

Racial Justice Statements - Parks and Recreation Organizations

Denver

Allegra “Happy” Haynes to Denver Parks & Recreation and the Community We Serve:

“Reflections on Our Troubled Times” Allegra “Happy” Haynes

As a child of the 60’s and coming from a family of civil rights activists, I am no stranger to the struggle for racial justice, social equity and human rights and once again, my soul is heavy with sadness and outrage by the recent shockingly violent murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police. I have participated in many protests, marches, sit-ins, pickets and boycotts in response to injustices in this city and across the nation, some of them incidents of police brutality very similar to this latest one in Minneapolis. African Americans have experienced the atrocity of racial violence either perpetrated or condoned by those in power from slavery to senseless killings witnessed today in far too many incidents. Unfortunately, this is an experience shared by other communities of color in our nation’s history.

When this latest incident occurred, I was totally ill-equipped to express my feelings and explain to my young niece and nephew how after so many decades of struggle, changes and progress that had been made, this could still happen today. As I witnessed the protests around the country and here in Denver and overlooking the misguided and indiscriminate violence of a few people, a thread of hope has started to emerge and slowly encircle the sadness and anger.

So, why is this time different?

Like so many communities across the country that have been protesting to express their outrage and grief about the brutal murder of George Floyd, our Denver community has come together in a spirit of unity and resolve to address the institutionalized racism and discrimination that underlies this national crisis and to heal the wounds that divide us. For the first time, people of all backgrounds are coming together to say, “enough is enough” and that together we must address this problem at its core. It is no longer just one group or another’s problem, but our collective responsibility to end racial injustice.

Denver Parks and Recreation has an important role to play to address the impacts of institutionalized racism and inequity through our commitment to social justice, inclusion and equity. As all of you know, these are core principles in the Game Plan and from our leadership team to our HR team, our Partnership Council, our Equity Diversity and Inclusion team and employees across the agency, DPR is committed to using our resources and talents to help build a resilient, equitable and healthy community for everyone, free from discrimination. We commit to these principles through training, community engagement, maintaining a safe and inclusive work environment, planning and building with equity and providing opportunities for our youth to build their path to a bright future. Let’s work together with passion and compassion, patience and urgency, openness and determination and creativity and courage.

Even from the beginning, the founders of our country recognized the ongoing need to strive for “a more perfect union”. Now, more than ever, we must be all in for that mission. That is why we stand behind “Black Lives Matter”. Together, let’s pledge to do our part to dismantle the evils of racism and bigotry and build a just society.

NRPA Statement in Response to Recent Incidents of Racism in Communities Across the Country

(May 29, 2020)

Kristine Stratton, president and CEO of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) issued the following statement regarding the recent incidents of racism in communities across the country:

“The recent high-profile incidents in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Glynn County, Georgia, and New York City, bring to light the urgent need for real and substantive dialogue about systematic inequality and racial bigotry facing people of color in communities throughout the United States. I believe park and recreation professionals, who champion inclusiveness, fairness and social equity, share my sentiments when I say — society has no place for racism, intolerance or divisiveness. It saddens me that during a time when we should be coming together as a unified nation to keep one another healthy and safe in the midst of a global pandemic, racial bias threatens to sow further division among people across multiple communities, and more importantly, endanger the lives of our family members, neighbors and loved ones. The goal of parks and recreation is about making parks and green spaces accessible to all, regardless of race, gender, religion or socioeconomics.

Watching the events unfold in the city of Minneapolis as a result of the tragic death of George Floyd necessitates broader discussions about our collective differences and challenges regarding race and culture, the changes that must be made moving forward, and what we can do as a park and recreation community to create the solutions that will help us heal as a country and overcome our pain and prejudices.

In the case of the [Central Park incident](#), not only was it an example of a white person threatening a black person with a racist action, it reflected a fundamental breakdown in the social contract park patrons have, where patrons can help each other maintain social order and mutual respect for one another, so that all may enjoy our public spaces. Especially now, in the era of COVID-19 that has claimed more than 100,000 lives, what does the new social contract look like, and how can we help people understand that our spaces are for everyone and must be shared in mutual trust?

Moreover, we know that parks have not always been welcoming to people of color. In 2017, NRPA started the [Parks for Inclusion](#) project with the goal of helping our field take a holistic look at inclusion and work toward creating parks and programs that truly welcomed and included patrons from all walks of life. The [Parks for Inclusion Report](#) produced in 2018 reflected some hopeful trends, but also a great deal of work that still remained. Insufficient funding was cited in the report as the primary reason that agencies have not been able to make more progress, and we know that our current financial crisis is not helping in that regard. Nonetheless, there is progress that we can make together to support inclusive spaces — parks for all — even with constrained budgets.

