessibility information easier to find on the park websites, including trails, activities and/or events. The researchers found out that a plan is in the works to provide more accessible trails within the county system. This information needs to be promoted county-wide so residents are aware that their needs will be met at some point in the future. (Source/article: <http://bit.ly/21VpY4P>).
Note: This is currently in the works by MCP through their “Inclusive Access Plan” – more information: <http://bit.ly/1qtbywQ>
5. Exercise is important to residents of San Rafael. Many frequent their local gyms and would like to see information about park events and activities visible there. Some even suggested that it would be a great idea to partner with these gyms for special events.
6. There are several computer apps available that help inform people about events and activities happening in their neighborhood. It is suggested for MCP to become immersed with these apps. Examples:
 - a) “Next Door” <https://nextdoor.com> – “The private social network for your neighborhood.” One of the best ways to stay in the know about what’s going on in specific neighborhoods—“There are so many ways our neighbors can help us, we just need an easier way to connect with them.”
 - b) “Meetup” <http://www.meetup.com/> – According to their promotion, “makes community real”. Their app helps locals find groups of people meeting up in real life who share similar interests. This is a premier way to find out “what’s happening near you”. People meetup around the things that matter most to them. “Meetups are neighbors getting together to learn something, do something, share something...”
Note: Both apps are growing in popularity including relationship to posts about park use, activities, events, and more.

7. There are frequent park clean-up days that occur at various county parks in order to keep the parks safe and maintained. The Canal neighborhood does not have many county parks within close proximity (walking or short drive) and must rely on their neighborhood parks, some of which are not well-maintained or patrolled regularly. One way to increase awareness of county parks is to partner with city parks and host joint clean-up days in the Canal neighborhood parks. This would provide an opportunity for MCP to let these communities know about the county parks and also show that the county cares about their residents regardless of what form of government is overseeing their parks.

The theme of partnering with local park agencies to ensure well-cared for parks at the local level is valid. MPC volunteer coordinators may not have the capacity to maintain parks for other jurisdictions; hence, MCP should work with local park managers to identify strategies for addressing deferred maintenance and capital improvements, through funding development or other means. Measure A is addressing some of these needs and park managers could work together to identify and develop matching funds.

8. Future studies should include a minimum of four focus groups in different cities across Marin County. This allows for a greater comparison across a broader cross-section of the population, plus helps produce even more robust results. That is, when using generally the same battery of questions, you often don't hear anything new (e.g., reach saturation point) after 4-5 focus groups.
9. Share results from this study with San Rafael Parks and Recreation and other local park managers.



Conclusions and Closing Thoughts

The residents of Marin County are particularly fortunate to have such beautiful open spaces and parks within a short distance of their homes. There are many opportunities available for them to enjoy and appreciate the variety of both ecosystems and recreational opportunities that make up the county park system. Focus groups are an excellent way to obtain information from communities that agencies are trying to serve. They are complex to organize yet project management is always worth the effort. As the focus groups were being planned one of the community liaisons responded as follows to a thank you note sent by the investigator the next day:

“It was my pleasure. It’s important to us to join efforts to improve access to the Marin County Parks and create more opportunities for outdoors activities. We are here together to support healthy eating active living in Marin, so anything we can do to collaborate please let us know. We loved the experience at the focus group. You understood the audience and the interaction was pretty good. I loved how you set the right tone to engage the participants to share their experiences regarding outdoor activities, what works, what is the challenge and what they would like to do to change the social conditions in their community. Thank you so much for that. I can’t wait to hear the results of this study. Thank you Jeannette Sotomayor from the Albert Boro Community Center for being always present to help and facilitate a place to meet with our community. “

In Partnership,

Florencia Parada,
Health Hub Supervisor
<http://www.marinclinic.org>

Participants in this study readily acknowledged that the value of county parks to the local community is as deep as it is wide. While this was a small and purposive sample, the two groups were chosen by the MCP department and considered an important opportunity to tap into individuals who are less visible and not as well represented in public involvement process for park decisions. This study's small sample size limited the number of substantive conclusions or common themes due to demographic divergence between the two groups.

These parks are an important aspect of people’s lives that participants in this study try to incorporate as much as possible. They understand the various benefits associated with frequent park-use and hope to instill those same ideals and habits in their children and other family members. For the senior community, the parks are a place to maintain their physical and mental health, as well as socialize with other community members and friends. The Latino community values the parks as a place to spend time making new memories with their families. Despite their differences, the senior community and the Latino community both share the same love and appreciation for their county parks, and are committed to ensuring that these spaces will be available for many years to come.

MARIN COUNTY
PARKS
PRESERVATION • RECREATION



APPENDICES



APPENDIX A

The following two pages display the fliers that were created and used for recruitment of focus group participants. These fliers were sent to the community leaders to distribute.



WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR VOICE!

