

Community Engagement for High Line Canal Improvements





HIGH LINE CANAL
C O N S E R V A N C Y



LACY
CONSULTING SERVICES

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Preface

This final report was prepared for the High Line Canal Conservancy staff and relevant stakeholders to incorporate the suggested improvements and recommendations that arose from the community engagement conducted by Lacy Consulting Services for the improvement and enhancement of the High Line Canal Trail. The final report centers community voices from diverse backgrounds. Within, the phrases marginalized groups, special populations, or equity deserving groups refers to people of various and diverse identities including, but not limited to: individuals living with disabilities, individuals in low income or economically disadvantaged groups, LGBTQIA+ community members, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), undocumented individuals, English learners, houseless or unhoused individuals, and those historically marginalized, silenced, or systematically oppressed by governments, institutions, or majority groups. Therefore, we ask the reader to keep in mind that English is a second language for some participants while reading the quotes featured in the results. Lastly, we would like to emphasize that the perspectives shared in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the High Line Canal Conservancy—they are community voices compiled through the social science research led by Lacy Consulting Services LLC.

Executive Summary

Introduction

The High Line Canal Conservancy (Conservancy) plans to implement 14 high-priority trail improvement projects spanning 15 neighborhoods and 27 miles of the High Line Canal Trail (Canal Trail). To inform the development and implementation of the projects, the Conservancy hired Lacy Consulting Services (LCS) to facilitate community engagement in Green Valley Ranch, East Denver, and Aurora. To accomplish this goal, LCS identified and conducted focus groups with diverse community members who agreed to voice their perceptions about the Canal Trail and necessary improvements. Focus group participants were required to be above the age of 18, reside or spend considerable time in the neighborhoods served by the Canal Trail, and use either the Canal Trail or similar green spaces. In addition, emphasis was placed on recruiting participants from marginalized or equity deserving identities including immigrant, refugee, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color), low income, those living with a disability, and/or LGBTQIA+ communities. This summary features the key takeaways from the community engagement focus groups. Within the full report, we additionally contextualize the local concerns about the Canal Trail within the broader dialogue of social challenges surrounding urban green spaces (e.g., green gentrification, segregation, and houselessness). The parallels between the focus group results and contemporary equity-focused green space research, reinforce the need to genuinely include community priorities and holistically consider both positive and negative consequences that could arise from the revitalization of the Canal Trail.

Focus Group Results

Full participant profile statistics, including figures, are available in the larger report. A total of eight one-hour focus groups were conducted which varied in size from two to 10 people. Of the 50 total participants, the most represented age group were the ages of 30 and 39. Most participants were aware of the Canal Trail and were from the East Denver area. In addition, 20 identified with at least one marginalized group identity, while eight did not identify with any. Most participants used the Canal Trail for walking, running, and biking. Participants commonly viewed the Canal Trail as an important asset for community access to nature in the Denver Metro Area. In addition, participants valued the Canal Trail as a stress relieving space, for its natural landscape, and useful for transportation or commuting given the continuity of the trail system. Participants used the trail more frequently in summer months, as they expressed that lack of shoveling, heavy snow, and darkness deters winter

use. Concerning the trail improvement projects, focus group participant suggestions focused on three main themes:

- **Amenity and Infrastructural Improvements**-Participants suggested improvements to trail pavement quality, trail width in high traffic areas, and trail slope next to bathroom facilities. In addition, participants expressed concerns about accessibility (e.g., populations using ambulatory devices and elderly) and safety, suggesting adding regular seating, resting areas, and bathrooms. Participants also desired increased directional and interpretative signage for parking, trailheads, history, wildlife, and flora.
- **Community Suggested Outreach**- Regarding social considerations, participants suggested developing new partnerships that connect the Conservancy with smaller community groups and programming that aligns with their personal interests. For example, participants expressed interest in the creation of classes for bird watching, foraging, wildlife identification, photography, exercise classes, and sponsored walks for community building and raising awareness about the trail. Relatedly, participants also suggested empowering local community members/groups to host events at the trail, create community art pieces or workshops, and create locally designed amenities. In addition, participants expressed safety concerns about unhoused encampments along the trail, hazardous debris or waste, drug paraphernalia, and crime. In response, the suggestions emphasized the need for better lighting and emergency call boxes.
- **Trust and Future Engagement**-. The participants voiced interest in greater access to information and transparency about their safety concerns, citing that online information about the trail does not communicate potential risks to users. Participants stressed that accurate, transparent, and up to date information could help build trust in the Canal Trail and community buy-in for the improvement projects. In addition, participants expressed that outreach or communication efforts should be tailored to the local communities' identity and trail use preferences, especially given voiced concerns about previous experiences with engagement and lack of follow-up after other public participation events.

Recommendations

Informed by the community voices and results, a few key recommendations for the trail improvement projects include (please refer to the full report for the complete list of recommendations):

Amenity and Infrastructural Improvements:

- Create frequent and accessible resting/seating areas to balance nature experiences and diverse user needs.
- Implement infrastructural improvements in consideration of those with ambulatory difficulties or devices, strollers, are unfamiliar with the trail, or have small children.

- Conduct “community walks” for local stakeholders to suggest/highlight desired location of improvements in real time and to foster greater inclusion, ownership, and awareness.

Community Suggested Outreach:

- Gather further community input to understand the preferences of the underrepresented demographics not yet reached (e.g., houseless populations).
- Create more opportunities for locally led or collaborative programs and events

Trust and Future Engagement:

- Direct more tailored outreach and engagement to the least represented areas along the Canal Trail.
- Develop partnerships with existing community-led groups to increase community input and assist in promoting trail awareness, events, and programming
- Partner with human services organizations to provide appropriate resources and assistance to the houseless population to avoid further displacement.

Conclusion

Planning for restoration, revitalization, and investment in urban green spaces is a complex process, as without holistic consideration it can produce unintended social impacts like gentrification or reinforce segregation. Therefore, revitalization efforts cannot be considered in isolation from the potential consequences and must be informed by local input. Reflected in the community voices, participants shared both suggestions for the improvement projects and concerns about the Canal Trail. It will be crucial to consider this report as a starting point to understanding the complex social context surrounding the Canal Trail, the diverse preferences, and the ways in which diverse stakeholders currently feel excluded from green spaces in the Denver Metro Area. Further, while an important foundation, the additional work outlined in the recommendations section is still needed to reach other groups and create a more equitable design for the improvements.

After reading this executive summary, we recommend continuing onto the report to understand the full breadth of the challenges that face urban green spaces and the shared community perceptions that inform the recommendations for future engagement.

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Project Introduction

The High Line Canal Conservancy (Conservancy) raised funds and partnered with local governments to implement 14 high-priority trail improvement projects spanning 15 neighborhoods and 27 miles of the High Line Canal Trail (Canal Trail). To inform the development and implementation of the projects, the Conservancy aims to incorporate community input from local voices on the desired improvements for the Canal Trail with particular focus on Green Valley Ranch, East Denver, and Aurora. To integrate the community and raise awareness about the project, the Conservancy hired Lacy Consulting Services (LCS) to facilitate community engagement to inform the initial phase of the improvement projects along the northeast sections of the Canal. To accomplish this goal, LCS identified and conducted focus groups with various community members who agreed to voice their perceptions about the Canal Trail and their views about necessary improvements. The following report is a synthesis of the community perceptions of the Canal Trail, their activities and interests, desired improvements, and amenities to equitably improve their community's natural spaces and trail usership experience.

Since 2014, the Conservancy has engaged with community members and leaders to build relationships and foster stewardship of the environment and the recreational trail systems of the Denver Metro Area. Through emphasizing a community-centered approach, the Conservancy hopes to foster an equitable and inclusive design for the high-priority projects along the northeast sections of the Canal. In total, \$11 million will be invested over the next 10 years as an initial phase, with subsequent phases expected later. To equitably improve the recreational experience on the Canal Trail as well as the environmental health of the region, this investment will be guided by communities' voices to reflect their needs for the urban green space. The planned improvements could include trail amenities, fitness stations, play and gathering areas, improved access, pedestrian bridges, tree planting, and signage in hopes of increasing the accessibility and enjoyment of the trail as a welcoming open space to all people of the region.

This final report comprehensively features the most prevalent concepts which emerged from the focus groups to elevate the local community voices. To begin, we set the stage by outlining the broader challenges unfolding across the country within urban green spaces and the importance of gathering community input. By drawing from this social science research that integrates a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) lens, in this

report we aim to highlight the parallels between the Canal Trail and other documented urban green space improvement projects relevant to the focus group suggestions heard and the Conservancy's previous engagement. This integration is meant to demonstrate how the emergent themes from our focus groups reinforce existing calls to consider all the potential impacts that arise from the development of natural recreational spaces and the need for genuine inclusion of community priorities moving forward.

Literature Review

Urban Green Spaces and Green Gentrification

As with any urban green space project, modifications to the area may result in unintended consequences such as green gentrification, that is critically important to consider prior to implementation. Urban green space projects are frequently situated within or adjacent to historically marginalized and low-income neighborhoods (or equity deserving groups) as they sometimes restore post-industrial, impoverished, or abandoned landscapes (Nixon et al., 2022). Due to this context, greening projects can produce disparate outcomes for different users, communities, and historically marginalized groups. At the same time, these projects are increasingly conducted by environmental non-profits that are not always willing, or able, to take on environmental justice issues like developing affordable housing options adjacent to their greening project or developing representative community coalitions to ensure decision making power for all impacted neighborhoods (Rigolon & Németh, 2018). As a result, restoration and revitalization projects—in what some call the urban park paradox—are capable of providing the intended benefits to some communities while at the same time producing a milieu of unintended consequences including reinforcing segregation and social inequities (Harris et al., 2021), which in turn emphasizes the need to consider environmental justice and advocacy in any urban greening project.

Environmental Justice researchers have documented challenges in relation to various forms of justice relevant to the planned improvement projects. For example, the distribution of low socio-economic status communities correlates with longer distances to urban green spaces nationally (Rigolon et al., 2019). As for representative community participation, the ability to attend public scoping, development, or planning meetings for green spaces favors higher income groups that can more easily afford childcare, have greater flexibility in their schedules, and frequently benefit from outreach efforts being tailored to their demographic (Rigolon & Németh, 2018). Nationally, multiple case studies

have documented that failure to understand and include the priorities and concerns of local communities (see Case Studies) has resulted in the displacement of long-term residents from neighborhoods adjacent to greening projects (Gould & Lewis, 2017). Undoubtedly, these social barriers influenced our sample for the focus groups in this study and will remain a challenge moving forward. While the Canal Trail is an existing trail system—as opposed to a new development—this nuance, in and of itself, doesn't necessarily curtail the pervasive process of green gentrification.

Urban Green Spaces and Houselessness

Largely conceived as designated for middle class leisure (a notion that dates to landscape architects such as Frederick Law Olmstead and the design of the city parks of New York), urban green spaces are targets of frequently racialized anti-houseless policing (Speer & Goldfisher, 2020). Despite research that documents the role that urban green spaces play in the lives of people experiencing houselessness—enabling privacy, emotional solace, and ultimately survival—anti houseless policing, in addition to exclusion from property, subjects the houseless to surveillance, further deprivation, and frequently violence (Speer & Goldfisher, 2020). As environmental justice researchers call for the reconceptualization of urban green spaces as important and useful to those experiencing

Case Studies

Chicago's 606 – The 606 is a 2.7-mile rail to trail greenway that was constructed in Chicago's Puerto Rican enclave between Humboldt and Wicker Parks. Since construction, property values have increased almost 50%, pricing many of the long-term Latine residents out of the area. In addition—as more white residents move into the surrounding neighborhood—studies have documented increased sentiments of segregation, social exclusion, and cultural loss (Harris et al., 2020).

Atlanta's BeltLine – The BeltLine is a 10.5-mile paved trail surrounding downtown Atlanta. Since its construction, home prices in some predominately Black neighborhoods increased up to 70%. Residents viewed the predominantly upper class and white workforce of Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. (the developer) as not representative of the diversity of their neighborhoods and a key contributing factor to the lack of low-income or affordable housing planned and the subsequent displacement (Rigolon et al., 2019).

Brooklyn's Prospect Park – Prospect Park—a 585-acre urban green space—was conceived in the 1800s and with nearly a 100-year history, the Park was viewed as unsafe with regularly reported murders, bicycle thefts, and muggings in addition to poor maintenance. In the 1980s, an initial \$10 Million kicked off decades of restoration that transformed the park. All the surrounding neighborhoods have since seen over 100% increases in their white populations (Gould & Lewis, 2012).

houselessness, dominant or majority groups who voice concerns of safety, unsightliness, or sanitation inevitably wield greater influence and control over decision making within urban green spaces (Sreetheran & Van Den Bosch, 2014). As a result, those who actively participate in capitalist society set the dialogue and determine what constitutes satisfactory access or use of these spaces (Kronenberg et al., 2020). Navigating and providing houseless populations support is a complex issue. Nevertheless, keeping these concepts in mind during Canal Trail improvement implementation will be essential to balance addressing focus group concerns of personal safety and houseless population equity.

Ensuring Equitable Participation

To reach a point where more equitable community or stakeholder participation can be cultivated, first an understanding of public participation as a spectrum of involvement is required. It is an active process that requires significant time and resources to successfully complete. However, the ability and willingness to direct resources to effectively enable participation varies widely across societies, governments, organizations, communities, and individuals (Stiglitz & Rosengard, 2015). Therefore, researchers conceptualize the spectrum of community participation as spanning between no engagement to equal power-sharing and control over decision making between all impacted stakeholders (Lauria & Slotterback, 2020). Within that spectrum, it is also important to recognize pitfalls such as inauthentic engagement, lack of diverse representation, and tokenistic participation. Tokenistic participation—which can manifest as the inadequate inclusion of sufficient representatives to speak for a community's or interest group's priorities or even the collection of perceptions with no subsequent inclusion of the priorities or reconciliation of concerns—can further the oppression of historically marginalized voices, reinforce social inequalities, and cement the agenda of dominant groups in the outcomes of a public works project (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Here, in the spirit of fostering a human rights-based approach given the above context, and countering the implicit erasure of houseless population's voices, it is imperative to note that the houseless population along the Canal Trail were not reached in the engagement efforts for this report. This carries direct implications for the Conservancy's commitment to equitable participation if not addressed in future work.

The High Line Canal Conservancy's Engagement Efforts

Since its formation in 2014, the Conservancy has made engagement efforts to increase both organization and Canal Trail awareness. In 2016, they organized the Learn & Connect Series, which partnered with local government and consisted of eight events to increase awareness about the organization. The Vision Planning initiative in the same year used public open houses and strategic input sessions to gather feedback from the community. In 2017, the Conservancy focused on community input in the Northeast region. They conducted surveys, environmental learning programs for youth, family walks, and input sessions focused on programming and partnerships. The following years, in 2019, similar engagement continued, in addition to events such as the "Dine for the High Line Canal" fundraiser.

In 2021, the Laredo Highline Community Engagement initiative revealed some challenges such as trash along the trail and unauthorized motorized vehicle use. The Conservancy continued to engage with the community into the summer of 2022 implementing five events in the Northeast region. These events included flora and fauna and bilingual family events such as yoga and hikes. Participating community members were excited to explore and learn about the trail's connectivity to other green spaces. Additionally, participants voiced how these organized events provided a chance to overcome barriers to enjoying a green space such as unfamiliarity, wayfinding, and safety concerns. Lastly, prior to the work described in this report, in 2022 through 2023 a survey conducted on the trail and at events collected further feedback from respondents in the Northeast region. It was found that the majority of patrons in this area use the Canal Trail for recreational activities, mainly alone or with their dogs. The most important characteristics of the Canal Trail mentioned were its natural landscape as a peaceful retreat and exercise opportunities. Spanish-speaking respondents of this engagement effort also expressed interest in enhancing arts and culture along the trail.

The perceptions summarized from engagement conducted from 2016 until the work described in this report included desired improvements such as better trail maintenance, enhanced maps, more frequent signage (both navigational and educational), and more foliage. As well as prioritizing the implementation of stormwater and landscape management, safer accessibility and trail crossings, and the need for shade, bathrooms, and seating. The engagement efforts also provided insight into community interest in better

communication, interest in stewardship and volunteering opportunities in addition to recreational, educational and exercise programming. Furthermore, in 2017 it was found that several areas were underutilized due to a lack of trail awareness.

Pertinent context for this report, we found several similar concepts and suggestions to have been previously voiced by community members in the earlier engagement work conducted. However, in the internal documentation provided, community perceptions regarding engagement improvements and challenges have not been thoroughly outlined before. It is important to note that while the engagement work presented here—along with the formation of the NE Advisory Committee—does constitute as foundational engagement that offers multiple insights for critical reflection, it should be regarded as a beginning.

In this report, we frame our results and subsequent discussion on the local perceptions of the Canal Trail within the research and environmental justice concepts presented above. The Canal Trail is an urban green space facing substantial revitalization within a complex social system. The community perspectives and recommendations shared here are designed to serve as a roadmap to improve the community engagement process and achieve more equitable outcomes. However, this process is on-going and ensuring equity will require long-term participation through expanding relationships with all communities that use and benefit from the trail during improvement planning.

Methodology

Populating Focus Groups

The Conservancy delineated the following five distinct neighborhood clusters for engagement: East Denver neighborhoods, Central Aurora neighborhoods, Aurora Municipal Center neighborhoods, North Aurora Neighborhoods, and Green Valley Ranch neighborhoods. For focus group recruitment, the LCS Community Engagement Specialist conducted in-person engagement at community centers, libraries, and other public spaces in these neighborhood clusters to inform and invite potential participants. Among the variety of community outreach strategies employed, participant recruitment additionally included a division of labor between the High Line Canal Conservancy's and Lacy Consulting Services' respective community engagement coordinators. At the request of the Conservancy, select members of staff were responsible for outreach to schools, posting the flyers (described below) to local businesses and nearby apartment buildings, and reaching out to pre-existing Conservancy community stakeholders within the five Northeast geographic clusters. The

Conservancy assigned specific Neighborhood Organizations (16) and Issue Affinity Groups (21) to LCS to focus engagement efforts. While several organizations agreed to forward the flyer to their listserv or post it within their office or apartment building, the majority of contacts were unresponsive. Therefore, LCS' Community Engagement Specialist followed-up in-person with those organizations.

To reach as many diverse groups as possible, LCS created a flyer in both English and Spanish that alerted community members to the purpose of the focus groups, described the characteristics needed to participate, provided information regarding compensation, and logistical details regarding focus group scheduling. Flyers were used in combination with in-person outreach previously described. The flyer contained a QR code with a link to a short survey (Appendix A) where community members could provide contact information, availability, language and meeting (i.e., virtual or in-person) preferences, and verify that they met qualifying characteristics (Appendix B). In total, 76 community members filled out the English intake survey and 23 community members filled out the Spanish intake survey.

