



July, 2021

To Our Boulders Community:

We appreciate that so many post comments to our [three online comment boxes](#), and to our two physical comment boxes (one in each location). Many others reach out via email and social media. We do our best to respond as frequently as possible in a public forum; for urgent or easy-to-take-care-of matters, we often fix things on the fly, too! Keep the comments coming!

We recently had some change-ups to our management structure, and as such it has taken a little longer than normal to get this response out, thanks for your patience! You should see us back on our normal schedule after this round of responses.

We can't thank you enough for contributing to improvement at Boulders. We really appreciate the comments, especially the ones which spark thoughtful internal conversations and engagement with our community. We're happy and privileged to serve each and every one of you.

Sincerely,

Boulders Climbing Gym

General Feedback - COVID Concerns:

We had several comments regarding mask usage, capacity limits, the reservation systems, and general COVID safety. Some were positive, some negative, and many were mixed. As we have now lifted our reservation system as well as our mask mandate, we are going to refrain from responding to COVID questions individually. However, we would like to commend our wonderful community for your engagement during COVID. You have reminded us once again that it takes a village to run a gym, and perhaps a small city to run one during a massive international disaster. The stories we heard of people finding sanctuary in our space warmed our hearts, and the corrections or criticisms we received strengthened our community ties and our resolve to protect each other. From all of us at Boulders, thank you.

General Feedback:

Comment: *I am a regular weekday morning climber downtown. We have a pretty great little community. One point of feedback I'd like to provide is that at times the staff ends up vacuuming first thing in the AM. It seems very off-putting and in the way of climbers. Perhaps the opening staff could come 15 minutes early to vacuum, or do at a less busy time, say 8 or 9am when many of the early climbers leave.*

Response: Thank you for bringing this up! Yes, we understand that the vacuum sucks! (Har-Har! #dadjoke) But in all seriousness, we do agree that it can be a bit off-putting.

This said, we've recently added cleaning shifts to our schedule, and we'll encourage openers to vacuum later in the morning, or at less busy times. This is a good suggestion and one we can certainly accommodate, ASAP.

Three distinct Comments, Addressed Together: #1 - *Since the prices have increased on the Eastside and the \$9/visit punch card is no more, single-day climbing prices are prohibitively expensive at both locations.*

#2 - *The membership prices should be income dependent. Membership fees is a MASSIVE barrier to entry.*

#3- *It would be greatly appreciated if you consider discounted day passes for eastside only members to the downtown boulders location. We cannot afford the combined-location monthly membership.*

Response: We hear the concerns about pricing, and we share those concerns. While pricing reflects our financial reality as well - rent and payroll are both expensive, and have disproportionate impact in our two small gyms - we don't want to turn away anybody because they can't afford to climb at Boulders.

We've recently launched our Climb4Community initiative to address this. As you may have seen on our social media, Climb4Community offers sliding scale day passes, class fees, youth programs, and memberships that are open to anyone and come with a long list of awesome benefits, including free rentals, more guest passes, and deeper discounts in the pro shop. Some folks on this membership are paying over double a normal membership rate, and some are paying close to zero dollars per month, everyone gets the same benefits. You can check out more information regarding that program at our new website, climb4community.org

Additionally, make sure to take advantage of all the discounted days of climbing in the gym! On the first of each month we have Climb for a Cause days, during which intro packages are \$12 (and all the money supports a local nonprofit)! We also have discounts for femme folks on Fridays, students on Saturdays, and a list of affinity groups which all have \$10 intro package deals. Details and schedules can be found on the Climb4Community website as well.

Thank you for bringing up this important issue, and please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or ideas for how else we can make climbing more accessible. You can email your suggestions to community@bouldersgym.com

Comment: *I live in Iowa. Boulders is the closest climbing gym to where I live. However, the last time I checked (after driving 100 miles to get there!), I found out that there are no auto-belay routes to climb. That sucks, because I don't have any climbing friends and am forced to spend my climbing gym workouts on the auto-belay routes. I can't help but think that you are missing out on a lot of potential climbers, like me, who don't have someone to belay with/for... and therefore are going elsewhere, or just missing out on the opportunity to enjoy climbing.*

Response: Thanks for driving from Iowa! You'll be happy next time you come! We added auto-belays to the Eastside last summer as part of our COVID mitigation. Our new gyms will also have them, but more on that later. ;)

