

2009 CITY BUDGET & LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Issue Backgrounder: PARKS

ENSURING PARK ACCESSIBILITY: THE IMMIGRANTS AND PARKS COLLABORATIVE

Parks are our city's public spaces. Regardless of background, neighbors rely on parks for recreation, to strengthen social ties, and improve physical and emotional well-being. The Immigrants and Parks Collaborative aims to ensure that our city's open spaces are accessible by all and meet New Yorkers' needs for recreational and gathering places.

The Immigrants and Parks Collaborative is a unique partnership of ten vibrant community-based organizations, the New York Immigration Coalition, the JM Kaplan Fund, and Partnership for Parks. Together, we work to:

- Improve access in parks for the 2 million city residents who are limited-English-proficient;
- Ensure parks are safe spaces that build a sense of ownership rather than fear;
- Offer programming reflective of neighborhood diversity, preferences, and needs;
- Use parks as tools for bringing together immigrant and non-immigrant residents and organizations;
- Influence capital design processes and respond to emerging uses of space.

Building Bridges between Immigrant Communities and The Department of Parks and Recreation

Parks are important resources that strengthen and sustain communities and build goodwill among neighbors. Fostering opportunities for newcomers to engage with parks in programming, stewardship, and leadership roles bolsters immigrants' civic engagement, connects them to their neighbors, and makes existing social networks more inclusive and diverse. Through our Immigrant Outreach Fellowship, the Collaborative has developed models for immigrant outreach in 8

RECOMMENDATIONS

Create an Immigrant Liaison staff position at the Department of Parks and Recreation.

The NYC Parks Department must meet the communication assistance requirements set forth in the Mayors' Executive Order 120, beginning with translation of signs, notices, and application forms.

neighborhood parks. The Fellowship helps parks-related groups to engage immigrant communities, and supports immigrant groups to become more involved in their neighborhood parks and civic associations. The Collaborative will be holding a forum in the summer of 2009 highlighting immigrant outreach and participation best practices.

Improving Language Access for Park Users

Immigrants are learning English at faster rates than ever before. However, many cannot navigate the government bureaucracy or are denied essential services due to language barriers. Similarly, newcomers can have difficulty learning how to the parks system works and have no way to understand their rights and opportunities for using parks responsibly if parks provide information only in English. We want to eliminate misunderstandings between park personnel and newcomers seeking to use parks in ways that may conflict with current uses. Languages barriers also limit newcomers' ability to participate in park improvements, activities, and maintenance.

The Immigrants and Parks Collaborative is currently developing language access best practices, and in 2009 will be testing outreach to limited English proficiency individuals. Additionally, the Collaborative will be partnering with the NYC Parks Department to help implement the agency's new language access plan this summer.

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Improving Vending and Permitting Opportunities for Immigrant Park Users

Park permitting and licensing policies that favor older residents coupled with an unclear vending and permitting process have made it difficult for immigrants to sell their goods and organize cultural and sporting events in their local parks. Immigrant vendors offer some of the city's best locally prepared, authentic ethnic foods. Cultural activities and sporting events bring life to our open spaces and health to the city's residents. The success of our neighborhoods can be attributed to the extent they manage diversity; likewise, the success

of our parks depends on how well these reflect and meet the needs of our diverse communities.

In 2009, the Collaborative will address barriers that immigrant New Yorkers face in accessing vending and permit opportunities. The Collaborative will help immigrants to better understand the park vending and permitting process, and will assist park administrators to reach out to immigrant communities to ensure diversity of participants who can obtain vending and permits.

Detailed Recommendations:

Create an Immigrant Liaison staff position at the Department of Parks and Recreation. Serving primarily as an ombudsman, the Liaison will oversee outreach and investigate complaints by immigrant communities about access to parks.

The NYC Parks Department must meet the communication assistance requirements set forth in the Mayors' Executive Order 120, beginning with translation of signs, notices, and application forms.

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