Qualifying Characteristics & Interview Questions

Focus group participants were required to be above the age of 18, reside or spend considerable time in one of the five Northeast neighborhood clusters served by the Canal Trail, and use either the Canal Trail or similar green spaces. The one exception to the age requirement occurred with one dedicated focus group for local youth council participants. In addition, it was highly desired, but not required, that participants were from part of a marginalized or equity deserving group such as immigrant, refugee, BIPOC, low income, living with a disability, and/or LGBTQIA+ communities. These qualifications were defined to emphasize the inclusion and engagement of known marginalized identities within the clusters along the Canal.

LCS created two separate interview guides of open-ended questions for community participants who were either (1) familiar with and use the Canal Trail or (2) participants who frequent other green spaces and trails (Appendix C1 & C2). Broadly, community focus group questions focused on individual perceptions about the Canal Trail, engagement and usage, and desired improvements. Every effort was made to prioritize focus group participation to those community members with diverse lived experience and belonging with marginalized or equity deserving groups—as well as to ensure equal representation among the five neighborhood clusters, gender, and a normal distribution of age-range. However, ultimately, participation was limited to those community members who were most responsive to

emails. At the conclusion of each focus group, participants were forwarded a link to an optional demographic survey (Appendix D). Questions in this survey pertained to race and ethnicity, zip code, household and income information, among other demographic topics. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in preparation for analysis.

Analysis

A qualitative analysis of the focus group transcriptions was conducted to understand the prevalent perceptions from community members and emergent themes surrounding the Canal Trail and desired improvements. For the qualitative analysis, LCS used NVIVO 12 1.6. release (a qualitative analytical software) to code the focus group transcriptions for emergent themes and key concepts. A complete list of the codes and their corresponding definitions can be found in the Codebook (Appendix E). The responses to the open-ended Participant Demographic survey are provided in summary statistics of those participants who responded in Appendix F. Once the focus groups were coded, we conducted several thematic analyses on the interview and focus group transcriptions. First, we conducted several matrix coding queries (i.e. an analysis comparing recurring themes in different codes to understand the differences in context and attitudes) to understand data patterns and intersections between the key codes. Next, we conducted word frequency analysis for specific themes such as improvements, amenities, and safety to understand the common concepts that defined these themes.

Focus Groups

As part of recruitment efforts, Lacy Consulting Services utilized an intake survey to gauge interest in the focus groups. While a total of 99 community member responses were recorded from the intake survey, only a smaller subset of community members ultimately attended and participated in a focus group. The *Participant Profile* section below provides details on the subset population of community members who formed part of the focus groups and for which categorical data pertaining to age range, identity, geographic location, and Canal Trail usage is available. Further information on all 99 community members who completed the intake survey can be found in Appendix G1 & G2.

LCS conducted eight distinct focus groups in which a total of 50 community members participated. Out of these 50 participants, 30 completed the intake survey provided through the recruitment flyer. This was due to a few factors that are common in social science research. First, the intake survey was voluntary, and participants could choose not to

complete it. Second, in some cases of in-person engagement or convenience sampling, contact information was shared informally with the LCS Engagement Specialist with the goal of simply gathering more participants. Finally, the intake survey was not shared with the youth council or Mosque focus groups due to ethical considerations (i.e., protecting the identity of participants under the age of 18 and those from a religious minority¹).

Results

Participant Profile

This profile offers a succinct breakdown of focus group participant characteristics compiled from the intake survey (n=30). In addition, characteristics obtained from a local youth council focus group (n=10) and the Mosque focus group (n=7) that aligned with those obtained from the intake survey are included when appropriate. Data is presented for the following categories: age distribution, identity group(s) in which these community members' lived experiences are situated and through which their perspectives are informed, geographic location, and usage of the Canal Trail. This profile is provided to disaggregate input more fully from focus group participants. Critically, the disaggregation of data allows for greater transparency and precision; revealing disparities in experiences that situate beliefs and perceptions relevant for the Canal Trail improvement project.

Age Distribution

LCS aimed to achieve a representative sample in the focus groups by recruiting community members from a diverse range of ages. The focus group participants' ages were distributed as follows: 10 participants were in the under 18 age group, four were in the 20-29 age group, 12 were in the 30-39 age group, six were in the 40-49 age group, four were in the 50-59 age group, and four were in the 60-75 age group (Figure 1). Data on age distribution represented age group from the focus groups was the 30-39 age group (Figure 1).

¹ To appropriately recognize how belonging to religious minority groups informs individual identification within broader marginalized or equity deserving group(s), identity categories were expanded to include a religious minority identification during assessment to be able to include the aforementioned group in the *Participant Profile* of this report. It is important to note that this category was not presented in the intake survey and that no other participants were presented with the option to indicate religious observation or minority as an identity while completing the intake survey.

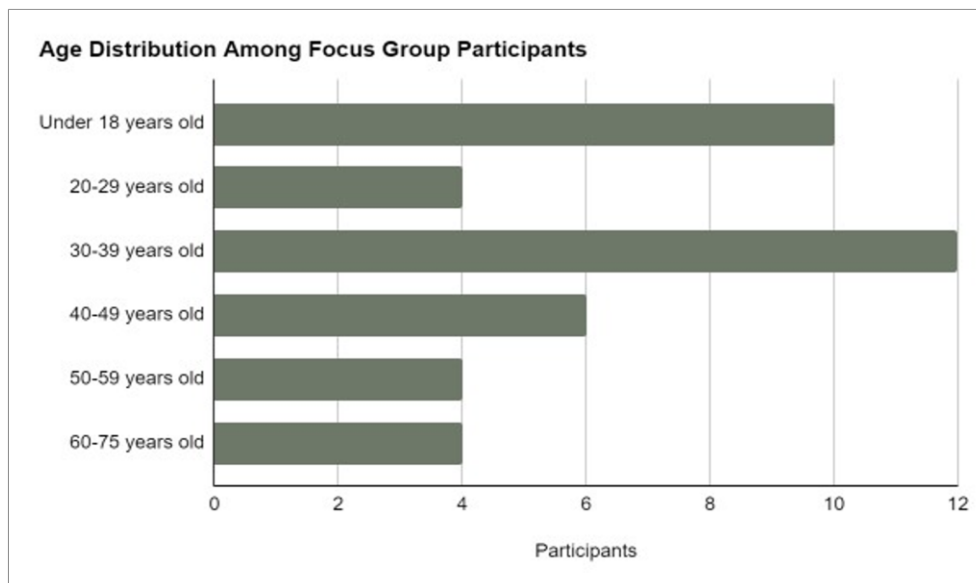


Figure 1. Age distribution of focus group participants (n=40).

Representation of Identity Group(s)

During the intake survey, community members were asked to self-identify from a selection of marginalized and equity deserving groups to better understand participant demographic background. All individuals who filled out the intake survey were given the option to select more than one identity or to skip the question entirely. Two focus group participants chose to skip the question. Many participants had overlapping identities which were distributed among the following categories: 10 participants selected BIPOC, 10 were identified as youth² (defined as under 18 years old), seven selected low income, seven were identified as religious minorities³, six identified as immigrants, five participants are living with a disability or have a family member who lives with a disability, three are part of the LGBTQIA+ community, two participants identified as senior citizens, one identified as a refugee, and eight selected the option "none of the above" (Figure 2).

² The intake survey was not administered to youth participants as they were minors. Since youth as an identity group can be considered an equity deserving group, it is presented here as such a group. Youth participants were not provided with the option to identify with any other marginalized or equity deserving groups.

³ As this identity group emerged from a focus group that used convenience sampling, it was not included as an option in the original intake survey. Therefore, this identity category was added to the graph after the fact to properly reflect part of the perspectives and experiences of this group. It is important to note that no other participants who completed the intake survey were presented with the option to indicate this identity group nor were members of this focus group presented with the option to identify with any other group beyond forming part of a religious minority group.

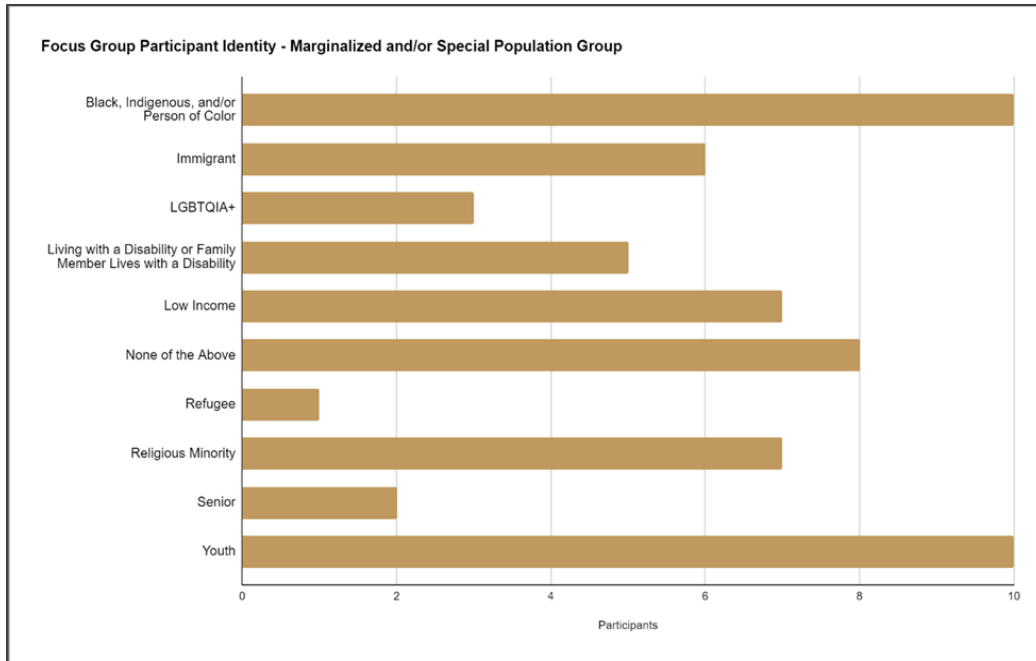


Figure 2. Focus group participant identity (n=45).

The option to select multiple identity groups during intake survey completion was an intentional design choice as identity and belonging are not limited to a single category. To further reflect the overlapping nature of the focus group participants' identities, the number of distinct categories selected by each participant were quantified and are shown in Figure 3. Community members from the focus groups described their identity as follows: eight focus group participants did not identify with any marginalized or equity deserving group whereas 11 people selected one group identity, five people chose two group identities, three people held three overlapping group identities, and one person belonged to four identity groups (Figure 3).

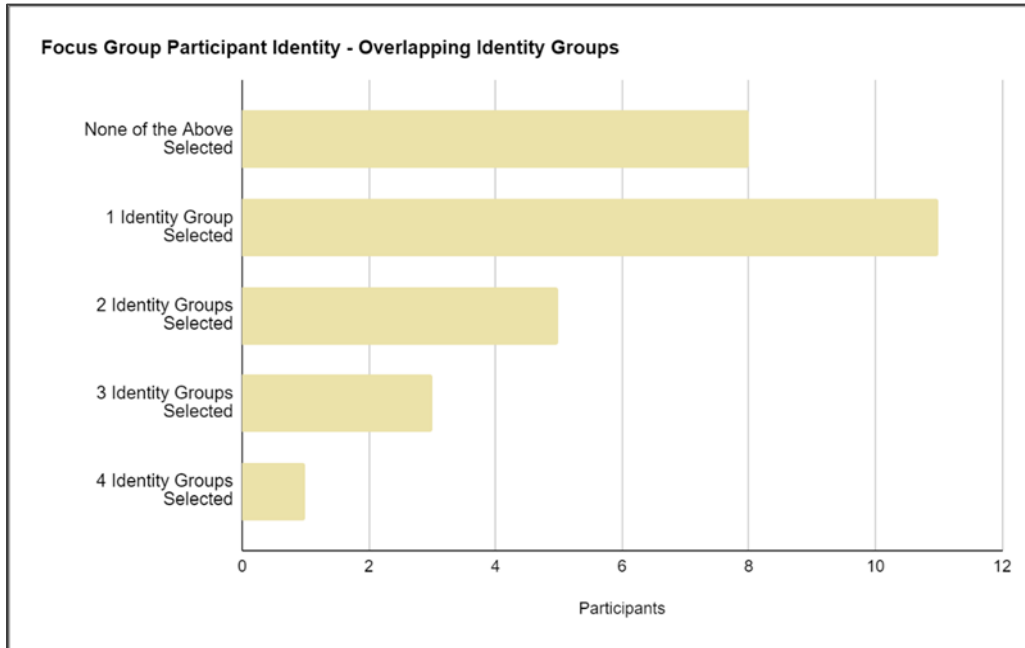


Figure 3. Overlapping marginalized and equity deserving group identities for focus group participants (n=28).

To offer a more comprehensive glimpse into the lived experiences and realities of those community members who participated in the focus groups, intersectionality is explored below in Figure 4. This figure provides a breakdown of the identities selected by each focus group participant who chose to answer this question on the intake survey.

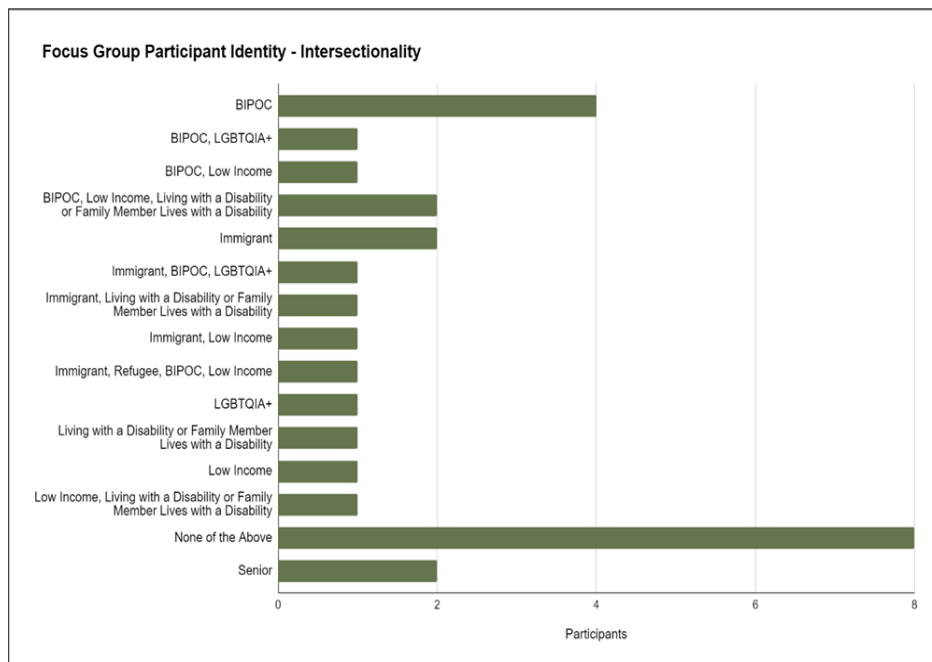


Figure 4. Focus group participant intersectionality with marginalized and equity deserving groups (n=28).

Geographic Location

The targeted geographic locations along the trail have been outlined in Figure 5. The regions include five distinct neighborhood clusters defined by the Conservancy as follows: East Denver neighborhoods (Windsor, Four Square Mile, Indian Creek, GoldSmith, and Hampden (East)); Central Aurora neighborhoods (Highland Park East, Highline Villages, Expo Park, Rangeview, and Lyn Knoll); Aurora Municipal Center neighborhoods (City Center, City Center North, Centretech, and Centrepont); North Aurora neighborhoods (Laredo Highline, Norfolk Glen, Friendly Village, Tower Triangle, Northeast, and Gateway Park); and Green Valley Ranch (GVR) neighborhoods (GVR North, GVR South, and Painted Prairie) (Figure 5).

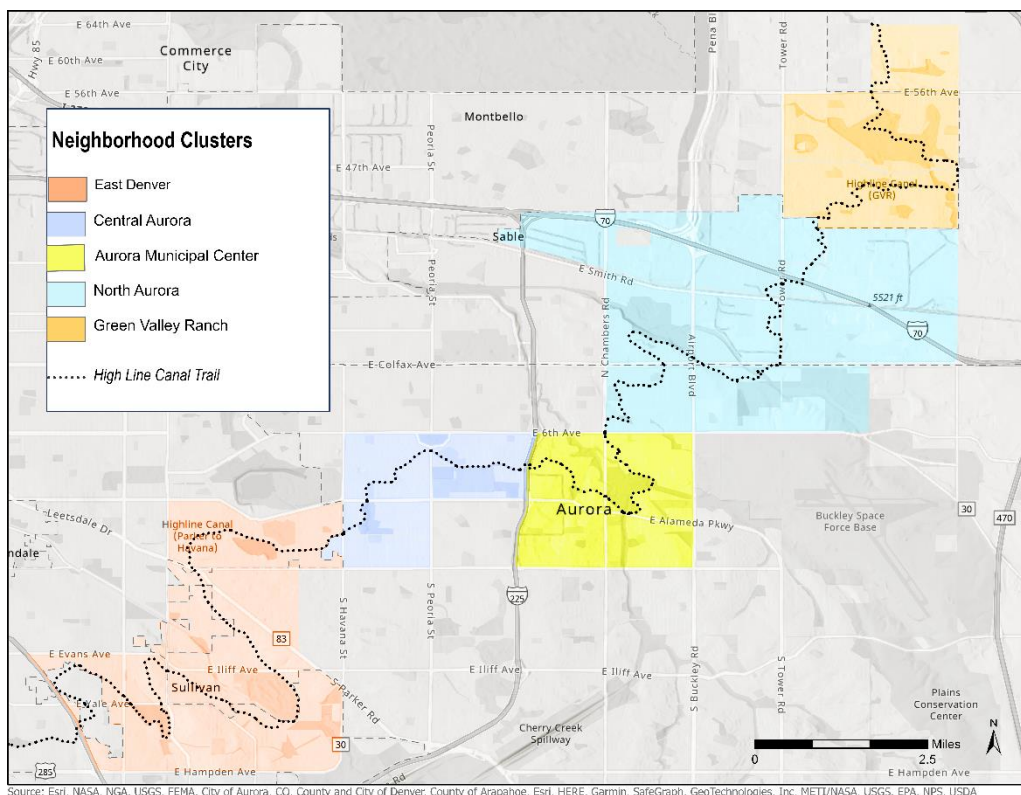


Figure 5. Five neighborhood clusters along the High Line Canal Trail.

The geographic distribution of the focus group participants from the neighborhoods is specified in Figure 6. East Denver was the most represented region with 10 participants. Six participants were from Central Aurora, six more were from Aurora Municipal Center, five participants came from North Aurora, two participants were from Green Valley Ranch, and one participant indicated they were not from any of these regions (Figure 6).