Comment: *I'm just reaching out to know if you guys have considered implementing anything to assist colorblind climbers at your bouldering gym (multicolor taping system, colorblind friendly color system, etc.) I went for the first time recently and had a spectacular time, but there were a lot of times where red/green or blue/purple holds were really quite hard to distinguish. Roughly 10% of the population is color blind to some degree - and I'm sure I'm not the only one at your gyms. I love what you guys are doing and it's incredible to have such a sweet bouldering gym in downtown Madison, but I just wanted to raise*

my thoughts and hear what you guys had to say. It is best if you respond via email - and thank you for reading my message! :)

Response: Thanks for reaching out! Glad you liked climbing Downtown, and thanks also for the conversation via email, we appreciate your suggestions and engagement! For the short term, we have added the written name of the color to the tags, which should help with that side of the issue at least. We're continuing to look into this and will hopefully have a solution soon. Thank you for lifting this to our attention.

Comment: *We're on 3+ months since I asked you to replace the brushes Downtown and at the Eastside. More people will help keep routes friendly if the brushes don't [@\$# @#%\$!@]*

Response: Friendly reminder that we're real people answering this, and a family-friendly community, too! We ordered new brushes three months ago, and they've only just arrived. Due to the pandemic some goods are harder to get than others; brushes were on the short-supply list but we got 'em now! Thanks for your patience :)

Comment: *I missed the quarterly Community & Culture survey. Next time can you put how long it will remain open? Also maybe an obvious link to it on the homepage.*

Response: Thanks for asking about this, and we're glad you value the Community & Culture survey as much as we do. We used the same marketing methods to promote the survey this time as we did the first time, and the closing date was listed in all communications. Generally, it should always be open for 10 days. We can look into other ways to get the word out next time around, if you have any other suggestions we'd love to hear them!

Comment: *climbing iz fun! <3*

Response: Glad you noticed, and we agree!

Comment: *I think it would be useful to increase the visibility of the feedback options.. I appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback, but didn't know about the digital option for a long time.*

Response: We couldn't agree more! We are working on a poster right now that will have QR codes for all of our feedback channels, and those will be posted at both gyms. We have also contacted our web team to see if we can rearrange the website menus, thanks for your suggestions!

Comment: *People used to be required to wear shoes or socks on the climbing floor. Is this not a rule anymore? I see staff as well as members walking around barefoot. I hope you clean your mats.*

Response: You're correct, we do not allow bare feet on the climbing surface! We will certainly remind our members and our staff of this rule, thank you for keeping an eye out for our collective health!

Two distinct comments, addressed together: *#1 I took the Community and Culture survey and wanted to provide some context for one of my answers. I said that I wasn't particularly confident that Boulders staff would "stand up for me" if I was being mistreated. This is mainly because there seems to only be one or two employees on site at a time, and they're usually chilling at the front desk far away from the climbing area and facing the other direction. That's not to say I think being mistreated is a problem, just that if it did happen, I think the employee(s) would be very unlikely to notice.*

#2 *Can you guys hire more desk staff? Service takes forever on the weekends*

(there were a couple other comments regarding staffing as well)

Response: These comments bring up some of the reasons why adequate staffing is important- when we are understaffed it makes our space less safe (physically, through having less time for orientations, as well as emotionally), and it's just plain annoying! We were lean from our COVID staffing, and we are currently in the process of hiring more desk staff, which should hopefully help address some of these issues. Additionally, when this first comment was submitted, staff were reminded about the importance of floor checks and attention to climbers, so we hope you've noticed an improvement there! Additionally, We have plans to take company wide Bystander Intervention training so our staff is better prepared to identify, manage, and intervene in the case of harassment or other forms of mistreatment in our gyms. Our front desk staff have a responsibility to greet and assist guests as they enter our space, though will readily intervene if an issue is brought to their attention

Comment: *To the kids program directors - I think it would be neat if the kids were taught to always brush their projects before leaving the gym. No offense to children but they can get a bit greasy running laps. This could also help make adults realize brushing is for cool people.*

Response: This is a great idea! We will address this with our coaches, and hopefully you'll see an improvement in this regard.