It has never been more important for our industry to be a leading voice for social equity and inclusion. Our communities are visiting our public spaces in record numbers to find the physical and mental health solutions that parks and recreation uniquely provide. We are in the community building business — in the business of creating joy and supporting health and well-being. As we follow our path to recovery, let's make sure we are opening our spaces and rebuilding our programs in service of our fundamental belief that everyone deserves a great park.”

Philadelphia Statement on Racial Justice

Dear PPR team,

Thank you for all you continue to do for our city especially all those working hard to plan for a safe and fun summer.

As you know, this week Mayor Kenney signed an executive order designating today, Friday, June 19th, a city holiday, for the observation of **Juneteenth**, which **celebrates the end of slavery** in the United States.

Juneteenth commemorates June 19, 1865, the date when Union troops arrived in Galveston Bay, Texas to announce to the enslaved people there that they were freed. The troops arrived **two and a half years after** the Emancipation Proclamation was signed by President Lincoln, and maintained a presence in Texas to ensure and enforce emancipation among slave-owners throughout the state.

Juneteenth is not just a momentous day for Black Americans. **It is a momentous day for all Americans, and all Philadelphians.** As we commemorate Juneteenth, we all have the opportunity to consider how we will mark this day. For me personally, I intend to reflect on the governmental systems that allow inequities to persist, and look for opportunities to do better -- for our team and the residents we serve.

As we reflect, it is important to acknowledge the history of racism in our public spaces, from segregated public pools to inequitable access to green spaces. And, we must also look inward, recognizing that **we can do better to recruit, hire, develop, and promote Black talent.**

I remember my first meeting with Program District Managers four years ago, and realizing that there was only one Black person in the room. I remember seeing the list of Recreation Leader Trainees three years ago and realizing the majority of those reachable on that list were white. I recall a situation when a very well-respected Black person was removed from a promotional list and said they felt as soon as they walked into the interview for that position- that they weren't what the hiring panel was "looking for". I've had very difficult conversations with staff who feel

they have been treated unfairly due to their race by supervisors and/or colleagues. And likewise, I've had very difficult conversations with community members who felt they were mistreated by staff because of racial prejudice.

I want to acknowledge that we have made some **good and meaningful progress** in improving a biased culture that exists in Parks and Rec. Working within the civil service process, we completely changed the hiring for new recreation leaders with great success for people of color, and we're working on similar changes for other positions. We've created more forums for open dialogue and discussion, and are exploring how to include anti-racism training into mandatory professional development for staff.

I also want to acknowledge that core to our mission and history at Parks and Rec is our work and engagement with diverse and traditionally under-represented communities, and that we have **so many staff**- quintessential public servants- who have committed their professional lives to serving all Philadelphians.

All of this considered, however, **there is so much more work to do**. And we cannot rest until we achieve the racial equity that our Black colleagues deserve because **Black Lives Matter...period**.

As the leader of Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, I remain committed to having honest and open discussions- followed by concrete action- to address the racial disparities that have plagued our department for too long.

I also call on each of you to recognize our individual roles in upholding the City, and the department's values of equity and inclusion. The news headlines from just this week highlight individuals and groups associated with public service in the city acting outside of our shared values. This behavior has no place in our work.

Today I hope you join me to stand in solidarity with our Black colleagues and friends and in memory of the **countless Black lives lost to injustice and brutality**.

May this Juneteenth be a chance for reflection and healing for each of you.

Best,
Kathryn

Kathryn Ott Lovell
Commissioner
Philadelphia Parks and Recreation
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Portland

Dear Portland,

Our community, like so many others across the country and the world, have demonstrated their outrage, sadness, and frustration and have come together to protest police brutality and to renew calls for police accountability.

Portland Parks & Recreation stand with these peaceful protestors. We stand for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. We stand with Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and immigrants and refugees. We stand with all people who have been murdered, assaulted, harassed, intimidated, targeted, and oppressed by systemic racism.

I'm proud that our parks, where many of our community's ongoing gatherings have started and ended, are places where people feel safe coming together to be heard and to be seen.

Parks are not a luxury; they are a necessity because they make us healthier as individuals and, more importantly, as a community. This has been true throughout history, and it is true today.

These are your parks. We are here to manage them responsibly so that all Portlanders can exercise their rights, minds, and bodies. We'll clean up any litter, graffiti, or vandalism - these are temporary. But the change these protests may generate can be a lasting civic legacy that all Portlanders can be proud of. We are experiencing a time of unity, and Portland Parks & Recreation is here for our City.

Best,

Adena Long
Director, Portland Parks & Recreation

Seattle

As a department within the City of Seattle, we recognize our place in the long-standing institutionalized racism that has plagued our communities of color for decades. At Seattle Parks and Recreation, we are committed to using our resources to lift up people of color, to work to undo the impacts of both interpersonal and institutional racism, and to build up our young people in a way that they can speak out against racism and injustice. The protests of the last few weeks have spurred us to be more compassionate, intense, and urgent in our pursuit of racial equity, and in our mission to create a park system, recreational programs, and a city that is anti-racist, equitable, and affirms black lives.