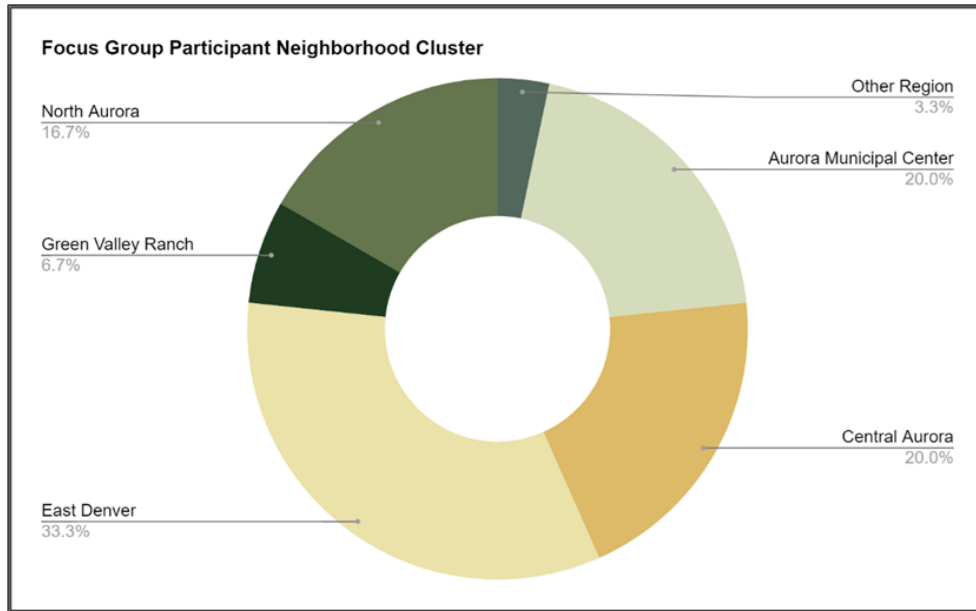


Figure 6. Focus group participants by neighborhood cluster (n=30).

Usage

The majority of focus group participants, 86.7% or 26 individuals were Canal Trail users. Only four individuals, or 13.3% of participants, reported that they did not use the Canal Trail and instead used other trails and green spaces (Figure 7).

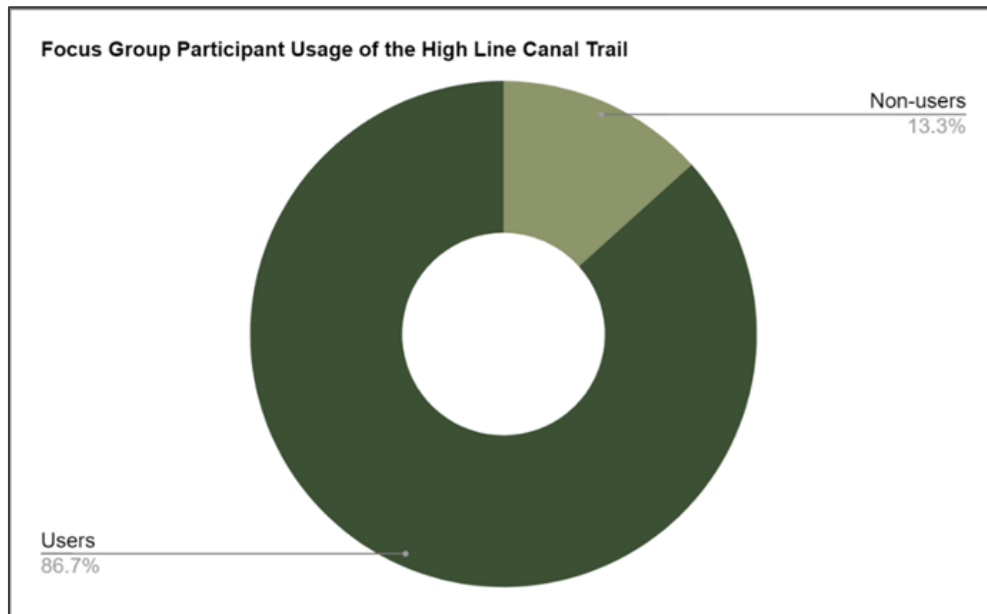


Figure 7. Focus group participant usage of the High Line Canal Trail (n=30).

The Canal Trail serves an integral role in community access to nature in Denver's urban environment. Participants voiced common uses of the trail such as for exercise, including activities walking, running, and biking. Many participants utilize the trail alone, with family or others, and as a space to walk their dogs. Other motives for usage included a desire to simply be outside, take advantage of a neighboring natural/green space, and as a stress reliever. Some participants cited specific functions for using the trail, due to its connectivity to other neighborhoods or parts of the city, as transport or for commuting. A common allure of the natural landscape is that it is a free public community space without obstructions or cars. The long continuity of the trail is desirable for those with children and dogs, so that they can explore, and for users to decide their distance traveled depending on their preferred activities or interests such as long-distance walking, running or biking. Frequency of participant usage varied, but many indicated higher weekly usage when they could easily access the trail by walking or had close access points to their residence. Some participants expressed that difficult weather conditions such as heavy snow or lack of shoveling and darkness deters their use of the Canal Trail. In addition, participants voiced that they use the trail more frequently in the summer months, during daylight savings, and less in the winter months due to both the weather and early sunset.

Community Suggested Improvements

Community participants shared numerous suggestions for desired amenities and infrastructure improvements based on their personal experiences and use of the Canal Trail and other green spaces. These community suggested improvements aimed to broadly increase accessibility, usage, and perceptions of personal safety for trail users and non-users. In the context of public spaces or trails, like the Canal Trail, safety, amenities, accessibility, and infrastructure are all interrelated and play a critical role in creating a positive user experience. The following synthesis (1) highlights the most prevalent views that emerged from the community focus groups and (2) offers participants' rationale behind certain suggested improvements. Both components are important to consider for the authentic integration of community input as part of the improvement of the Canal Trail.

Safety

It is important to first anchor community members' suggestions in the desire for increased personal safety as this theme underpinned much of the input received during the focus groups. Safety is a critical aspect of public spaces and trails, such as the Canal Trail, as

users need to feel safe and secure while using them. The following quotes capture some participants' trepidation about using the Canal Trail:

"And then I would also, of course, like to underline what some of the people are saying about safety. I don't... also don't know what the answer is. But there have been moments when I've chosen not to go on the High Line Canal because I think— by myself— who knows what could happen in any of the parts that I go to. It's usually if I have a big dog or something with me, that I'm thinking, 'Oh, maybe someone's not going to come up to me.' So yeah, I don't know what the answer is for that, but I think that's always a concern when we're talking about a less visible space in the environment that people are using."

"I would say some segments in northeast Aurora—so as you're getting from Expo Park and then, I guess it would be heading north, if you will. I know the trail goes back and forth but just as the trail goes north— kind of from that area— just some safety improvements because, from what I've heard, I know there've been several women attacked biking and walking and jogging in that area. And so, myself, I wouldn't feel safe there when it wasn't daylight."

Perceptions of personal safety and security can be enhanced through infrastructure improvements as well as through the provision of amenities. Concepts such as user accessibility to the trail and during their visit can contribute to both patrons' perceived safety and probability of usage. Ensuring that patrons of all abilities and identities feel that they can securely and consistently access and use the trail, beginning prior to their visit to the moment they start their departure, will not only enhance physical access and usage (i.e. infrastructure and amenities), but reinforce perceived accessibility (i.e. community belonging). Accessibility, amenities, and infrastructure, then, are essential for creating a safe and inviting Canal Trail atmosphere, and they must be considered in tandem to ensure a positive user experience for all.

Amenities

Amenity improvements or the addition of more regularly occurring amenities along the trail included restrooms, water access, signage, shade, and seating. Two commonly mentioned suggested improvements were regularly placed seating and resting areas, as long distances without ensured seating posed some insecurity or challenges for those with mobility issues to ensure their own safety or an unassisted return to their cars or starting point. Table 1 provides a summary of the suggested amenities voiced by community members during the focus groups:

PARTICIPANTS' AMENITY SUGGESTION	PARTICIPANTS' DESIRED IMPROVEMENT RATIONALE	SELECT PARTICIPANT QUOTE
Restrooms	Improves accessibility and comfort of the trail for more diverse groups including the elderly, those living with disabilities, those who use the trail for long durations of time, and children	<p><i>"[...] a big reason that I love the trail is because in most places that I've been on the trail there is a dirt or crusher-fined jogging path next to the paved path. So wherever the trail is going to be built out in the future, or wherever that enhancement could be made, to continue having both a paved and a dirt or gravel surface would be awesome... Then— just seconding what everyone else has said— restrooms at regular intervals, safety boxes or whatever at regular intervals, and then shade structures. I know it would be a big one if there's going to be new areas of the trail that are going to be built and it's not possible to have mature trees, then maybe shade structures and water fountains would be awesome."</i></p>
Shaded Areas or Shade Structures	Promotes accessibility, especially in the summer months, for those living with disabilities, older age groups, and bikers	
Access Points	Increases accessibility for all patrons through the various neighborhoods along the trail through consistent and/or well marked entrances	
Seating Areas /Water Fountains	<p>Promotes community gathering and usage</p> <p>Beautifies gathering areas with "oasis" type features such as fountains, steams etc.</p> <p>Promotes accessibility for those who cannot continually walk without a resting area</p> <p>Reinforces perceived safety for those who may have mobility issues, knowing they have space to sit and rest</p>	<p><i>"[...] I've got a couple of chronic illnesses and disabilities I'm living with and there are times when you can go for five miles and there's nowhere to sit. That's not great for accessibility. But I do love the wildlife."</i></p>
Play/Exercise Areas	<p>Encourages imaginative nature use through interactive play areas</p> <p>Promotes new user experiences through exercise stations such as calisthenics machines, bars, benches</p> <p>Promotes other user interests and new user experiences through smaller engagement stations such as history, natura facts, tactile or visual examples</p>	<p><i>"I know that there are a few areas where the school uses the Highline Canal and the property around it for education and for kids to be able to get outside and play. I think in some areas I've also seen they have nature play stuff like benches and some signage and things to climb on. I know Highline Canal, I think, is looking to invest in more of those options, and I do really like that that is part of the conversation. So I hope to see maybe more nature play areas congregated where we see a lot of youth and a lot of families."</i></p>
More Greenery/Foliage	<p>Cultivates consistency along the trail in foliage, tree and grass coverage along the trail</p> <p>Creates more visually appealing landscape with plants and flowers near seating areas</p> <p>Provides shade with larger trees, especially in the summer months, for those living with disabilities, older age groups, and bikers</p>	<p><i>"[...] that area east of I-225 is just really exposed where, if it's the summertime, it's just going to be so relentlessly hot. And all you really have to look at are other apartment complexes or industry. And it seems like having trees and grasses would be helpful even though that it's really an enticing area to want to go to, just because it doesn't seem like there's really a lot there."</i></p>
Trash Cans	Decreases the perceived issue of littering and dog waste disposal	<p><i>"And as mentioned before, the trash cans, more sitting spots, that would be great."</i></p>

Table 1. Summary of focus group suggestions for amenities and supporting participant quotes.

Infrastructure

Desired infrastructure improvements included pavement quality, trail terrain, inclinations or trail curvature, and debris. While most focus group participants did not express difficulty accessing the trail, others did articulate specific accessibility concerns for certain demographics. Participants particularly referred to older demographics and those who use ambulatory devices when considering accessibility improvements. Accessibility that reassures patrons' perception of safety when getting to and using the trail is imperative to promote usership for all individuals. The following quotes highlight the thoughts of a few participants:

"There is one area of the trail —it might be off of Florida— it's a new access to the trail and there is a porta potty there, which is awesome. But the slope getting from the trail to the porta potty is pretty great. And so, I could see... for example, my mom has mobility issues, she can't walk. She has trouble walking, I guess, up and down hills. And so, getting to that restroom would be problematic for her, just as an example. And I know it's hard because the slope on both sides of the trail, it could be challenging to grid it to get a restroom in an accessible place. But if it would be possible to have more accessibility for those porta potties, that would be awesome."

"I also access the trail from Expo Park and I don't recall there being a good way to access there for a wheelchair because it is dirt in that area and no paving"

"I live a little south of Green Valley Ranch and we don't have any direct connected —even a sidewalk that ends up...that you can get onto the overall rec path system. So, I think, certainly for where I live, certainly if you have a wheelchair or any kind of issue, you do need to drive. We don't have bus service. As I said, no sidewalks that connect into the rec path system. So that seems like a gap to me that it [the Canal Trail] doesn't connect into some of these neighborhoods along the eastern edge of Aurora. And I think that seems like an opportunity to not, sort of, require a vehicle to access the trail from where we live."

Parking

Easily accessible and marked parking was also voiced as an infrastructural addition that would increase usage on the Canal Trail. Touching on themes of perceived personal safety, participants voiced feeling more comfortable knowing they were able to leave their cars in designated, well lit, and nearby parking areas.

"[...] I do want to echo that I think in this Denver Metro area, trail head accessibility is not just a problem for High Line Canal. I think it's a problem for a lot of trails and so it would be kind of cool if High Line Canal could take on, 'How do we make trail head parking a more easily accessible or visible component of trail systems?'. Because it's not just like High Line Canal has this problem— it's a lot of Sand Creek Greenway, Aurora trails, Denver trails."

"I also live very close to a trail head. And I do have to say, speaking to accessibility to the places I use, Quebec and the new trail head parking on Bellevue have made a huge difference as far as getting to the trail and having it be easy."

"Yeah, similar concerns with safety, especially around like, 'Okay, I'm parking my car here, is it going to be okay? Is it going to get broken into?' And then I think the inconsistency is something that stands out to me. [...] Yeah, so that inconsistency: not being able to predict whether the lot is safe..."

"Y'all might have some of these things already, but I know that in many parking lots, too, many trails, they'll have kiosks with maps information, sometimes information about the wildlife you'll see in the area possibly to help people find their way around or to see other parking spots that are available throughout the trail, or to see areas that are more accessible than others."

Signage

Increase in various types of signage were of interest to participants. Signage can provide readily accessible references points for patrons and reassurance of their personal safety, especially for those who may be unfamiliar with the trail or don't frequent often.

Desired sign improvements included indication of parking areas, trailheads, historical information, wildlife, and nature facts.

"Yeah, I kind of just want to second that [not knowing how to access the trail at different places or things to do] too. And [another focus group participant] popped in the chat: 'maybe more signage at access points.' I keep thinking, I moved to a new neighborhood maybe six months ago and I'm Googling as we're doing this [focus group], 'How to access the trail? What is the nearest point?' And I'm still not entirely sure. And so, having signage at those access points, maybe with maps, that'll let you know the full extent of the trail and where else you can get on it. But even if there isn't a way to let, kind of, whole neighborhoods know that this is a thing nearby, when you're driving down the street or walking down the street maybe you'll stumble across that [signage] and have better information there."

*"I think that it [the Canal Trail] has easy access but many times you don't know you are on the trail and there are no signs that let you know where you are, where that path will take you to."
"I really like the idea about signage, and not just signage telling you how the trail connects, but also playing into the rich history of the different areas on the High Line Canal. I think that would definitely make it more appealing to a lot of parents and people just seeking that type of knowledge."*

Separate Bike Lanes

Participants voiced difficulty in navigating narrow sections of the trail with mixed traffic. Providing separate bike lanes would reduce the chance of collisions between pedestrian and cyclist user groups, improving the safety of different types of users along the Canal Trail.

"Yeah, I think that when the bikes are going by fast, it's hard. As I said, I'm often there with animals, with dogs with me, and there are some places on the trail where it's quite wide or it's dirt and you have a little bit more wiggle room. But over by Quebec and Mississippi, for example, it's very narrow and all the non-bikers try to squeeze onto the tiny gravel part. And then there's a lot of traffic over there because...the paved parts, the bikes go by pretty fast."

"And then when I'm biking a lot on that trail and I know there's a lot of people walking, walking with little kids, walking with the dogs, it's wide enough, but if that would be separated into two lines, I feel that would be safer for everyone, because people cannot hear me while I'm biking. I can see them unless they're over some curve. I think that would add to the safety of the trail for everyone and would make it more inclusive to all kinds of types of usage of the trail. So definitely that. And as mentioned before, the trash cans, more sitting spots, that would be great. Yeah. But mainly I would say accessibility from the neighborhoods."

Pedestrian Crossings

In addition to adding separated bike lanes to increase user safety, participants also voiced an interest in increasing well-defined pedestrian crossings at major road intersections of the trail. This included crosswalks, but also infrastructure to stop cars so that pedestrians can safely cross the road intersections along the trail.

"I think that also the signage and the crossings definitely, because some of the crossings are very busy streets in the middle and they're not marked. There's no way to stop traffic and you get kind of stuck there if you want to turn back or try to make it across"

"There are places where the trail comes to a street, it is important to have pedestrian lights, a button that you can push for a red light to stop the cars and pedestrian can cross safely because there can be lines marked on the pavement but cars don't stop and we have to either wait for a long time or walk around and it takes way longer to go around."

"I feel safe when the trail is far from any stress and I know my kids can run free. And I don't feel safe when the trail comes to a street and there are not stop signs or pedestrian light that makes it safe for us to cross."

Lighting and Emergency Call Boxes

Darkness or poor lighting was a primary concern, limiting factor, or deterrent of both trail access and usership. Several patrons mentioned avoiding the trail at night or during the winter due to both weather conditions and early sunset times. Suggested increase in lighting along the trail, at crosswalks, and regularly placed emergency call boxes were desired to improve participants' safety concerns. Call boxes would help multiple user groups feel safer when using the trail alone, at dusk, or at night.

"Yeah, so from my perspective, I don't know from a safety perspective, I don't know if it would be possible to put those blue box with the... I don't know what you would call them— but they have a blue light on there and a phone where you can call for safety— maybe every few miles or something. Because definitely for me, I love the trail but I don't necessarily feel safe on there at night or in the very early morning areas in some of the segments by my house, which is in northeast Aurora actually. And so having some way to maybe dial for safety would be cool."

"I think that trails need better lightning – some kind of light along the trails. It is not inviting to go for walks at night because it's so dark. But having some solar lights on the ground so you see where you are walking or, like, streetlight that make you feel safe to walk at night when you are coming back from work. Emergency buttons or emergency phones every so often that are well lit and easy to get to and you can see them clearly at night. There's so much energy wasted on Christmas trees all over the city...so to think that there are no solar panel lights along the trails... it is really a shame that no one has thought about illuminating the streets and trails that are used to commute from workplace to home. There are solar panels that charge during the day and have several hours of light during the night, it's hard for me to grasp that one in Denver has thought about this solution."

"[...] lighting and making it to where people do see you at crosswalks, so you do not get hit. Because, also, when you're actually walking across Quebec, making sure people actually see you. Because I've almost been hit by a car, how many times now? Because I walk on the south side of Quebec to— across Adam City—to go to Adam City high school, and those cars that turn right do

not look. And they need to be aware that kids are walking across that so that they do not hit people, especially in the morning because it's dark."

"And then I know there's some low impact lighting options out there. I think looking at that, so it doesn't mess up the landscape or anything, but especially in those kind of dusk hours I think is where —at least for me— that's kind of when I start wondering if it's getting a little more unsafe. So, keeping it [the Canal Trail] kind of lit [...]."