JOIN US FOR A FOCUS GROUP WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

This session is **FREE** and open to adults
18 years & older ~
Healthy food will be provided!
The first 12 registrants who participate
will receive a
\$50 Sports Authority gift card
for your participation, time and input!

The Marin County Parks Department is working with SF State University to learn about your park experiences, if there are any barriers that prevent you from visiting, and what you think could improve your county parks.

We want to hear from YOU! Learn more about Marin County Parks while helping them to better assist your community ~



For questions or more information, contact:
Dr. Nina Roberts: nroberts@sfsu.edu
(415) 338-7576

**Tell us what you
think about Marin
County Parks!**

**Whistlestop
(Caboose Room)
930 Tamalpais Ave
San Rafael
415-456-9062**

Thurs. Jan. 28th

RSVP by Tues. 1/26/16 by
calling or dropping by the
front desk

- **Arrive early as you must be in the Caboose by 5:30p to sign-in and have dinner!**
- **Group interview starts promptly at 6p, ends by 7:30p**

**MARIN COUNTY
PARKS**
PRESERVATION - RECREATION



CARING FOR WHAT WE HAVE
• 2012-2021 •



(Photo: Courtesy of Marin County Parks Department)

**¡QUEREMOS ESCUCHAR SU VOZ!
ACOMPAÑENOS EN NUESTRO GRUPO DE
ENFOQUE CON SU COMUNIDAD**

Esta sección es GRATIS para adultos de 18 años en adelante ~
¡Comida saludable y deliciosa será proveída!
¡Las primeras 12 personas que se registren recibirán una tarjeta de regalo con valor de \$50 de Sports Authority por su participación, tiempo y opiniones!

El Departamento de Parques del Condado de Marin esta trabajando con la Universidad de SF State para aprender acerca de sus experiencias en estos parques, si existen algunas barreras que impiden que usted los visite, y de lo que usted piensa que podría mejorar los parques del condado.

¡Queremos oír de usted! Obtenga más información acerca de los Parques del Condado de Marin y en ayudarlos a mejorar a su comunidad ~

Gracias a la Clínica-Health Hub de la Comunidad de Marin como socio en este proyecto



Para preguntas y más información, contacte:
Dr. Nina Roberts: nroberts@sfsu.edu
(415) 338-7576

¡Díganos lo que opina acerca de los Parques del Condado de Marin!

**En el Centro Comunitario Albert Boro
50 Canal St.
San Rafael
415-485-3077**

Jueves 11 de Febrero del 2016.

- Cena comienza a las 6pm.
- Entrevistas en Grupo comienzan puntualmente a las 6:30pm, y terminan a las 8pm.
- Habrá un Traductor de Español
- Cuidado de niños será disponible si se requiere.

**MARIN COUNTY
PARKS
PRESERVATION • RECREATION**



CARING FOR WHAT WE HAVE
- 2012-2021 -

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Protocol and Questions (n=2 groups)

Welcome & Introductions

Hi, my name is [*facilitator name*] and this is [*note taker's name*] from SFSU [*student major/department*]. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us today and agreeing to be part of this focus group. We'll do group introductions regarding who you are in a few minutes. First we want to provide a brief overview. This conversation will last about an hour and a half and will be recorded. We would like to record this conversation so we can transcribe the audio into written notes. The recording will be kept in a secure location and will not be used for any other purpose other than this project. No names will be associated with any of the comments you make during this interview. When you signed in today, there was a number next to your name, you'll use that which I'll explain in a moment. [*Ask if anyone has any issues/problems with being audio-recorded*].

I will be leading the conversation today and [*note taker's name*] will be taking notes. I am first going to go over a few details before we start. And, each of you will receive [*incentive*] for your involvement today. If you have any questions, please ask as they come up.

Purpose of the Focus Group

We are working in partnership with Marin County Parks Department to better understand county resident's attitudes, experiences, recreation use patterns, and preferences and to identify barriers/constraints of non-users or less frequent visitors to Marin County Parks. The information you share will help Marin County Parks determine how well they are supporting their strategic plan and contributing to their long-term goals. In addition, the information you provide can help improve existing park resources and services to meet community needs. Your participation is key as this group represents the ideas of [*community*]. We welcome your input and your voice matters to the Parks Department so we need you to be honest with us and share your thoughts and opinions openly.

Guidelines

Has anyone ever participated in a focus group? [*Ask for show of hands*]. For some people being in a focus group can be a new experience. We'll first discuss general ground rules that can help ensure a safe environment where everyone's ideas are shared and valued, and to ensure we capture what everyone says on the recorder and in our notes. Again, your name will not be attached to your comments, only a number.