Comment: *I love this place! P.S. I like french fries. P.P.S. maybe you could supply chalk for people who don't have any*

Response: Lots of great points here, we really echo your sentiment about french fries! We had paused rental chalk due to the pandemic, but we are happy to be bringing it back soon. You can expect to see this in the next week or so (we are just waiting on a shipment of chalk to refill the bags!)

Several comments, all addressing improvements to the east side: *"East side AC", "fan for the east side", "bring back the east side bike racks!", "fix the moon board on the east side", and "I am not a fan of the floors on the east side".*

Response: We're right here with you folks, having one of the oldest gyms in the country certainly comes with its unique challenges! We just improved the AC on the east side, and the bike racks are back (we had to move them when the parking lot was resurfaced). There is actually already a big ol fan on the east side, but now that the AC is fixed, staff might not be using it as much. If you think it'd still be helpful you can always ask them to set it up! This coming fall we are also going to be investing in new floors for the east side gym, along with several other updates- none of which would be possible without your support, so thank you!

Staff Shout Outs

Response: Since a lot of these comments had names included in them, we won't share them here, but we were super happy to hear all of your staff shout outs! Your comments have been passed on to the appropriate staff members, and needless to say, they're pleased with them as well :)

We had several comments regarding the Climbing Team, their use of space, and their COVID practices. We have contacted our coaches regarding etiquette, and spoke with them about COVID mitigation back when these comments were first submitted. We hope you noticed an improvement there.

Regarding general team etiquette, we appreciate you joining us in making space for our team kids, who more often than not have little autonomy regarding their time frame for climbing in the gym. Additionally, their coaches wanted to thank you for your patience as they figured out how to manage 20+ kiddos who largely had Boulders as their only social outlet for the past year.

That said, we value our team kids, their safety, and their right to take up some space. We encourage you to join us in that support of the upcoming generation, and, if you need to be in the gym while they are at practice, understand that they have just as much right to be there as you do. Remember, we were all goofy kids once, and the places we were allowed to be ourselves were the ones that shaped us into the adults we are now!

Route Setting Feedback:

****A quick note here: it seems that route setting, far above and beyond any other issue at the gym, is a major point of contention. This is common among gyms and across climbing disciplines, largely because grading and “good” route setting is subjective, unlike many other issues we discuss above (we have further evidence for this in the fact that every month we receive comments like “your setting is the best I’ve ever climbed”! And also, “your setting sucks!”). We appreciate the continued engagement from our community and our setters. That said, we will not be responding publicly to comments that degrade the personhood of our setters, or imply that they are malicious in their grading. If you believe that *any* staff member at Boulders has malicious intent, *please* bring it up with management (any of the feedback channels, or community@bouldersgym.com work for this) and we will take it extremely seriously. However, we find it inappropriate to take out climbing frustration by dragging setters through the mud. These are real people, who are presenting you with a craft they created. Disagreeing with grades or style is awesome and appreciated, but slander for slander’s sake won’t be tolerated. Thanks for understanding, and feel free to email community@bouldersgym.com with any questions.**

Comment: *I would appreciate more updates on when route-setting happens. I appreciate feeling valued as a customer and member at boulders by hearing about when it will happen.*

Response: We value ALL of our members, and our apologies for not communicating the long hiatus. We definitely could’ve been more proactive about the setting schedule change during that time. We know that route-setting is an important part of what we deliver on behalf of all members and visitors, and we’re proud to be one of the only gyms who have maintained our regular route rotation during COVID, cycling through ~35 to ~50 new routes or problems each week at both gyms. Our regular setting schedule is:

Downtown: Mondays and Tuesdays from 8am-4pm.

Eastside: Thursdays and Fridays from 8am-4pm.

We’ll always try to announce changes to this schedule on our social channels.

Comment (one among several that mentioned grade creep and lack of easy climbs): *I feel that route setting is catered for higher level climbers.*

Response: We hear this perspective and understand; it's sometimes hard to find fresh problems in the preferred grades, yes. We also know that grade creep (the tendency of grades to become harder over time as setters improve in their own climbing) is a common issue among all setting teams. We've scheduled a meeting with our head setter to discuss these issues at length, and bring up some of the suggestions that you all have sent to us. Thanks to everyone who provided constructive feedback on this issue, and especially those of you who provided email addresses and engaged with us in further discussion. We agree that an abundance of easy climbs is paramount to inclusivity, and general positive experiences in the gym.