Taken collectively, the perceptions voiced relating to the intersection of accessibility, safety, desired amenities and infrastructural improvements shape the understanding of current community ability to visit and use the trail. Many of the participants' perceptions surrounding these overlapping categories were framed in the context for older age groups who frequent the trail; however, these concerns can also be applied to a variety of other demographics such as anyone living with a disability, those with mobility issues, or even those who are not familiar with or are new to recreating on the trail. Therefore, in consideration of new installations, being mindful of distance from entrance or exit points, parking, visible signage, other amenities, and frequency of amenity availability are important aspects highlighted within the focus groups to contemplate in planning.

Community Suggested Outreach & Programming

Participants gave suggestions for ways to develop partnerships and programming that aligned more with their personal interests and desire to connect with community groups. A summary of community suggestions can be found below in Table 2. Ideas proposed were to host events or empower community members to create community events held at the trail. Partnering with specific organizations and creating programs such as foraging, bird watching/identification classes, education classes and groups, exercise classes, outdoor painting and photography, and sponsored walks with a professional were also of particular interest. Another idea, in addition to already hosted community clean ups, was to hold community flagging events where participants can walk the trail and identify or mark areas with flags to signal needed improvements or desired modifications. There was also a desire to cultivate community ownership through inviting organizations, business, and nearby schools to adopt a portion of the trail and hold community participatory trail enhancement workshops. Ideas included painting a community mural lead by a local artist, sculptures, or locally designed benches, statutes, and amenities.

Community Recommendations	Cultivate Community Ownership	Create an Inclusive and Welcoming Environment	Sponsor Weekly Activities	Implement New or Improve Existing Trail Activities
<p>Synthesis of Community's Suggested Actions:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve businesses and schools in supporting the trails and open spaces • Implement Adopt-a-Trail model for certain stretches • Create partnerships with community organizations • Organize more frequent clean-up events to give back to the community's open spaces • Use Canal Trail as an open public space that can be a setting for diverse community-led art expressions like graffiti • Host more community events or neighborhood gatherings • Advertise meet-up events through nonprofits, churches, and rec centers to bring people together and attract new users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold events or activities that bring the community together and are enjoyable for all ages • Provide more activities for small children • Create engaging activities for teenagers, including interactive activities and events not solely for younger children • Smooth trails for people with mobility challenges, wheelchairs, or bikes • Add art and educational components • Implement multilingual signs to explain historical and natural features of the trail • Revamp the Conservancy's website to include user-friendly maps with multilingual options and an address search function to find the nearest entry to the High Line Canal Trail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events or classes like yoga or photography • Groups for parents with strollers and runners • Foraging or wildlife classes • <i>Meet-and-greet</i> opportunities or welcoming picnics for people new to the area or to the Canal Trail to connect with the local community at events and gatherings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster youth participation through incentives or fun activities • Add more programming that features interactive activities such as drawing or coloring outdoors • Provide outdoor games like tic tac toe or Connect Four • Add bike rental stations • Focus on health initiatives like <i>Walk with a Doc</i> program for both urban and non-urban areas • Enhance events or classes for learning new skills, like candle-making or painting in the park, with local artisans or instructors.
<p>Select Community Quotes:</p>	<p><i>"I want to share that the organization Amigos de Mexico was part of a project where the kids were invited to a workshop where they made ceramic sculptures and they used those sculptures to decorate a bridge in Denver. And it's so amazing for my children to walk by that bridge and see what they created. And it does bring a sense of ownership and that they are part of this community."</i></p> <p><i>"So I wonder if High Line Canal could do some more intentional meetups where they're wanting feedback. So it's not a wildlife walk or a birding walk. It's like: we want to improve the High Line Canal and you tell us what that looks like – just as an idea."</i></p>	<p><i>"I mean, I agree with everything everyone's said in the chat [from the virtual focus group]. I mean, that's all fantastic. Just during this talk [focus group], I was trying to use the High Line Conservation Center's maps on their website to figure out some of the questions on portal entries and everything. And they're not easy to use on the website and I don't see any multilingual options— just to go to the point they're talking. So it seems like there's some low-hanging fruit to make some of this stuff available. But right now, you couldn't put in your address and then find the nearest entry to the High Line Canal Trail for example. You have to overlay multiple maps and it's all in English."</i></p>	<p><i>"I have tried walking the trail and I haven't found somewhere to park to get to the trail and it's too far to walk from my house to the trail or any trail heads. And I don't know anybody because I'm new to Aurora. Newish. So, I think if there was a meet and greet or some type of welcome event, that would make me feel a little bit better to then jump into a cleanup event or some other community building event."</i></p>	<p><i>"[...] It's little steps like that that really do change people's health. And I think this [Walk with a Doctor program] is a really great health initiative. And it's both mental and physical health initiative, you know. And maybe there's, I don't know if there's, like, close...if the trail goes by any rec centers or basketball courts, or if the, you know... I wanna appeal to kids. I wanna appeal to adults. I wanna appeal to the elderly folks that might just do a quarter mile each way, you know."</i></p>

Table 2. Summary of community suggestions for the Conservancy's outreach and programming with select supporting quotes

"I know that the Sand Creek Regional Greenway, which is in a similar part of town, at least, on the north side, has been doing these community led like input walks specifically for community leaders, and community leaders of color are invited, and they get cameras or they get a red flag and a green flag, and they're asked to walk around with the executive directors of Sand Creek and point out things are not safe, are not great. 'We love that, we don't like that, our community has told us X, Y, Z.'"

"I don't know how the success of it would be, but trying to create some running groups or cycling groups or stroller groups or various different types of recreation that people could do, like meetup type things. You know what I mean? And then advertising those through other nonprofits, churches, rec centers, things like that. That could be a cool way to bring people together and bring new users out, maybe."

"There are so many open spaces that can be enhanced by art, permanent or temporary. For example, I created huge stickers of hopscotch that were placed along a trail and then moved for other children to enjoy. Invite the community to be part of workshops for kids of all ages to create art with recycle materials or even from nature and create sculptures or paintings that can be shown along the trail. Invite the community to reuse, recycle and create. All of that brings beauty to any open space."

Community Recognition of Socio-Economic Downturn and Impacts

Prior to delving into the details of this section, it is critically important to emphasize that Lacy Consulting Services does not condone or support the further displacement, removal, or eviction of unhoused community members along the Canal Trail or as a result of Canal Trail improvements. Rather, we urge the Conservancy to pursue partnerships with houseless support and other human resource services that can provide appropriate responses and resources to manage the impacts of unhoused community displacement along the trail and the concerns voiced by focus group participants. The commonly mentioned safety concerns in the focus groups revolved around the impacts of the current national socioeconomic climate and recent COVID-19 pandemic. Many participants voiced unhoused people and houseless encampments along the trail as a key concern. While potentially not viewed by some as directly related to the environmental conservation of the Canal Trail, these issues do affect the community's trail perception, usership, and desire to foster trail stewardship.

Community participants' main concerns regarding encampments, commonly occurring under bridges or thruways and along the trail, included their personal safety, hazardous debris, or drug paraphernalia, and increase in trash and waste. The increase of houseless encampments seemed to have occurred over the last few years, in addition to other voiced concerns related to socioeconomic decline.

So, it just, in one sense, it feels safer, but over where I am, it hasn't been the safest because of some of the tents and whatnot that have been up in the area where my kids have found like

bottles of alcohol and whatnot. And so that's been, I think that's why we've decreased the amount of time that we're out there is because it doesn't necessarily feel the same way that it had felt."

In addition, participants expressed general concerns about crime, independent from the concerns about the houseless users of the trail. This idea also was frequently mentioned as additional reasoning for participants' desire for bettering lighting along the trail and the addition of emergency call boxes.

"I'm worried about where I live off of Yale and Quebec. It's dark and it's not even cement that's been upgraded. It's the old astroturf or the old asphalt and it's just completely degraded and there's no trash cans. There's no lighting and there's still some of those really tall old Cottonwoods I do not trust. And we lock our doors because it gets scary. I have people hop our back fences on the canal and I had a group of people hop their [neighbor's] fences on the canal... five guys climb in and they're hiding in our neighbor's home."

Trust and Future Community Engagement

Drawing from the questions that were asked about outreach and community engagement in relation to the High Line Canal Trail and Conservancy, trust emerged as an important theme. Within trust, we coded four sub-themes that provided greater depth to the concerns that were expressed by the participants. Overall, participants expressed 1) interest in having outreach and communication that was geared to them, their language and culture; 2) concerns that not all engagement is authentic, Colorado's outdoors spaces feel geared towards whites, and that organizations sometimes follow their own agenda anyway; 3) the need for more truthful and transparent information about safety and maintenance of the trail; and 4) past experiences of waiting for follow-up about whether their input was implemented.

So basically, I've been living in my community for about 25 years. So, my community has been underserved forever. Okay. So now, since we're going through this gentrification era and no disrespect, okay, but I'm just being honest. You want my honest opinion. You pay me for my honest opinion. And so now since we're going through, like, seems to me like since the white people are coming into the community, it seems to me like now they finally wants to do something for our community. And so, I try to be very, I'm pretty much like the leader of my community. I'm kind of like, you know, work for the city for like over 20 something years, so you gotta get in front of me."

Tailored Outreach and Communication

Participants shared sentiments that many times an organization's outreach and engagement is conducted by someone who they cannot relate to, does not look like them, or maybe that engagement doesn't even reach their community altogether. Participants highlighted that Colorado, in particular, creates feelings of division in the outdoors and that here—more than in other places they have lived—the outdoors feel like white spaces. Participants placed additional importance on the need to meet communities where they are

and more tailored efforts that are designed to make spaces more welcoming to diverse audiences. The participants urged careful selection of facilitators for these efforts, stating that inexperienced staff, rushed, or poorly planned engagement could cause negative impacts. Therefore, participants viewed effective and sensitive communication as essential for building trust with communities and buy-in for projects.

"There are sometimes spaces in the outdoors, especially here in Colorado, that are white spaces and are not so welcoming of other people... there is need for making it accessible for other people, but also advertising it—making it welcoming."

"[...] the coordinator being like flexible and being able to relate to the walkers and so yeah and just kind of the coordinator just has to be engaging. It's like everybody cannot do community engagement and I just find that lots of organizations try to come out to the program to do some wonderful things but it's like that connection is just like lost. "

"[...] I come from the southwest Denver area. I was really active in the community there. We built some green spaces in the alleyways. It was a lot of community effort and I was kind of used to already seeing the same faces and the same family. So, it kind of feels distant once you move out from that. And just trying to build community where people look like you and inviting ... I'm not an avid hiker or someone that spends a lot of time outdoors. I like to spend time outdoors to my limit in my comfort. And sometimes the outdoors can feel intimidating."

Additionally, within the topic of communication, there is community interest to build awareness about increases in crime and unhoused encampments along the trail to promote a sense of security. Participants were interested in being informed about other trail updates, as well, such as debris, trail conditions, and maintenance in addition to the encampments.

"Of course, we want to ensure that people who are experiencing homelessness are treated with respect and dignity, et cetera. But having a conversation about how leadership with High Line Canal addresses true and actual safety for people walking individually with small kids, by themselves at night, riding bikes, and what parts of the trail are safe to use at certain times and what aren't, and how we communicate that to the public. Because I think I'd feel more comfortable if I got on and it was sort of like, 'We are seeing an increase in human waste in homeless encampments in this section. We'll update you when we have these spaces and those individuals X, Y, Z.'"

"On a similar note, but different, is more communication around trail maintenance. Either everybody on the trail— everybody who contributes to the trail maintenance— needs to be on the same page about we are shoveling the snow and we are definitely doing this and we are all doing X, Y, Z to make sure it's accessible. Or it needs to be identified that this section is not going to be shoveled, for example, in winter, and that requires a different level of preparedness. You will need snowshoes in this area, would be helpful."

"Yes, just speaking on behalf of my community, I work with a lot of immigrants and African refugees that come here and I know there's a big community here, especially in Aurora and the Denver metro area. And I think there's a lot of times it's: we just don't know. We don't know where we have access to. And I think really starts with conversations and I try to encourage my community as much as I can to get outdoors, but it's really more of just the information that's been out there. And a lot of times it's like if there's things that's going on, it's usually the language barrier. People don't know how to get to where and when. And I think that's sometimes something, especially in my community, it's really the language barrier, not knowing the access to different places and things to do."

Authenticity and Fairness

Coming from a place of perceived unfairness—participants who travel to use the trail system and find themselves torn between enjoying nature and asking themselves why they don't have trails like this in their own neighborhood—the need to improve authentic and wider engagement arose. Although many participants did appreciate the opportunity to participate in a focus group and viewed the method as positive, some participants recognized that their voices appear to be less heard in public engagement processes if they lived in communities further away from the trail. In addition, some focus group discussions centered on the view that organizations who do outreach and engagement sometimes have their own organizational agenda and do not truly intend to listen or incorporate community feedback.

"I'm just like fed up with people coming into the community. And they say they're going to do something. Yeah. And they don't do it. You know, now I'm really being like cautious with my time... I want to know, if I'm a part of something, I want to know, 'What are you going to do for my community?' So that's my personal agenda... Some committees, I mean some programs and committees, it's like they have their own personal agenda— their goals and objectives. And so, I have goals and objectives too. Which is, 'How is your program going to contribute to my community?'"

"When I do walk the High Line Canal, I don't even really wanna be like negative, but here's the thing. And, sometimes, I love the beauty. And then, sometimes, it puts me in the mindset of like: the unfairness, the disparities like in my neighborhood. Or when I see that they have certain things, I'm like, why they don't have it in my neighborhood? And then I get on to this, I don't know, then sometimes it takes me in a, it just puts me in a bad mood. But yeah, so that's why part of me is just kinda like excited to know what you guys [the Conservancy] are doing. But then I'm thinking, okay, I mean, how would you guys [the Conservancy] be contributing to my neighborhood, to beautify my neighborhood?"

Transparency

Participants expressed a desire to have greater access to information and more transparency about related safety issues regarding the trail. Specifically, drawing from the perceived safety issues that included murders along the trail, drug use, other crimes, and houseless encampments, participants expressed that they felt that the online information available about using the Canal Trail appeared to be primarily promotional—or did not communicate potential risks or isolated incidents. Participants wished that online resources, in addition to events and promotional materials, shared accurate and up to date crime information, the location of ongoing maintenance that could pose safety concerns or trail closures, snow-removal updates, and generally, areas that they may wish to avoid or could interrupt their usage.

"I also...don't know, have an answer for this, so that might be frustrating. But sometimes I get a little frustrated with our more urban parks — and especially dealing with people experiencing

homelessness, and some of the drugs, violence — where there is a perception that every trail is safe. Or we want it to feel like every trail is safe, and that might not be the case. And so sometimes I wish there was just more transparency from our government agencies like the city governments or from trail leaders – whether it's High Line or other trails – on, 'this might not be the best place to walk right now as we're trying to get resources to this particular community...' Because when you just go on the website and it's just information about, 'a tree has fallen' or 'we're repaving this area,' it makes it seem like those are the only issues that are happening. But realistically, at least myself, I'm like, 'Okay, but is it actually a place I should be going right now? Or would it be better if I just went to this [other] side of the trail?'"

The transparent communication of critical information overall promotes awareness of trail incidents and assures patrons of their safety. Further transparency, regardless of the topic, allows patrons to be prepared for what they may come across on the trail. Ultimately fostering more community buy in and sense of security while on the trail.

"We're lucky because we can...but, absolutely, getting community trust and community buy-in. And I think this kind of outreach, all you can do is say, 'Hey, we [the Conservancy] want your input. We want your— [you] to help us, you know.' And put it out there and hope that it will catch on. You know that, keep...you know...emphasizing with communications that this is the purpose of this conservancy. And this is the...you know...that's all, all we can do is to...you know...encourage and really state what the mission and the...And so that communication is essential. And when they start, hopefully as things start to improve and awareness...you know...then more people will buy in, and more people will try...trust. And, you know, so it's a...it has to be a two-way thing. But I'm so grateful for the input about... I'm just really grateful for the input to say, 'hey, you know, we've seen and done and heard a lot of talk, let's see some action.' You know, or let's see, you know, let's see what really happens."

Acknowledging Input and Following Up Suggestions

Several participants shared that they have a history of participation in previous Conservancy community engagement events such as meetings, focus groups, and interviews. However, some of these participants also mentioned that their participation and feedback had yet to turn into tangible results. In what is known as informant fatigue in Environmental Social Science literature, participants shared that in these past experiences, they were never reached out to again or are still waiting to see the changes and improvements that their communities desired. As previously mentioned, however, there were also multiple participants that did express hope that the focus groups were a good indicator of change and that they hope to see their recommendations on the trail.

"Sometimes there are projects done by organizations that are not based on what the community needs. Or they don't ask the community what improvements they would like to have done in their communities. And either the organizations just do whatever they come up with— not based on the people who will be using the space— or sometime the projects all together are not done and end up on promises in the air."

"Knowing that the HLCC hired you to do these focus groups, makes me think that they are interested in what the community has to say. We will see in the future if they really listen to our recommendations."

Discussion

The focus groups revealed diverse perceptions of desired amenities and improvements. Further, for those who require accessibility accommodations—whether it be from difficulty walking on a certain surface or inclines, use of ambulatory devices, strollers, and even those with small children—the Conservancy will have to consider accessible designs for infrastructure improvements to provide reassurance and comfort. In addition, through both the most recent engagement effort and previous ones, the Conservancy not only has a list of amenities to consider, but also a more intricate set of improvements rooted in social and local context. Beyond amenities and infrastructure, the suggested improvements include more intangible ideas such as transparency, relationships, equity, and trust. Trust, although seldom considered, is essential in the development of conservation initiatives. While some community suggested improvements can be supported with the addition of amenities, others will take time, transparent outreach, and consistent engagement to satisfy. Here, we discuss some of the implications of our findings in relation to the research on environmental justice, inclusive outreach, and equitable engagement in urban green spaces.

Any conservation intervention cannot be considered in isolation from the potential social impacts or community changes it may cause. Modifications to an existing social context can produce a cascade of unintended consequences that stand to both benefit or harm some groups and communities more than others. Namely, green gentrification can occur as the result of environmental cleanup (Williams & Hoffman, 2020), revitalization of urban spaces (Nixon et al., 2022), and the creation of new green areas (Rigolon et al., 2019). The property pricing impacts and community exclusion described in the literature review above also appear in our results, as some participants within the focus groups expressed that they have already been priced out of property along the Canal Trail and view it as an unattainable goal. Other participants voiced concerns about a lack of community representation and the shortfalls of previous engagement and programming they experienced. If considered in combination with the multiple case studies across the country where investment in urban green spaces initiated or exacerbated gentrification, this type of project should be accompanied by a great sense of responsibility—not only to the ways in which it might benefit the communities, but also the ways in which it may harm them or amplify existing challenges. Nevertheless, the participants suggested a suite of strategies

that could help build trust with their communities through more inclusive engagement, authenticity, transparency, and sustained involvement.