1. WE WANT YOU TO DO THE TALKING. We need everyone to participate and talk to each other as you are comfortable. I may call on you if I haven't heard from you in a while.
2. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. Every person's experiences and opinions are important. We want to hear what each of you think and feel about parks, in general, and within MCP in particular. We brought a map of MC parks for you to check out during the conversation. If you're not familiar with parks in MC, respond based on your knowledge of whatever parks come to mind for you. You don't need to agree with others, but please listen respectfully to different points of view. If you do agree with what

someone says, please speak up, rather than nodding your head or gesturing in some other way. This helps us capture agreement in the notes. Also, if someone else says something that reminds you of something or sparks a thought, please feel free to follow their comments with your own.

3. WHAT IS SAID IN THIS ROOM STAYS HERE. Everything you tell us today is ANONYMOUS. That means we will not share anything you say with your name attached. While we might use quotes or ideas that you share, as mentioned, we will never use your name in any way.
4. ONE MIC/1 NUMBER: Please speak one at a time – this will help us capture everyone’s thoughts and opinions. Before you make your comment, simply state your number first then go for it. For example, I may raise my hand and say, “Number five: I think that parks need to have more...”
5. STEP UP, STEP BACK: If you have shared a lot, step back to allow others to share.

Are there any questions before we begin?

[Respond if yes. If no questions proceed.]

We are going to begin recording from this moment on.

[Student assistant turns on digital recorder and begins taking typed notes on laptop].

AGING IN PLACE/SENIORS

Discussion Questions: As we move forward, it would be best to reply as it relates to MCP, if you're not able to that's fine. Comments about any park experience are fair game.

Icebreaker: We'll start the conversation with some general questions then move on from there. When you have no other obligations, how do you spend your leisure/free time? If you could try a new activity, what would it be? When the last time you tried a new activity, and what was your motivation to do so?

TIER 1

1. On average, what does your daily schedule look like? ***[lifestyle]***
 - a) Do you enjoy socializing with others? How often?
 - b) Is this important to you?
2. Is physical activity important to you? ***[health/P.A.]***
 - a) Do you get physical activity on a regular basis?
 - b) Where do you go for health care?
3. Is being outdoors important to you? ***[values]***
 - a) How did it make you feel in terms of being in the outdoors?
4. What do you think about the natural environment? ***[environmental literacy]***
 - a) How does nature affect/impact your experience?
 - b) Is there anything about nature/natural environment/outdoors that you want to learn more about?
5. When you think of a park or open space, what comes to mind? ***[perception]***
 - a) Can you name the nearest park to you?
 - b) Please share sample activities you like to do in parks and what you have enjoyed or liked about those parks. ***[use/experience]***
 - c) What have those experiences meant to you?
6. How do you get most of your information about what is happening in your community, in general? ***[info & communication]***
 - a) How do you hear/learn about the parks?
 - b) Where do you find information about the parks and its programs?
7. In the last 6 months to 1 year, how many times have you visited any Marin county park? ***[frequency]***
 - a) Where did you go? What did you do?
8. If you haven't had as many opportunities to visit or use the county's parks, tell us why? What were some barriers for you or your family to visiting the parks? ***[constraints]***
 - a) Transportation factors –How do you typically visit parks or how would you get there? Is getting to parks an issue for you?
 - b) If “time” is an issue, tell us more, why?
 - c) Do you have some mobility, sight, or other issue that makes navigating outdoor environments difficult?
9. If you do visit parks, do you feel welcome, safe or comfortable in parks? If yes/no, please tell us why or why not. ***[comfort/welcome]***
10. What types of programs/activities would you like to see in Marin County parks? Are there other types of facilities you might like to have? ***[program/facility recommendations]***

- a) What kind of activities would you be willing to travel to (participation)?
[use/recommendations]
 - b) What are some other ways MC Parks Department can best communicate with you in the future?
11. Are there any organizations that connect you with important services you need? (i.e., Whistlestop, Marin Community Clinic, others/which ones?)

Tier 2 - If Time, Address the Following Questions

1. What are the three most important things in your daily life? (i.e. family, comfort, health)
2. Have you ever had any issues or problems in the parks? *[safety, maintenance]*

Close with: “Does anyone have anything else to add based on what we’ve talked about or something else you’d like to share?”

[Student assistant turns off digital recorder, note-taking ends].

Closing & Wrap Up

Thank you all again for participating in this important conversation. The information you provided is significant and meaningful and can really help improve park use throughout the county. If you are interested in the results and findings of this conversation, a summary report can be sent out to you upon request. If so, please give your name and email address, or postal address, to our student assistant.

In appreciation of your time, *[note taker’s]* will be distributing *[incentives]*. In order to receive this *[incentive]* we need you to please sign our receipt log for the university accounting purposes only.

CANAL NEIGHBORHOOD

Discussion Questions: As we move forward, it would be best to reply as it relates to MCP, if you're not able to that's fine. Comments about any park experience are fair game.