To integrate equitable public participation within conservation or green space planning, co-production or co-design is widely considered the gold standard of participation (Turnhout et al., 2020). In co-production, community participants are included in the conception, design, and implementation of a project with equal voice and decision-making power. Trust is established by involving community participation from the very beginning of a project. The role of external entities—like a non-profit organization, consultant, or government that is involved in the process—can be conceived as that of a facilitator that may bring additional expertise, resources, or insight, but does not dominate the dialogue or control disproportionate influence over the process (Manteaw, 2008). Instead, the communities serve as the leaders and managers with all decision-making power. As a result, the outcomes of a project directly cater to the vision, priorities, and process of the community. However, it is important to note that projects that achieve this standard are rare and it can also be a heavy burden on a community.

Nonetheless, we can still draw a few lessons for establishing trust from research on co-production. Given that multiple participants shared experiences of participating in other engagement efforts that left them disillusioned about seeing their suggestions reflected in the implementation of public works projects, the Conservancy will have engagement challenges moving forward with some communities. Further, in reviewing the internal documents on the Conservancy's past engagement efforts, many of the same suggestions that appear here were previously voiced by the community. Although collected from different areas, it is important to use past engagement experiences and community input as a foundation to build upon for data aggregation. This repetitive solicitation for input without implementation or follow-up can lead to mistrust of the organization and informant fatigue. Therefore, we not only encourage engagement to collect community input, but also continued engagement to share how community input was incorporated into plans and implementation so the community understands that their time was well spent.

Houseless populations and encampments in urban greens spaces deserve attention given the consistent appearance in our results. Engaging and understanding this demographic is rare, as they are not among the voices who typically provide public input. However, in recent years environmental justice researchers have explored parks and green

spaces with a critical lens to challenge the dominant notions of universal access to recreation, wellbeing benefits, and positive outcomes created by revitalization or restoration activities (Rigolon et al., 2019). Relevant to the work described in this report concerning perceived safety and houseless encampments, contemporary urban planning seeks ways to foster the participation of people experiencing houselessness within the design of urban green spaces (Dooling, 2009). Contrasting the common the “Not-In-My-Backyard” driven sterilization of urban green spaces by dominant groups, drawing from a human rights approach values the experience of all people and recognizes that the houseless are not condemned to urban green spaces as a refuge, but rather effectively choose these landscapes for the same connection to nature and enjoy the spaces for the same foundational conceptualizations of their use (Koprowska et al., 2020). Therefore, in our recommendations, we provide ideas and potential connections for more engagement about this issue within the improvement projects.

Lastly, concerning the effectiveness of this engagement and the voices that were able to be included, a few key issues arose over the course of this study. First, while email engagement yielded few responses it became clear that in-person engagement proved more effective at reaching some audiences. For example, even though it took several attempts at “knocking on the door,” the LCS Outreach Specialist was able to gain access and include new voices into the focus group process (e.g., the focus group at the mosque was achieved after multiple in-person attempts, conversations, and efforts to build trust). Next, given that some participants expressed that projects sometimes happen that they are not aware of or that outreach generally doesn’t reach their community, it appears that the standard modes of communicating that local organizations implement for public works planning are not reaching all audiences. Improving communication and transparency is essential in the outreach process as it impacts the trust and perception neighboring communities have about the trail and Conservancy as stewards.

Recommendations

In response to the concerns identified in the focus groups and articulated in the discussion, we dedicate this section to recommendations for the most crucial aspects in moving forward with project implementation and future engagement. These recommendations are informed by the social science research conducted for this project and the community voices heard.

Trail Improvement Implementation

- Redirecting the initial projects to the areas where more information was acquired may be an option to ensure equitable project implementation and receive more community input.
- To address informant fatigue, use previous engagement to inform future planning and programming to limit repeated community solicitation for similar topics. Additionally, prior to soliciting community input, narrow project scope and take stock of the information already acquired, implementation of previous suggestions, and provide transparent updates.
- Directing more engagement and awareness efforts to Green Valley Ranch could assist in filling the gaps of information, cultivating awareness, and interest for other events.
- Prioritize in amenity implementation the preservation of the natural landscape while considering visitor comfort and amenity needs. Many participants voiced their appreciation for the trail's natural beauty and open space while the trail's continued usage is reliant on its view as a natural escape in an urban environment.
- For those with accessibility accommodations, whether it be difficulty walking on a certain surfaces or incline, use of ambulatory devices, strollers, and even those with small children, providing more information on what to expect while on the trail and distance between amenities will provide reassurance and comfort.
 - For example, finding ways to communicate when a patron can expect to find additional amenities again, while on the trail, provides the information they can then use to plan their experience within their limits accordingly. Being able to anticipate their experience on the trail consequently, also builds trust with the trail and the Conservancy as the stewards of the trail.

Environmental Justice Themes

As for the larger, more complex and systemic challenges, we strongly encourage additional training to build sensitivity to diverse needs, viewpoints, and users.

- Begin or continue to build sensitivity to the issues regarding green gentrification and environmental justice through education. The reading list in the references section offers a place to start.
- Practice accountability and engage with local affordable housing, renter's rights, and environmental justice organizations to take a broader view of urban green spaces and the potential impact of revitalization and investment (e.g., [Colorado's People Alliance](#), [Green Latinos](#), [Denver Metro Fair Housing Center](#)).
- Recognize and acknowledge the intersection of the houselessness, the Canal Trail, the Conservancy, and environmental justice to cultivate more holistic houseless population engagement and consideration for future projects.
- Contact organizations in Denver dedicated to working with houseless populations to form working relationships and eventual partnerships to ensure ethical engagement and sensitivity (e.g., [Colorado Coalition](#), [Denver Rescue Mission](#), and [St. Francis Center](#)).
- Analyze the preferred modes of communication (e.g., door to door engagement, town halls, connecting with parents through schools, local newspapers, or radio) for

the diverse groups in the area who feel like their voices are frequently left out (Pease, 2015). This way, engagement could move beyond less effective passive communication, like emails, newsletters etc., and begin to utilize the platforms where the intended communities prefer to communicate.

- Communicate updates about the trail to assure patrons both of their safety and Canal Trail accessibility. Through providing more information, several areas of concern can be highlighted such isolated crime incidents, location of houseless encampments, and areas with poor lighting. Providing consistent updates can also serve as a promotion and outreach tactic through increasing trail awareness and Conservancy visibility as the entity providing updates. Creating a geographic dashboard could be a useful, real-time tool.
- Provide more information on events, community gatherings, and updates on trail maintenance or closures so that frequent trail visitors may anticipate and plan their visits accordingly, especially for those who use the trail as transportation or for their businesses.

The following table (Table 3) summarizes the recommendations above and highlights the potential impacts to project implementation, community relationship building, and future engagement.

Intentional and Equitable Engagement

Efforts to promote intentional engagement will need to not only promote transparency, but also champion equitable involvement so that the changes that could significantly impact these communities are understood. A way to do so is by narrowing the scope of work so that the impact is effective and tailored (GIZ & CMP, 2020). In the case of the work conducted for Canal Trail improvements, this would include focusing engagement energy on Green Valley Ranch. Recalling that Green Valley Ranch had the least representation in the focus groups, the lack of awareness of or interest in participation indicates the need for building foundational relationships and engagement that must be integrated prior to development or project implementation. A few recommended strategies are as follows:

- Build partnerships with unconventional organizations or entities (i.e., those that fall outside of the outdoor recreation or conservation sector) such as art collectives, religious groups, schools, etc. to cast a wider net of outreach in areas where there is less awareness about the Conservancy and the Canal Trail.
- Use budding and existing partnerships to develop reciprocal relationships with communities by inviting them to host events that align with their interests and to facilitate receiving trail information from people within their community.
 - For reciprocal or mutually beneficial relationship building, it is important to consider what the Conservancy can offer to the surrounding communities.
- Provide consistent communication for both new entities and recurring visitors to reassure inclusion and in some cases, trail safety.

- Adapt the [Open Standards for Conservation](#) to the Canal Trail improvements process and project timeline. This will assist in creating a framework for project implementation that is guided by a series of checks to ensure project planning is equitable and flexible for unforeseen changes.

CONCERN OR NEED	RECOMMENDATION	IMPACT
Information Gaps for Certain Areas and Demographics	Further community input will be needed to understand the nuances and attributes of specific demographics and the trail. Partnerships can be used to increase information dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equitable community input on the project • Further awareness in areas unfamiliar with the trail and Conservancy
Audience Analysis	When one mode of communication or engagement is not working, try a different one. This may even include conducting an analysis to determine the preferred modes of communication of diverse groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet a community where they are at through the media or communication strategies they follow • Ensure that communities are not surprised by public work projects that change their surroundings
Geographic Specification of Where Improvements Should Occur	Community walks to suggest/highlight improvements in real time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community inclusion, ownership, and further awareness about the trail
Crime and Trail Maintenance	Trail updates about isolated crime events, trail closures, or maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes transparency and allows visitors to plan accordingly
Houseless Encampments	Partner with human services organizations to provide resources and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitive and tailored assistance for houseless population to avoid further displacement
Conservancy Follow Up	Follow up with communities and participants about implemented actions and how suggestions were integrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds rapport, relationships, and trust with community • Community feels heard and included
Outreach to Green Valley Ranch	Direct more engagement, outreach, and partnerships to the least represented areas using the partnerships tactics suggested by participants and outlined in this document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newly established rapport with community members that may not be familiar with the trail or Conservancy
Trail Terrain and Incline	Type of terrain and incline designated on map/ accessibility or rest points for strollers, disabilities, or ambulatory devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitors of all demographics feel safe and plan their visit within their limits of comfort
Balance Between Amenity Development and Natural Landscape	Creating regularly occurring hubs or loops of amenities and rest areas may provide the ability to balance preserving the areas in between as natural and providing comfort to visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More visitors, of different demographics feel more comfortable using the trail

Table 3. Recommendations for the Conservancy regarding suggested improvements and concerns

Study Limitations

In accordance with social science research protocols, it is essential to highlight the limitations of this study to ensure due diligence in the practical application of conclusions reached in this report. To begin, despite efforts to include a diverse range of community members with varying perspectives, the final subset of community members who participated in focus groups was not a representative sample. In assessment of the following limitations, generalizations about specific demographics or type of trail user base cannot be made. Additionally, focus group participants did not provide sufficient geographic granularity to pinpoint the exact area(s) where the suggested improvements and amenities should be implemented.

The following limitations need to be considered when interpreting and applying the findings of this study. A total of 50 community members participated in focus groups. While these participants did provide key insights into perceptions about the trail and desired improvements, it is important not to generalize their perceptions to all northeast regions surrounding the trail. As previously explained, there were several demographic groups that were not reached in these focus groups. Community members from the East Denver neighborhood cluster exhibited the highest participation rate in both the initial intake surveys and subsequent focus groups, resulting in their overrepresentation among focus group participants. Out of the five geographic clusters, the Conservancy has had the most engagement with the East Denver region. This fosters conditions where more community members from this region are engaged with the Canal Trail and, therefore, are more inclined to participate in focus groups, resulting in the overrepresentation of community input compared to other regions.

Due to the limited number of participants from other neighborhood clusters, the perspectives voiced by these participants should not be viewed as a comprehensive reflection of their respective regions. This limitation carries crucial implications in general, but particularly for the designation of Green Valley Ranch as the starting region for project implementation. Further community engagement is required to fully understand the perceptions of this area as only two participants identified from Green Valley Ranch. Redirecting the initial projects to the areas where more information was acquired is an option to ensure equitable project implementation and receive more community input. Directing more engagement and awareness efforts to Green Valley Ranch could assist in filling the gaps of information, cultivating awareness, and interest for other events.

Conclusion

In reflection of the local voices shared in this report, participants view the Canal Trail as a community staple and are supportive of the future improvements as a way to enhance usage. The amenities and improvements suggested aim to reinforce personal safety, promote greater accessibility, and cultivate more community gathering. The suggestions were mainly by participants who frequent the trail regularly and rely on the urban green space for several uses in their daily lives. The role of the Canal Trail to its neighboring communities cultivates community investment. Therefore, there is a level of protection of the space and its development as it will ultimately impact community usage. Especially since community members have now been included in the improvement process, understanding the attachment community members have to the Canal Trail will assist in progressing improvement implementation in an equitable way and provide insight to the reservations participants also voiced.

Moving forward the Conservancy will need to consider and, importantly, address through outreach and engagement practices continuous follow-up on the improvements' implementation. The participants' reservations extend beyond the provision of new amenities and infrastructure. The focus group discussions revealed additional critical concerns, including inadequate and non-transparent information sharing, lack of meaningful inclusion, and unaddressed grievances. Combining these lived experiences with the existing body of academic literature and scholarship on urban green spaces underscores the significance of advancing communication and rapport-building efforts to fully integrate the Canal Trail's neighboring communities into the improvement project. Leveraging the information from this project and previous Conservancy engagement, enough perceptions have been gathered to identify informational gaps, such as which demographics and areas need further representation and engagement.

Equitable engagement is both a dynamic process and an outcome. It requires consistency, long-term dedication, and coordinated multi-level efforts. While gathering the information for desired improvements was an initial effort, the focus groups indicated that further inclusion and efforts of co-production is required to sustain the process. This study, then, served the purpose of an initial assessment to understand those communities' priorities. To avoid negative impacts of limited engagement that can develop into consequences of urban green space revitalization, we urge the Conservancy to consider the

feedback provided by community participants and consider the social impacts of both trail development and integrating community members into the improvement process. Follow-up with Canal Trail communities is encouraged in all future stages of the project, not only to demonstrate how local voices were included in plans, but also to provide a platform for continual feedback. To be truly equitable, the Conservancy must meet its neighbors where they are. This long-term engagement is essential to building and maintaining trust with community members and ensuring equitable outcomes for the most important stakeholder: the community and its people.

Declaration of AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the authors used ChatGPT to conduct a robustness check and further streamline the emergent key themes and desired improvements voiced during the focus groups. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Appendix A1 & A2: Focus Group Participant Intake Survey in English and Spanish

Appendix A1: Focus Group Participant Intake Survey (Pre-Focus Group)

Focus Group Interest Survey

Thank you in your interest in participating in focus groups about potential projects on the High Line Canal Trail. The High Line Canal Conservancy has raised funds and is partnering with local governments to implement high-priority trail improvement projects. The Conservancy holds an inspired mission to ensure all communities along the Canal engage in and co-lead the design of enhancements that will sustain the Canal as a central part of each community's park and recreational system. While the Conservancy has engaged with over 5,000 community members and leaders since 2015, there is much work to be done to build deeper partnerships and relationships with communities, especially in Unincorporated Arapahoe County, Denver and Aurora, in order to co-create future improvements through an equity- and community-centered approach.

To improve the Canal with substantial community participation, the Conservancy is committed – with significant financial and human resources – to meaningfully engaging community members and leaders with the support of Lacy Consulting Services. The community engagement work will depend on community outreach, leadership and decision making to support the design and completion of high-priority projects along 14 sections of the Canal in the Northeast, spanning over 15 distinct neighborhoods. In total, this will amount to over \$11 million of investment into the 27 northern miles of the Canal as an open space and linear park over the next 10 years.

These high-priority projects* in the Northeast include:

- Canal Improvements Zones (9): one-to-two-mile stretches of trail identified for needing improvements, which could include multiple enhancements such as (but not limited to) new or improved access points, signage, play and gathering areas, fitness stations, seating and shade, and more.
- Pedestrian bridges (3)
- Trailheads that will improve access to the trail, facilitating an increase in use (2)

- Trail resurfacing in Denver that will improve accessibility for trail users of different ages and abilities
- Furnishings, tree planting and signage that will improve the quality of user experience on the trail and further increase use

* The projects are a first phase of improvements to this portion of the trail and do not limit possibilities for future projects outside of this scope.

This investment into the Canal is intended to be guided by the community in order to reflect their needs for the open space, improving the recreational experience on the Canal as well as the environmental health of the region. Much needed trail amenities, improved access and signage and additional trailhead parking will increase the accessibility and enjoyment of the trail. In addition, new plantings and natural resource restoration will increase biodiversity and climate resiliency for our neighborhoods and our region.

The following questions, estimated to take between 5 to 10 minutes of your time, aim to gather basic information and your availability, if selected, to attend a focus group.

All responses will be kept confidential and secure only to be used internally by Lacy Consulting Services and affiliated partners for the High Line Canal Improvement Project.

** Required*

1. Are you 18 years or older? *

- Yes
- No

2. Please select your age group *

- 18-19
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-75

- 75+

Contact Information

Name *

Your answer

Email *

Your answer

Phone number

Your answer

Trail Usership

Do you use the High Line Canal Trail? *

- Yes
- No, but I use other trails and green spaces
- No, I do not use or frequent green spaces or trails

Do you live or frequently spend time in any of the highlighted/colored in areas on the map?*

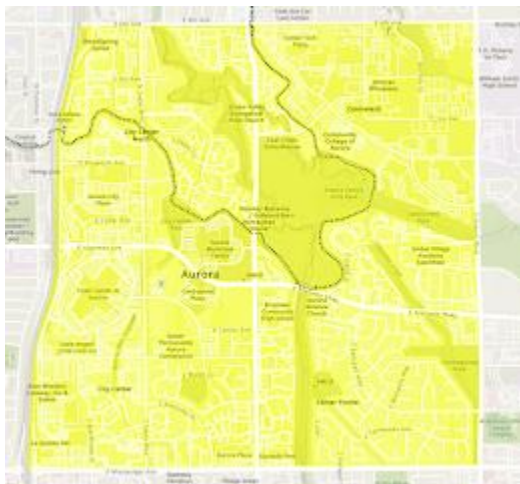
- Yes, in East Denver Neighborhoods (Hampden, Goldsmith, Four Square Mile, Indian Creek, or Windsor)



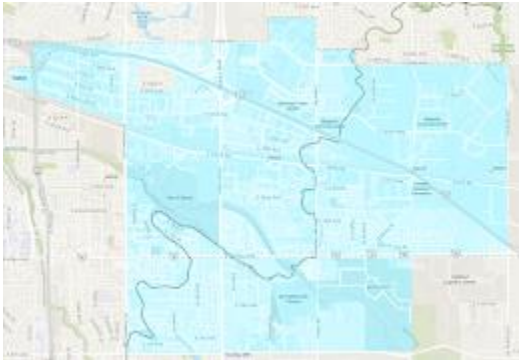
- Yes, in Central Aurora Neighborhoods (Highland Park East, Highline Villages, Expo Park, Rangeview, or Lyn Knoll)



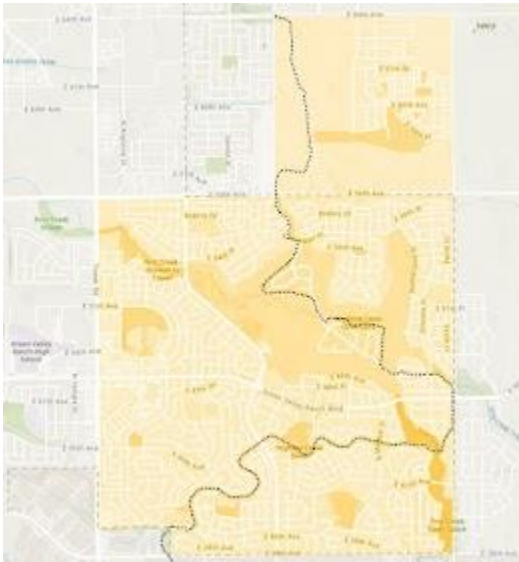
- Yes, in Aurora Municipal Center Neighborhoods (City Center, City Center North, Centretech, or Centrepoint)



- Yes, in North Aurora Neighborhoods (Laredo Highline, Norfolk Glen, Friendly Village, Tower Triangle, Northeast, or Gateway Park)



- Yes, in Green Valley Ranch Neighborhoods (GVR North, GVR South, or Painted Prairie)



- No, I don't live or frequently spend time in these neighborhoods

Participant Characteristics

Do you identify with any of the following marginalized or equity deserving groups?

Please check all that apply

- Immigrant
- Refugee
- Black, Indigenous, and/or Person of Color
- Low Income
- Living with a Disability or Family Member Lives with a Disability

- LGBTQIA+
- None of the Above
- Other: _____

Focus Group Scheduling

When are you available to attend a focus group?

Please check all that apply

- Available 9am-5pm weekdays
- Available after business hours 5pm-8pm weekdays
- Available weekends

If selected, what focus group option would be most accessible:

- Virtually (Zoom or Video Call)
- In Person
- I can do either if needed

Preferred Focus Group Language

What is your preferred language for the focus group?

- English
- Spanish
- Other: _____

Information Sharing Consent

Do you consent to sharing your contact information (name and email only) with HLCC for future engagement opportunities like this one? *Please note, your response will not influence your chance of being selected to participate in our focus group. **

- Yes, I consent.
- No, I do not consent.

Thank you

Thank you for your time in completing this survey. We appreciate your interest. If you would like further information on the High Line Canal Conservancy or the High Line Canal Trail, please visit: <https://highlinecanal.org/>

Please note, not all respondents will be selected to participate in the focus groups.

Appendix A2: Encuesta de interés para la entrevista en grupo

Encuesta de interés para la entrevista en grupo

Gracias por su interés en participar en grupos de enfoque sobre proyectos potenciales en el sendero del High Line Canal Conservancy (HLCC). El HLCC ha recaudado fondos y se ha aliado con el gobierno local para implementar proyectos de mejoramiento de alta prioridad. La misión del Canal es garantizar que todas las comunidades a lo largo del sendero participen y codirijan el diseño de mejoras funcionales que sostendrán al sendero de HLCC como una parte central del sistema recreativo y de parques de cada comunidad. Mientras que HLCC se ha comprometido con más de 5,000 miembros y líderes de la comunidad desde el 2015, aun queda mucho trabajo por hacer para construir alianzas y relaciones más profundas con las comunidades, especialmente en los condados no incorporados de Arapahoe, Denver, y Aurora, para crear colectivamente mejoras futuras a través de un enfoque centrado en la equidad y la comunidad.

Para mejorar el sendero con una participación sustancial de la comunidad, el HLCC se compromete—con recursos financieros y humanos considerables—a involucrar a los miembros y líderes de la comunidad de manera significativa con el apoyo de Lacy Consulting Services. El trabajo de participación comunitaria dependerá del alcance comunitario, el liderazgo y la toma de decisiones para apoyar el diseño y la realización de proyectos de alta prioridad en 14 secciones del sendero ubicados en el noreste que abarcan mas de 15 vecindarios diferentes. En total, esto equivaldrá más de 11 millones de dólares de inversión en las 27 millas más al norte del sendero como un espacio abierto y un parque lineal durante los próximos 10 años.

Los proyectos de alta prioridad* en el noreste incluyen*:

- Zonas de mejoramiento del sendero (g): tramos de senderos entre una a dos millas que han sido identificados como necesitados de mejoramiento que podrían incluir

múltiples mejoras incluyendo (pero sin limitarse a) puntos de acceso nuevos o mejorados, señalización, zonas de juego y reunión, estaciones de acondicionamiento físico, asientos y sombra, y más.

- Puentes peatonales (3)
- Inicios de sendero que mejorarán el acceso al sendero, facilitando un aumento en su uso (2)
- Repavimentación de senderos en Denver que mejorará la accesibilidad para usuarios de senderos de diferentes edades y habilidades
- Mobiliario, plantación de árboles y señalización que mejorarán la calidad de la experiencia del usuario en el sendero y aumentarán aún más el uso

* Estos proyectos son una primera fase de mejoras en esta parte del sendero y no limitan las posibilidades de futuros proyectos fuera del ámbito de esta propuesta.

Esta inversión en el sendero de HLCC tiene la intención de ser guiada por la comunidad para reflejar sus necesidades de espacios abiertos, mejorando la experiencia recreativa en el sendero, así como la salud ambiental de la región. Las comodidades del sendero que tanto se necesitan, el acceso y la señalización mejorados y el estacionamiento adicional en el inicio del sendero aumentarán la accesibilidad y el disfrute del sendero. Además, las nuevas plantaciones y la restauración de los recursos naturales aumentarán la biodiversidad y la resiliencia climática de nuestros vecindarios y nuestra región.

Las siguientes preguntas, que se estima que tomarán entre 5 y 10 minutos de su tiempo, tienen como objetivo recopilar información básica y su disponibilidad, si es seleccionado, para asistir a una entrevista en grupo.

Todas las respuestas se mantendrán confidenciales y seguras solo para el uso interno de Lacy Consulting Services y sus socios afiliados para el Proyecto de Mejoramiento del High Line Canal.

** Required*

¿Tienes 18 años de edad o más? *

- Sí
- No

Edad

Por favor seleccione su grupo de edad *

- 18-19
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-75
- 75+

Información de Contacto

Nombre *

Your answer

Correo electrónico *

Your answer

Número de teléfono

Your answer

Usuario de Senderos

¿Utiliza el sendero del High Line Canal? *

- Sí
- No, pero utilizo otros senderos y espacios verdes.
- No, no uso ni frecuento senderos ni espacios verdes

¿Vives o pasas tiempo con frecuencia en alguna de las áreas resaltadas/coloreadas en el mapa? *

- Sí, en los vecindarios del este de Denver (Hampden, Goldsmith, Four Square Mile, Indian Creek, o Windsor)

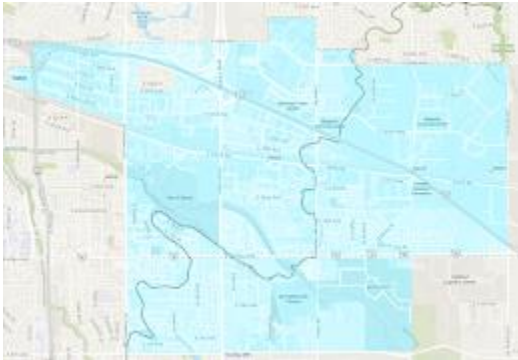


- Sí, en los vecindarios de Central Aurora (Highland Park East, Highline Villages, Expo Park, Rangeview o Lyn Knoll)

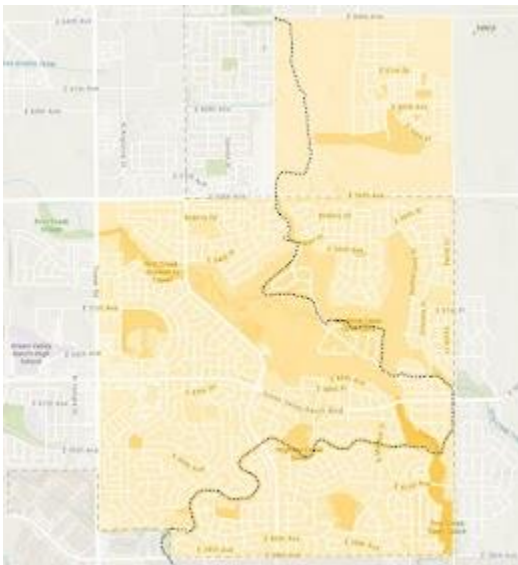


- Sí, en los vecindarios del Centro Municipal de Aurora (City Center, City Centre North, Centretech o Centrepoint)

- Sí, en los vecindarios del norte de Aurora (Laredo Highline, Norfolk Glen, Friendly Village, Tower Triangle, Northeast o Gateway Park)



- Sí, en los vecindarios de Green Valley Ranch (GVR North, GVR South o Painted Prairie)



- No, no vivo ni paso mucho tiempo en estos barrios.

Características de los participantes

¿Se identifica con alguno de los siguientes grupos de población marginados o especiales? *Please check all that apply*

- Inmigrante
- Refugiado/a

- Negro, Indígena y/o Persona de Color
- De bajos ingresos
- Vive con una discapacidad o un familiar vive con una discapacidad
- LGBTQIA+
- Ninguna de las anteriores
- Other: _____

Programación de la entrevista en grupo

¿Cuándo está disponible para asistir a un grupo de enfoque?

Por favor seleccione todos los que apliquen

- Disponible entre las 9am-5pm de lunes a viernes
- Disponible después del horario comercial de 5pm-8pm de lunes a viernes
- Fines de semana disponibles

Si es seleccionado, qué opción de entrevista de grupo sería más accesible:

- Virtualmente (Zoom o Videollamada)
- En persona
- Puedo hacer cualquiera si es necesario

Idioma preferido de la entrevista en grupo

¿Cuál es su idioma preferido para la entrevista en grupo?

- Inglés
- Español
- Otro: _____

Consentimiento para compartir información

¿Acepta compartir su información de contacto (solo nombre y correo electrónico) con el HLCC para futuras oportunidades de participación como esta? Tenga en cuenta que su

*respuesta no influirá en su posibilidad de ser seleccionado para participar en nuestra entrevista en grupo.**

- Sí, doy mi consentimiento.
- No, no doy mi consentimiento.

Muchas Gracias

Gracias por su tiempo en completar esta encuesta. Agradecemos su interés. Si desea obtener más información sobre el High Line Canal Conservancy o el sendero del High Line Canal, visite: <https://highlinecanal.org/>

Tenga en cuenta que no todos los encuestados serán seleccionados para participar en las entrevistas en grupo.

Appendix B: Focus Group Qualifying Characteristics

Primary Characteristics:

Mandatory Participant Characteristic: Participants must engage with either the HLC Trail and/or natural spaces or trails.

- Necessary to provide insightful input on the identified canal projects based on previous natural space usage

Mandatory Participant Characteristic: Participants must be living in or engaging with the neighborhood clusters of interest.

- Participants must be connected to the neighborhoods that have been identified for access and activation improvements to be able to provide recommended insight on necessary improvements for that part of the trail
- Connection to the neighborhoods can be linked through school, work, place of worship, etc. as well.
- Participants do not have to be a resident within these areas, however must be engaging with the area frequently.

Projects have been identified in 4-5 clustered neighborhood areas.

- Participants should be from diverse geographic representation across the Northeast
- *Ideally conduct two focus groups per cluster*
- *Ideally connect with organizations beyond conservation groups*

Secondary Characteristics:

BIPOC and other special populations/minority groups/marginalized groups

To amplify marginalized voices and community members, focus group recruitment should prioritize,

- primarily non white communities
- diverse economic status: low income, renters etc.
- immigrant and refugee populations
- people living with disabilities
- primary Spanish speakers

Variety of ages

- There should be diversity in the participant groups to understand how each demographic views the trail, uses it, and their ideas on engagement and improvements
- Local youth councils will be engaged

Variety of Type of Usership

- Include participants who use the trail in a variety of ways (meeting space, exercise, outdoor time etc.)
- *Aim is to improve access to the trail, facilitating an increase in use, and trail resurfacing in Denver that will improve accessibility for trail users of different ages and abilities*

Demographic Data Collection

- Household demographics
- Income demographics
- If people are willing to share, usage of trail information in particular for LGBTQ+ and Indigenous identities

Outreach Flyer (Spanish version not pictured)

WANT TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE HIGH LINE CANAL?



Join our focus group

We want to know what **improvements and projects** you and your community would like to see along the High Line Canal. Our goal is to enable more people to connect with nature + the trail in their neighborhoods on their own terms. **But we cannot do it alone.**

**WE WANT TO LEARN FROM YOU.
YOUR IDEAS ARE IMPORTANT TO US!**

PARTICIPANTS WILL RECEIVE \$100

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

- If you are +18 y/o
- Live or spend time in **northeast neighborhoods** served by the High Line Canal
- Engage with natural spaces & trails
- **Highly desired but not required** that you form part of a marginalized or special population group (immigrant, refugee, BIPOC, low income, living with a disability, LGBTQIA+, etc.)

Focus group interviews will last approximately 60 minutes and begin in November.

LOCATION: conducted in-person along the Canal or over Zoom as required by the needs of participants.

If you would like to join a focus group, please **SCAN THE QR CODE**, visit the link below, or reach out to Christianne from Lacy Consulting Services:

VISIT <https://forms.gle/7WSXoByFUHNsY6ook7>

CALL OR TEXT +1-570-604-7739

CHRISTIANNE@LACYCONSULTINGSERVICES.COM



Scan code to qualify



Artist Credit: @sarahh_lukowski_artist



Artist Credit: Darryl Phillips (@darrylphillips)



Appendix C1 & C2: Focus Group Interview Guide

Interview Auditing Process:

- 1) Participants with necessary and secondary attributes identified through Focus Group Interest Survey
- 2) Interview administered
- 3) Demographic Information Questionnaire Google Form sent

Appendix C1: Questions for Non-HLC Trail Users

HLCC

- Have you heard of the High Line Canal Conservancy before?
 - *If participant does not know, please explain*
 - *If participant does know, do you think your voice is being heard or considered in decisions regarding the High Line Canal?*
- Would you consider going to an High Line Canal Conservancy sponsored trash cleanup, community celebration, community walk or other events?

Natural Space Usage

- How often do you use trails, parks, or other natural spaces?
- Do you usually use trails or other natural spaces alone or with others?
 - *If with others, what do you do together?*
- Why do you use trails or other natural spaces?
- Do you use natural spaces or trails as a stress reliever or mental health outlet?
 - *Do you notice any stress relief after being outdoors?*
- What is the best experience you have had on a trail?
 - *Could you describe what made it the best experience?*
- What is the worst experience you have had on a trail?
 - *Could you describe what made it the worst?*
- What features or aspects on trails, or in other natural spaces, help you feel safe?
- In what ways do you think a natural space or trail could be more inclusive or welcoming?
- What would increase your likelihood to return to a trail?

Activities

- What kinds of activities do you like to do on trails and natural spaces?

- Do any aspects of the trail or natural space you use currently limit your usage or activities?
 - *What kinds of activities would you like to do on the trail, but currently cannot?*
 - *Is the current state of the trail limiting in some way?*

Appendix C2: Questions for HLC Trail Users

HLCC

- Have you heard of the High Line Canal Conservancy before?
- Do you think your voice is being heard or considered in decisions regarding the High Line Canal?
- Would you feel comfortable going to a High Line Canal Conservancy sponsored trash clean up, community celebration, community walk or other events?
 - *If unaware of High Line Canal Conservancy, please explain*

Usage

- How often do you use the Canal trail?
- Do you usually use the trail alone or with others?
 - *If with others, what do you do together?*
- Why do you use the trail?
- Do you use natural spaces or the canal trail as a stress reliever or mental health outlet?
 - *Do you notice any stress relief after being outdoors?*
- What aspects do you like most about the trail?
- What is the best experience you have had on the trail?
 - *Could you describe what made it the best experience?*
- What aspects do you not like about the trail?
- What is the worst experience you have had on the trail?
 - *Could you describe what made it the worst?*
- What aspects of the trail help you feel safe?
- In what ways do you think the trail could be more inclusive or welcoming?
- Why do you continue to use the Canal trail?

Activities

- What kinds of activities do you like to do on the trail?
- Do any aspects of the trail currently limit your usage or activities?
 - *What kinds of activities would you like to do on the trail, but currently cannot?*
 - *Is the current state of the trail limiting in some way?*

Accessibility

- From where do you normally access the trail?
 - *Is it easily accessible for you?*
- Are you aware of any parts of the trail that may be difficult to access?
- Have you ever had difficulty accessing the trail?
 - *In what way?*
- Do you know of others that have had difficulty accessing the trail?
 - *In what ways?*
- In your opinion, what could be done to improve access to the trail?

Improvements

- What areas of the trail need the most improvement?
 - *What kind of improvements do they need?*
- Are there any improvements to the trail that would enhance user experience or make your preferred activities better?
- Would these improvements enhance your relationship or interaction with the outdoors?
 - *In what way?*
 - *If these improvements were made, how would it change how you use the trail?*
- In your opinion, what would attract more users to the trail?
- If you could create an ideal trail, what would it look like?
 - *If you could create a project or Canal Improvement Zone (ex. New access point, multiple signage, play areas, meeting areas etc.) for HLCC to implement, what would it be?*

Appendix D: Demographic Information Questionnaire (Post Focus Group)

Thank you for your time in participating in the focus group and answering this brief questionnaire. This questionnaire is also part of the project the High Line Canal Conservancy would like to integrate community perspectives to create equitable and inclusive trail improvements. The following demographic information questions, estimated to take between 5 to 10 minutes of your time, are to better understand basic user information and your engagement with the High Line Canal. All responses will be kept confidential and secure only to be used internally by HLCC and affiliated partners for the High Line Canal Improvement Project.

1. Please provide your zip code:

2. Age

Mark only one oval.

- 18-20
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-75
- 75+

3. Gender

Mark only one oval.

- Female *Skip to question 5*
- Male *Skip to question 5*
- Non-binary *Skip to question 5*
- Prefer not to say *Skip to question 5*
- Other, please self identify

4. If other, please self identify in the space provided

5. Race/Ethnicity

Mark only one oval.

- Hispanic/Latino *Skip to section 3 (Optional Information)*
- Black or African American *Skip to section 3 (Optional Information)*
- Asian *Skip to section 3 (Optional Information)*
- American Indian or Indigenous American *Skip to section 3 (Optional Information)*
- Middle Eastern *Skip to section 3 (Optional Information)*
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander *Skip to section 3 (Optional Information)*
- Other, please self identify
- Prefer not to say *Skip to section 3 (Optional Information)*

6.. If other, please self identify in the space provided:

Optional Information

The following questions are intended for the High Line Canal Conservancy to better understand the demographics and trail usage of specific communities. These questions are completely optional. Your answers will remain confidential and will only be used for internal project use. We appreciate your contribution. LGBTQ+ Demographics This information is intended to gain a better understanding of the LGBTQ+ community and HLCC trail usership.

7. Do you identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

American Indian or Indigenous American Demographics This information is intended to gain a better understanding of the American Indian or Indigenous American community and HLCC trail usership.