Icebreaker: We'll start the conversation with some general questions then move on from there. What do you like to do for fun? When you have no other obligations, how do you spend your leisure/free time? If you could try a new outdoor activity, what would it be?

TIER 1

1. On average, what does your daily schedule look like? [*lifestyle*]
 - a) Do you enjoy socializing with others? How often?
 - b) Is this important to you?
2. Is physical activity important to you? [*health/P.A.*]
 - a) Do you get physical activity on a regular basis?
 - b) Where do you go for health care?
3. Is being outdoors important to you? [*values*]
 - a) How did it make you feel in terms of being in the outdoors?
4. What do you think about the natural environment? [*environmental literacy*]
 - a) How does nature affect/impact your experience?
 - b) Is there anything about nature/natural environment/outdoors that you want to learn more about?
5. When you think of a park or open space, what comes to mind? [*perception*]
 - a) Can you name the nearest park to you?
 - b) Please share sample activities you like to do in parks and what you have enjoyed or liked about those parks. [*use/experience*]
 - c) What have these experiences meant to you?
6. How do you get most of your information about what is happening in your community? [*info /communication*]
 - a) How have you heard about the parks?
 - b) Where do you find information about the parks and its programs?
7. In the last 6 months to 1 year, how many times have you visited any Marin county park? [*frequency*]
 - a) Where did you go? What did you do?
8. If you haven't had as many opportunities to visit or use the county's parks, tell us why? What were some barriers for you or your family to visiting the parks? [*constraints*]
 - a) Transportation factors – How do you typically visit parks or how would you get there? Is getting to parks an issue for you?
 - b) If "time" is an issue, tell us more, why?
 - c) Are park-related fees/costs a barrier to visiting (e.g., entrance, camping, food, gas, equip)
9. If you do visit parks, do you feel welcome, safe or comfortable in parks? If yes/no, please tell us why or why not. [*comfort/welcome*]
 - a) Do you have any fears related to visiting parks or open spaces?
 - b) Have visited a Marin County park or path in the last year? If yes, which one(s)? If not in this year, have you visited a MCP park or path in the past? What was a primary reasons why you have not visited a MCP in the past year?

10. What types of programs/activities would you like to see in Marin County parks? Are there other types of facilities you might like to have? [*program/facility recommendations*]
 - a) If you were not born in the US, what other kinds of activities did you enjoy in your home country that you do not see here?
 - b) What kinds of activities would you be willing to travel to (participation)? [*use/recommendations*]
 - c) What are some other ways MC Parks Department can best communicate with you in the future?
11. Are there any organizations that connect you with important services you need? (i.e., Canal Alliance, Marin Community Clinic, Health Hub)

Tier 2 - If Time, Address the Following Questions

1. What are the three most important things in your daily life? (i.e. family, comfort, health)
2. Have you ever had any issues or problems in the parks? [*safety, maintenance*]

Close with: “Does anyone have anything else to add based on what we’ve talked about or something else you’d like to share?”

[*Student assistant turns off digital recorder, note-taking ends*].

Closing & Wrap Up

Thank you all again for participating in this important conversation. The information you provided is significant and meaningful and can really help improve park use throughout the county. If you are interested in the results and findings of this conversation, a summary report can be sent out to you upon request. If so, please give your name and email address, or postal address, to our student assistant.

In appreciation of your time, [*note taker’s*] will be distributing [*incentive*]. In order to receive this [*incentive*] we need you to please sign our receipt log for the university accounting purposes only.

APPENDIX C

Demographic Composition of Participants

| | "Aging in Place"/Seniors | Hispanic/Latino | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| Host Organization: | Whistlestop | Al Boro Center | |
| Location: | San Rafael | San Rafael | |
| Age | | | Totals |
| 20-35 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| 36-45 | 0 | 6 | 6 |
| 46-55 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 56-65 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 66-75 | 7 | 0 | 7 |
| 76+ | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| N= | 14 | 12 | 26 |
| Gender | | | |
| Female | 10 | 10 | 20 |
| Male | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| Race | | | |
| White | 10 | 0 | 10 |
| Hispanic | 2 | 12 | 14 |
| African American | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mixed* | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Occupation | | | |
| Educator/Teacher | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Business/Marketing | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Administration/Office | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Construction/Landscape | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Medical | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Retail/Sales/Hospitality | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Maintenance/Housekeeping | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| Religious/Community Centers | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Student | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Retired | 7 | 0 | 7 |
| Homemaker | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| Self-Employed | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Not Specified | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Own Vehicle? | | | |
| Yes | 9 | 7 | 16 |
| No | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| If no, form of transit? | | | |
| Bike | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Bus | 5 | 3 | 7 |
| Carpool | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Not Specified | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *Self-ascribed mixed race: | Caucasian/Indian | | |
| | Italian/African-American | | |