8. Do you identify as American Indian or Indigenous American?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No *Skip to question 12*

- Prefer not to say *Skip to question 12*

9. Do you believe that the perspectives and voices of the American Indian or Indigenous American community have been sufficiently included in the decisions concerning the High Line Canal trail?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Improvement is needed (*partnerships, communication, liasoning, advocacy etc.*)
- More information is needed to answer

10. To better understand community usership, in your opinion, is the High Line Canal Trail an area commonly frequented or used by members of the American Indian or Indigenous American community?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No *Skip to question 12*
- Unsure, but I use the trail frequently *Skip to question 12*
- Unsure, but I do not use the trail frequently *Skip to question 12*
- Prefer not to say *Skip to question 12*

11. If answered yes, please describe, in your experience, how or in what way the trail is used:

Disability Demographics

This information is intended to gain a better understanding of those living with a disability and HLCC trail usership.

12. Do you identify as living with a disability?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No *Skip to question 17*
- Prefer not to say *Skip to question 17*

13. Please describe your disability

14. Do you have any ideas on activities, projects, or tools that HLCC can implement to better support your disability or others with disabilities?

15. Do you require any accommodations to access trails?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No *Skip to question 17*
- Prefer not to say *Skip to question 17*

16 Please describe the accommodations you need

Household Information

The following questions may include potentially sensitive topics and information. As a reminder all responses will be kept confidential and secure only to be used internally by HLCC and affiliated partners for the High Line Canal Improvement Project

17. How many people live in your household?

18. How many people within your household use natural spaces or trails regularly?

19. If you feel comfortable sharing, roughly what is your total annual household income?

Mark only one oval.

- \$0-\$30,000
- \$31,000-\$60,000
- \$61,000-\$90,000
- \$91,000-\$120,000
- \$120,000+
- Prefer not to say

20. If you feel comfortable sharing, are you currently enrolled in any government assistance programs? (SNAP, SSI, TANF, WIC, or government assisted housing/housing benefits etc.)

Appendix E: Codebook

CODE CATEGORY	CODE	CODE DEFINITION & THEMES
<p>ACCESSIBILITY</p>	<p>Connectivity</p>	<p>Various factors of accessibility including physical access, once on the trail, navigating the trail, and trail access points.</p> <p>Mention of trail's connectivity or accessibility to other trails, parts of the city, or access points, or ability to connect onto the trail. Included positive perceptions of trail's appeal.</p>
	<p>Disability</p>	<p>Accessibility for those living with disabilities or elderly people who may need support. Mobility concerns due to terrain, lack of seating areas, and access points. Code shared themes with infrastructure codes due to sidewalk and seating/ rest areas needs</p>
	<p>Drove to Trail</p>	<p>Trail accessible to participant only by driving. Also includes issues that arise from having to drive i.e. cars traffic, parking needs</p>
	<p>Navigation</p>	<p>Mentions of trail access points, navigation to trail entry points, or while on the trail</p>
	<p>Proximity or Walked to Trail</p>	<p>Proximity to the trail or easy accessibility, includes participants who can walk to the trail or can connect easily without transport</p>
	<p>Sidewalks</p>	<p>Mentions of the need for sidewalks to access the trail</p>
	<p>Transportation</p>	<p>Examples where transportation is needed to access the trail</p>
	<p>Weather Conditions</p>	<p>Weather conditions that make trail accessibility difficult. Includes snow cleaning/shoveling and difficulty with heat</p>
<p>ACTIVITIES</p>		<p>Activity suggestions from participants including new partnerships. Also includes participants' other interests that may or may not be possible to be adapted to a trail event</p>
	<p>Community Suggestions</p>	<p>Community suggestions for new activities Includes educational signage or events on</p>

	Other Community Interests	<p>history, flora and fauna, trail clean ups, general community gathering or meet and greets, identifying problem areas, nature walks or group bikes, classes, community art gathering etc..</p> <p>Participants expressed other interests that have potential for activity or community building along trail such as art/ painting photography, fishing, picnicking</p>
BARRIER		Barriers or limitations to accessing the trail, some phrases shared with trail accessibility codes
CHALLENGES	<p>Community Buy In</p> <p>Economic Disparity along Trail</p> <p>Gentrification</p>	<p>Perceived challenges along trail Included community ownership/buy in into the trail, gentrification and socio economic changes along trail</p> <p>Mentions about community buy in or support for Conservancy events, the trail, or this project. Shared themes with Trust Code</p> <p>Participant comments on economic disparity or socio-economic changes along trail. Expressed also through cleanliness, amenities, wildlife, grass coverage etc.</p> <p>Participant comments about gentrification along trail</p>
CONSERVANCY	<p>Engaged</p> <p>Engagement Tactics</p> <p>Hesitancy in Events</p> <p>Information and Communication</p>	<p>Phrases mentioning perceptions of the Conservancy as an organization</p> <p>Participant is aware of Canal Trail or the Conservancy and its work previous to focus group</p> <p>Participant suggested engagement tactics such as advertising, outreach, or marketing strategies</p> <p>Participants' reservations in joining Conservancy sponsored events</p> <p>Participants' needs for further communication or information. Also includes new ways to communicate information to public</p>

	Interest in Events	Participant interest in Conservancy sponsored events or trail events
	Unaware	Participant was unaware of Canal Trail or the Conservancy prior to focus groups
IDEAL TRAIL CHARACTERIZATIONS		Participants' ideal trail attributes or features
IMPROVEMENTS		Specific amenities/improvements desired includes addressing infrastructure, blind spots along the trail, maintenance, cleaning, green; improvements. Also included general suggestions made by participants to improve the Canal Trail
	Amenities	Desired feature, service, or piece of equipment that was suggested by a participant. (e.g., play areas, bathrooms, picnic/gathering areas, drinking water access, trash cans, lighting, blue call boxes, art installations, exercise stations, bike repair stations, pet waste stations)
	General Concerns	Participant concerns or observations that do not fit into other code categories
	Green Areas and Wildlife	Suggestions for more green areas, planting trees or plants, for shade or for further connection to nature
	Location of Suggested Improvement	Participant suggested general geographic area for improvement.
	Maintenance and Cleaning	For either the trail itself or parking lots, suggestions concerning picking up trash, managing dog feces, filling potholes, shoveling snow, removing graffiti, trimming plants, and generally keeping amenities in good standing
	Nearby Parking	Comments about parking lot access
	Pedestrian Crossings	Suggested improvement for pedestrian safety such as cross walks, crossing lights, pedestrian bridges, and sidewalks.
PARTICIPANT TRAITS		Participant self disclosed information... Individual's descriptions of interests or traits

	<p>Appeal of General Trails (Non-Users)</p> <p>Appeal of Canal Trail</p> <p>Geographic Location</p>	<p>Accounts of using other natural areas, mostly related to enjoying nature, water, or amenities/features.</p> <p>Positive perceptions of the Canal Trail including user preferences, continuity and length, connectivity to other trails, nature access, proximity to urban environment, the community it fosters, and aesthetic value.</p> <p>Reference to an area, place, neighborhood, or part of the city either for an improvement, point of access, or someone's home.</p>
SAFETY	<p>Darkness/Poor Lighting</p> <p>Desire for Security or Cameras</p> <p>Infrastructure</p> <p>Internal Perceived Safety</p> <p>Parking</p>	<p>This code is a broader catch all for mentions of safe trails (what is required for people to feel safe, general safety, what the Conservancy or other authority organizations do or don't do to be transparent about social safety aspects on the trail). Both positive and negative</p> <p>Concerns of safety pertaining to poor lighting or after sunset. Also includes the desire for having more lighting along the trail.</p> <p>Direct mention of wanting surveillance (includes range of security cameras to police/authority presence) for increased feelings of safety</p> <p>Infrastructure concerns that impact sense of safety. Broad range from trail improvements, pedestrian crossings, emergency blue boxes, etc</p> <p>Personal safety or physical safety while on trail Also includes less tangible components of safety such as feelings or general concerns</p> <p>Safety concerns about parking lots and cars/property that is left behind. Overlaps with Crime code</p>
NON USER SAFETY		<p>Participants who do not use the trail and their feelings about safety</p>

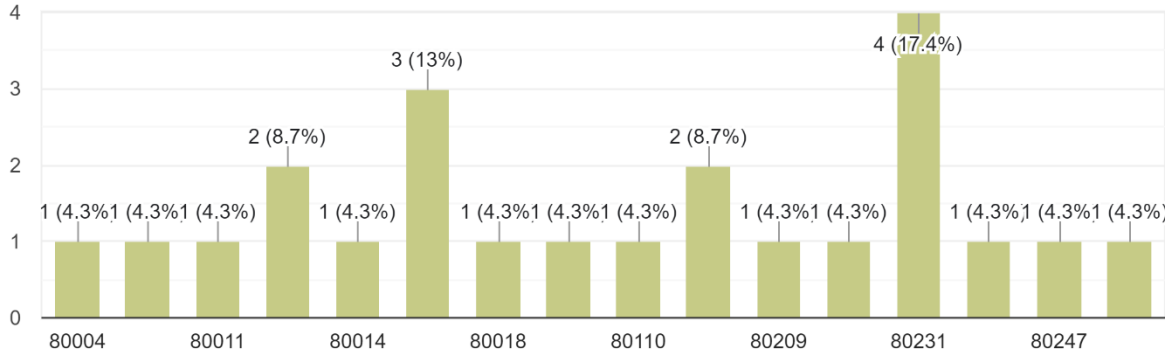
	Physical Safety	Safety concepts that have to do with physical aspects of the trail or injuries that can result from being outside of a built environment (e.g. rugged terrain)
SOCIO-ECONOMIC DECLINE		Effects or impacts on the trail due to socio economic decline. Broad category (mentions about the pandemic as it relates to houselessness along the trail, general women's safety, parent's consideration/fear about kids access to trail, etc)
	Homelessness	Mentions about issues concerning houseless people or encampments
	Tactics to Address Homelessness	Suggestions to address houselessness along the trail. Mainly suggestions from the Youth Council focus group
	Crime	Mentions of crime along trail
TRUST		Phrases related to participants' perceptions of trust in the Conservancy as an organization, engagement tactics, or the trail
	Participants Felt Heard	Participants' feelings about their opinions being heard by the Conservancy
	Organization's Motives	Perception of or distrust in the Conservancy or the organization's motives
	Community Representation & Interest	Participants express wanting to feel represented in decisions involving the trail
	Transparency	Participants express the need for more transparency
USAGE		Different ways that participants utilize the trail
	Alone	Participant described using the trail by themselves
	Biking	Participant bikes on trail
	Dog Walker	Participant walks dog on trail
	Frequency of Usage	How frequently participants use trail

	Nature or Natural Landscape	Participant descriptions of using the trail to be in a natural space or mentions of appreciation for the natural space inn urban environment
	Non-User	Participants who have not used the trail
	Public Space/Community Building	Phrases the describe using the trail for its public land access and community aspects
	Running	Participant runs on trail
	Seasonal Usage	Participant uses trail more during or specifically in a particular season
	Stress Reliever	Participant uses trail as a mental health outlet or stress reliever
	Uses Trail with Family	Participants uses trail with family
	Uses Trail; with Others	Participant uses trails with friends, groups, or as a meeting place
	Walking	Participant walks on trails
FUNCTIONALITY		Uses of the trail for functional purposes such as for commuting, transport, or their business
	Commute or Transport	Participant uses trail to commute or as primary transport

Appendix F: Demographic Information Questionnaire Responses

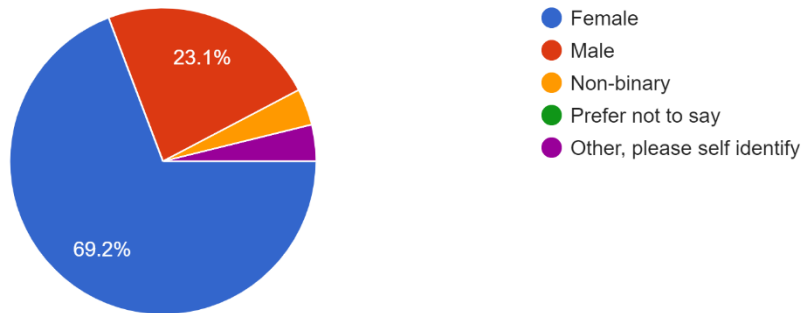
Please provide your zip code:

23 responses



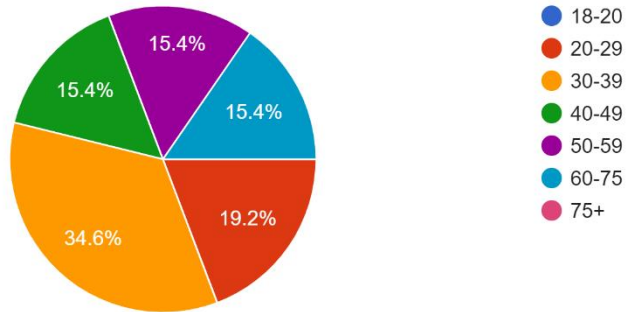
Gender Identity:

26 responses



Age:

26 responses



If other, please self identify in the space provided:1 response

genderfluid

Race/Ethnicity:

26 responses

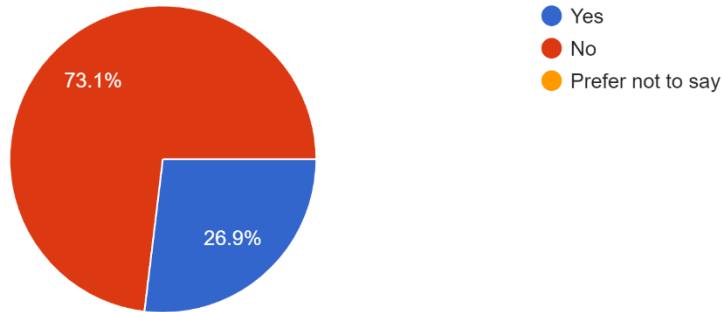


If other, please self identify in the space provided:12 responses

Caucasian
 White
 white
 Caucasian
 Caucasian, non-Hispanic/Latino
 White
 White/Northern European American

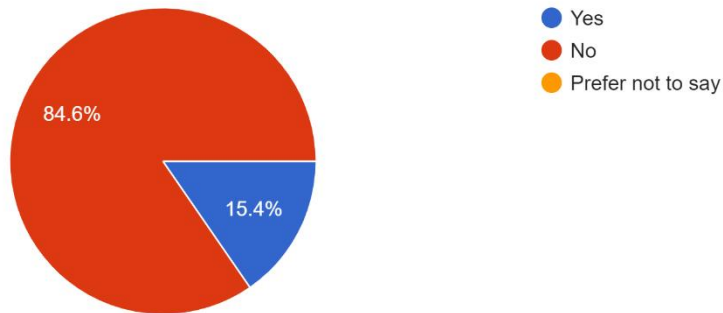
Do you identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community?

26 responses



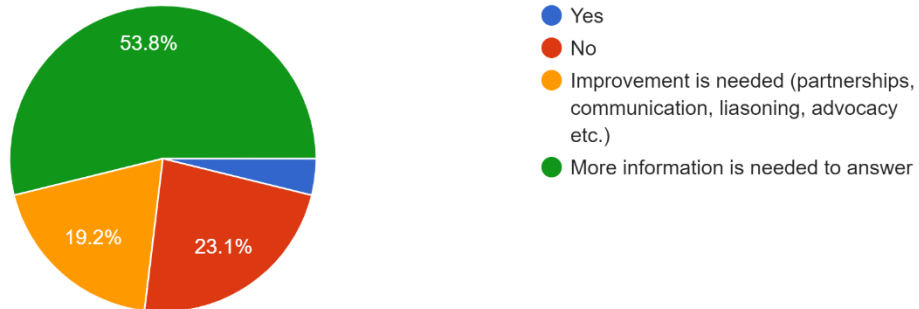
Do you identify as American Indian or Indigenous American?

26 responses



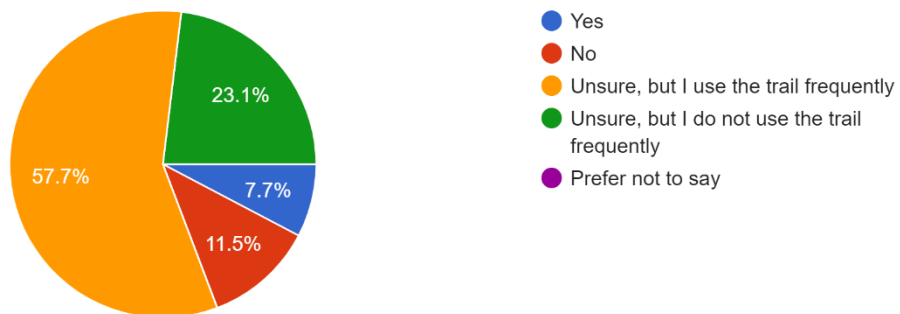
Do you believe that the perspectives and voices of the American Indian or Indigenous American community have been sufficiently included in the decisions concerning the High Line Canal trail?

26 responses



To better understand community usership, in your opinion, is the High Line Canal Trail an area commonly frequented or used by members of the American Indian or Indigenous American community?

26 responses

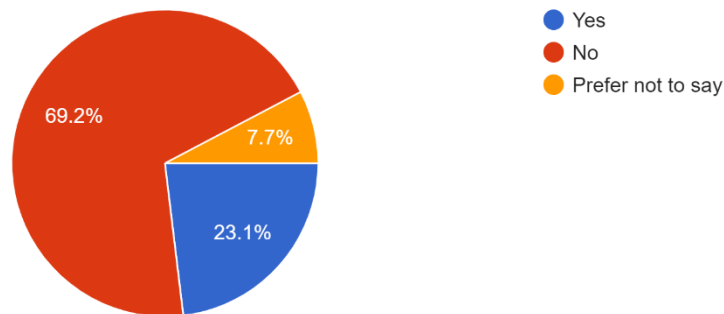


If answered yes, please describe, in your experience, how or in what way the trail is used: 0 responses

No responses yet for this question.

Do you identify as living with a disability?

26 responses



Please describe your disability 4 responses

Age
mobility
hip replacement surgery and knee issues
Autism and ADHD

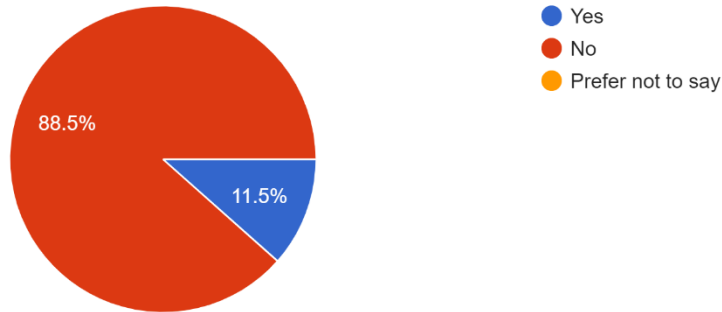
Do you have any ideas on activities, projects, or tools that HLCC can implement to better support your disability or others with disabilities?

9 responses

Pls add more handicap accessible ramps, more porta potties & support for the visually impaired. Thank you!
More accessible areas for wheelchair users
N/A
Someone referenced Sand Creek Greenway using community walks to identify areas for improvement. I would suggest doing this with folks with disabilities.
Benches and places for rest along the HLCC. Maps that outline where places of high accessibility are located. Signage to aid in accessibility
Rest areas
more rest benches
paving areas of the trail where it's only gravel, such as adjacent to Expo Park, adding accessible restrooms or port a potties, parking areas to access the trail with low slopes getting to the trail
Maps with landmarks

Do you require any accommodations to access trails?

26 responses



Please describe the accommodations you need

3 responses

Resting areas like benches or rocks to sit on, cleared away debris/snow, regular access to restrooms
Safe crossing through busy streets, direct access from neighborhoods
smoother access points for wheelchair

How many people live in your household?

25 responses

- 2
- 1
- 4
- 3
- 7
- 5

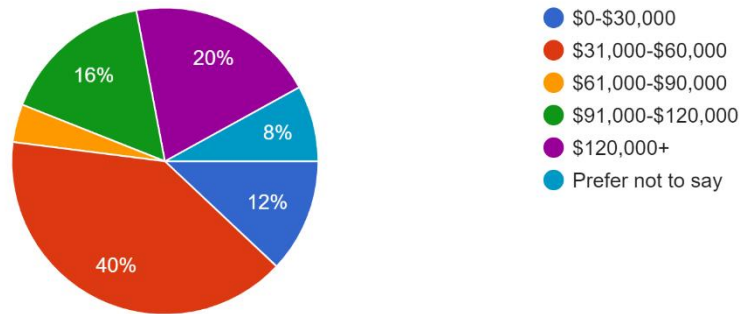
How many people within your household use natural spaces or trails regularly?

24 responses

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 7
- 5

If you feel comfortable sharing, roughly what is your total annual household income?

25 responses



If you feel comfortable sharing, are you currently enrolled in any government assistance programs? (SNAP, SSI, TANF, WIC, or government assisted housing/housing benefits etc.)

17 responses

- No
- no
- None
- No
- na
- I am not
- Yes
- CES Waiver

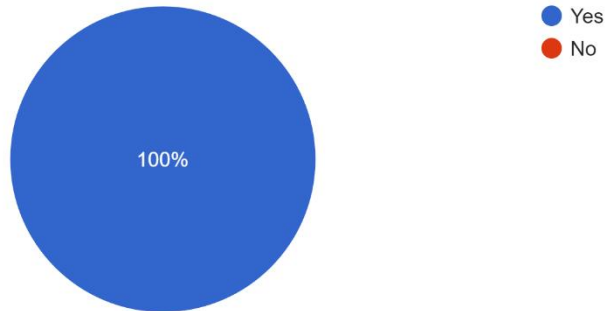
Appendix G1 & G2: Participant Intake Survey Summary Statistics

Appendix G1: Focus Group Intake Survey Responses

*Please note, response numbers shown will change due to cut off date of focus groups

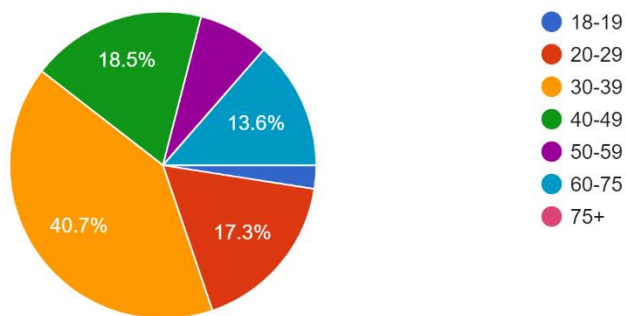
Are you 18 years or older?

81 responses



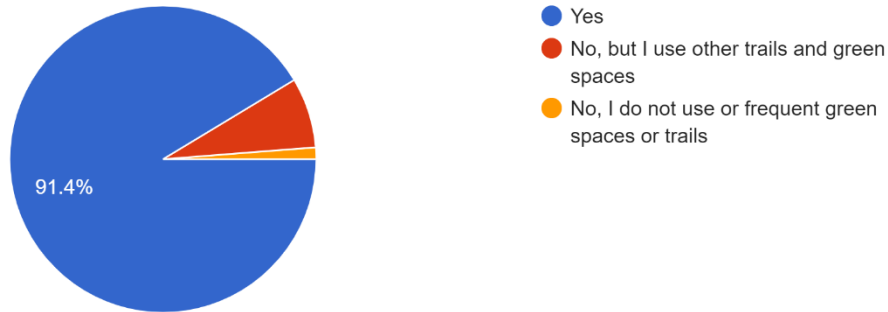
Please select your age group

81 responses



Do you use the High Line Canal Trail?

81 responses



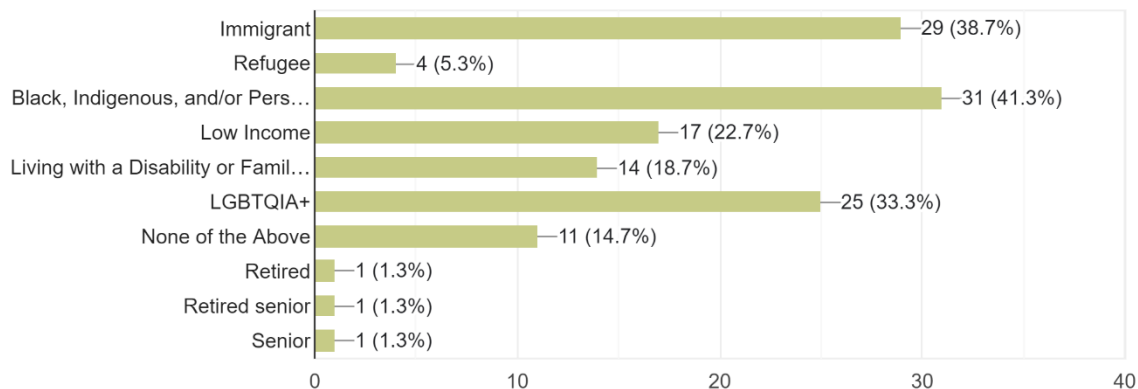
Do you live or frequently spend time in any of the highlighted/colored in areas on the map?

81 responses



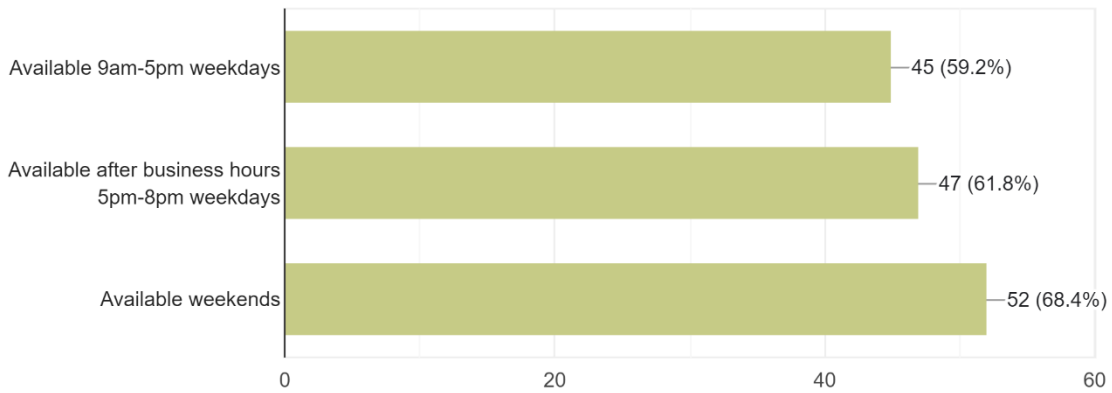
Do you identify with any of the following marginalized or special population groups?

75 responses



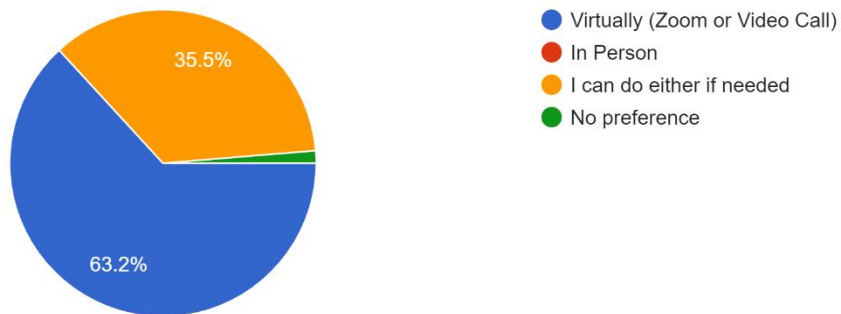
When are you available to attend a focus group?

76 responses



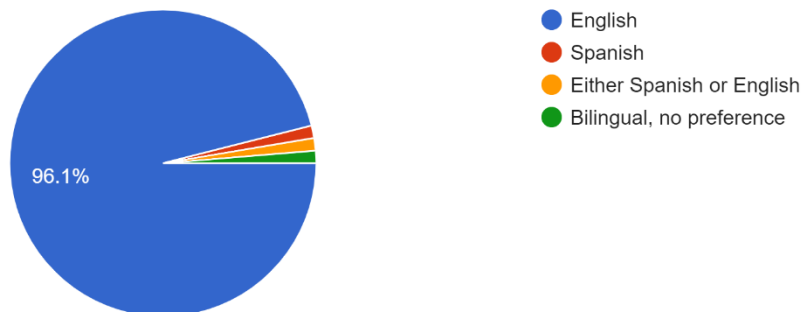
If selected, what focus group option would be most accessible:

76 responses



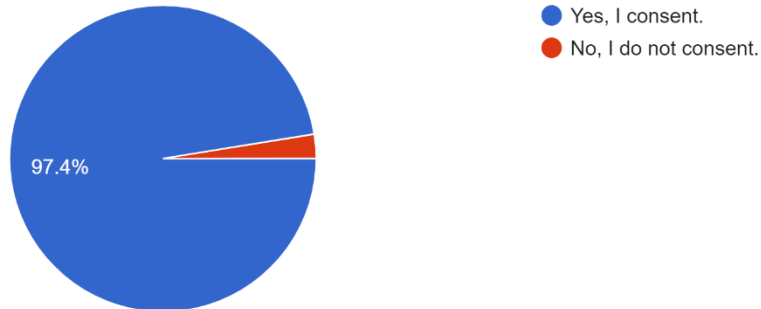
What is your preferred language for the focus group?

76 responses



Do you consent to sharing your contact information (name and email only) with HLCC for future engagement opportunities like this one? Please note... being selected to participate in our focus group.

78 responses

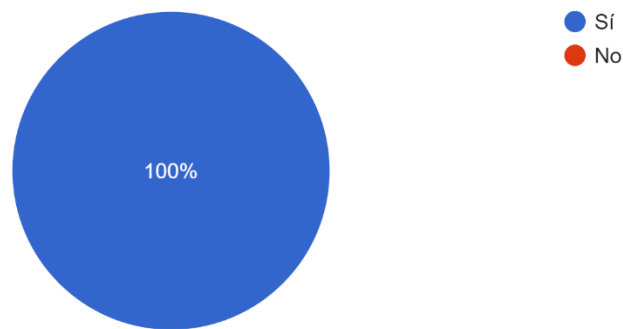


Appendix G2: Spanish Focus Group Intake Survey Responses

*Please note, response numbers shown will change due to cut off date of focus groups

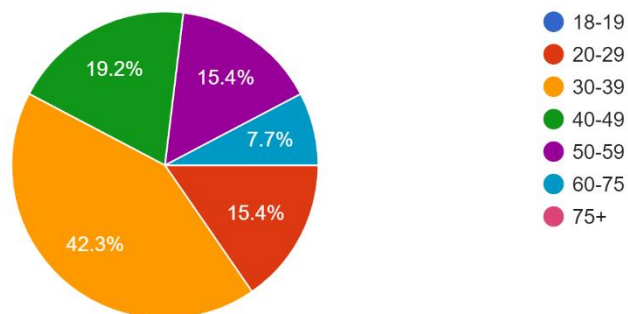
¿Tienes 18 años de edad o más?

26 responses



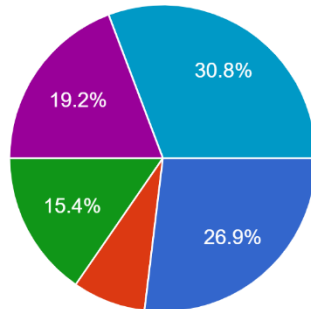
Por favor seleccione su grupo de edad

26 responses



¿Vives o pasas tiempo con frecuencia en alguna de las áreas resaltadas/coloreadas en el mapa?

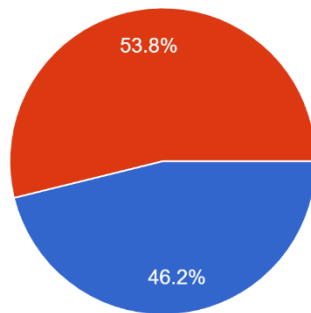
26 responses



- Sí, en los vecindarios del este de Denver (Hampden, Goldsmith, Four S...
- Sí, en los vecindarios de Central Aurora (Highland Park East, Highline Villages...
- Sí, en los vecindarios del Centro Municipal de Aurora (City Center, City...
- Sí, en los vecindarios del norte de Aurora (Laredo Highline, Norfolk Glen,...
- Sí, en los vecindarios de Green Valley...
- No, no vivo ni paso mucho tiempo en...

¿Utiliza el sendero del High Line Canal?

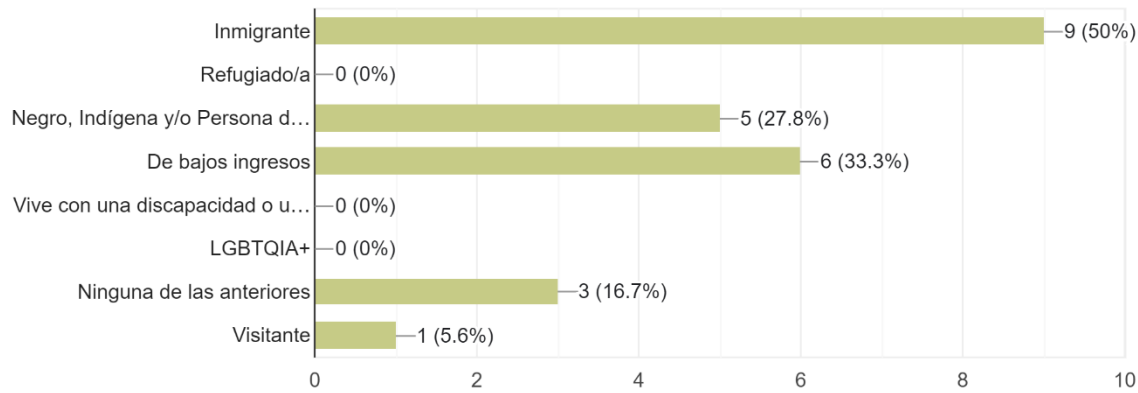
26 responses



- Sí
- No, pero utilizo otros senderos y espacios verdes.
- No, no uso ni frecuento senderos ni espacios verdes

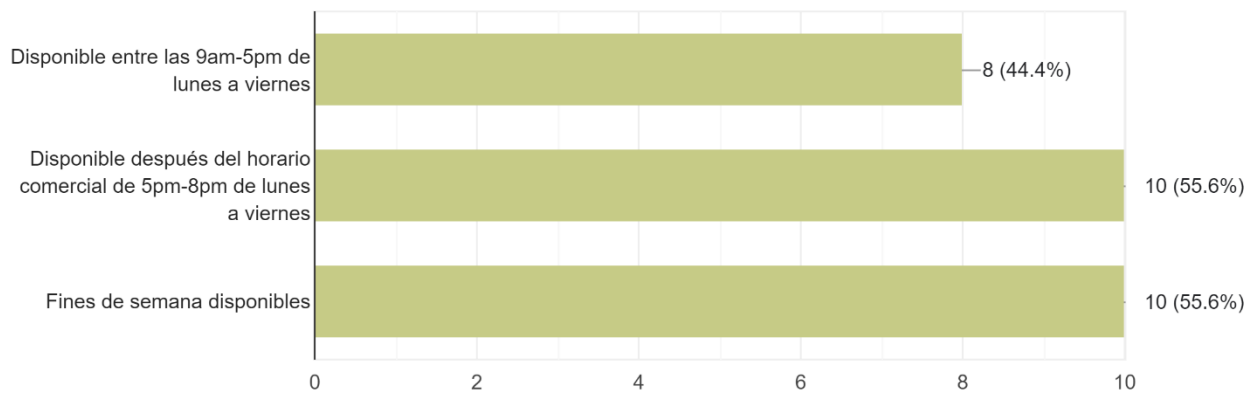
¿Se identifica con alguno de los siguientes grupos de población marginados o especiales?

18 respuestas



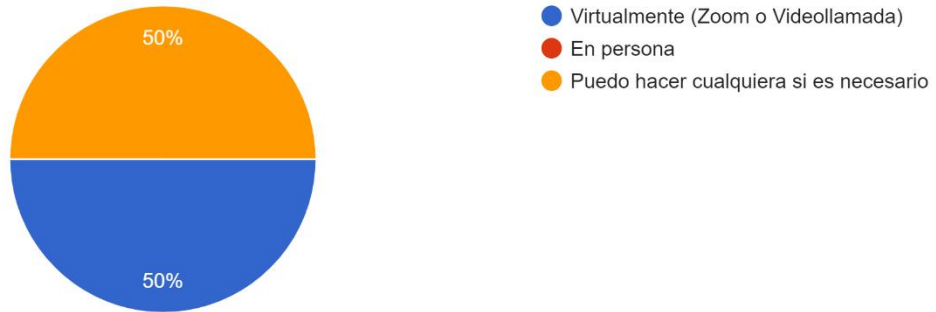
¿Cuándo está disponible para asistir a un grupo de enfoque?

18 respuestas



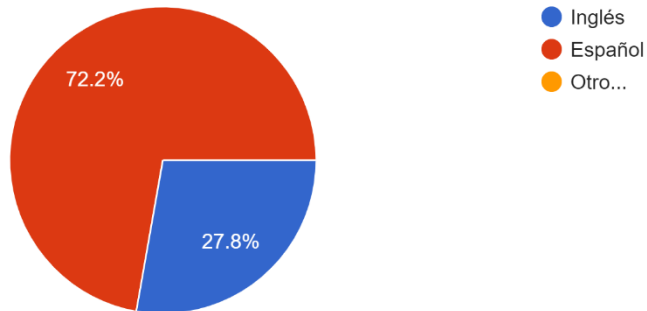
Si es seleccionado, qué opción de entrevista de grupo sería más accesible

18 responses



¿Cuál es su idioma preferido para la entrevista en grupo?

18 responses



¿Acepta compartir su información de contacto (solo nombre y correo electrónico) con el HLCC para futuras oportunidades de participación como esta? T...o para participar en nuestra entrevista en grupo.

25 responses