Just to give you a little more insight into the process, we do have metrics we try to hit, and ways to measure this. At any given time, over 50% of our boulder problems are set at V2 or below, and over 50% of our routes are set at 5.10 and below. We use Kaya to manage our overall inventory against how climbers self-report their onsite and project grades for both bouldering and route-climbing in our quarterly Community & Culture Survey.

We want these to align pretty closely, as we strive to match what we set with what our members want. Now that we've converted to 100% consensus grading via Kaya, we'll also review what we intended to set versus how hard our community feels the grades are. Our setting team regularly checks Kaya and they use the feedback they gather to inform how they set any given week. They take pride in their work and deeply appreciate any feedback that folks are willing to share with them. The more specific the feedback, the better!

Again, thanks for your engagement with this, please keep commenting and grading on KAYA, both what you think needs improvement, and what you love (so our setters know what to replicate)!

Comment: *I was wondering if there were a way we could introduce community feedback for route grading. I have absolutely no problems with the setting (y'all are great!), but I think the grades are pretty inconsistent (even with the updated color range). A few of the orange tag climbs set downtown are harder than the yellows, while a few of the greens are easier than the oranges! I know climbing is somewhat subjective, but I think it could be helpful for us as climbers to be able to say "this feels harder than it was graded" and if enough people feel the same way, have the tag be updated. I also am interested in moving away from the colors and posting the V-grades on the wall (the app is nice but it's hard to quickly find the climb you're looking for), but that's a different issue.*

Response: We're really glad you like the problems we set! Thanks for saying so. However, as we've already mentioned, we've expanded circuits for boulder problems to the Eastside, and have gone to all consensus grading via the Kaya app. So while we're not going to be tagging the problems with their V-grades like you asked, we are encouraging community feedback, as you've requested. We're going to try this for a while and see how it goes.

One word on the circuits: Yes, there are Orange problems that are harder than Yellow problems, but this is also by design. We have some overlap here within the circuits so that there's (among other reasons) an abundance of problems in particular grades (see our answer above about having more easy problems for one reason why.)

Between Kaya and the circuits, there should be the right amount of the right information for everyone, at any time. The circuits get climbers in the right zone generally, and then Kaya can fill in details for those who want them. We've found that we surprise ourselves sometimes by pulling

down problems we might not have tried if we had known the grade at the start. We encourage everyone to give everything that looks fun to them a go!

Comment: *It seems like some of the harder boulders, especially the ones in overhung sections, are hard only because of the reach between holds. While I understand (and appreciate!) dynamic hard climbing, it would be really nice to have some more technical stuff, with feet options that incorporate more difficult technical climbing that extends beyond lunging for holds.*

Response: Thanks for this feedback! We know that in some sets our setting team can get particularly psyched on a specific type of move, and there may be more of those in that round of setting than is appropriate. We appreciate your patience and understanding, this has been passed on to our setters and we hope that you will see an improvement in future sets!

Big Picture Feedback*

**This is a new segment of feedback we are going to dig into as a community. Here we will address one or more issues that came up during this feedback period that feel core to the construction of community, who we are as a business, and how we would like to engage with each other moving forward. Please feel free to email community@bouldersgym.com if you have any questions, or if you would like to engage in further discussion regarding any of our Big Picture Feedback comments or responses.*

Comment: *"I was dismayed while walking into the Eastside location a few days ago to see a Reparations Thrift stand in front. I feel that I cannot support a business whose beliefs I disagree with on both a pragmatic and ethical level.*

Upon doing some research into Reparations Thrift, I encountered: an organizational website suggesting that, "anyone who benefits from white supremacy, including all white people, should pay reparations"; a newspaper article citing an organizational leader who claimed that, "we are a direct, mutual aid organization that is centered around the idea of repairing and repaying what has been stolen—and under white supremacy, everything has been stolen"; and an Instagram account suggesting that non-black folks should celebrate Juneteenth by, "(giving) stolen generational wealth to black people." That's not to mention the fact that Reparations charges people differently depending on the color of their skin.

I'll spare an in-depth discussion here about why I disagree with all of this. It suffices to say that I find it both extreme and erroneous to suggest that being white makes you a white supremacist—even if that term is used glibly here to indicate something slightly differently than it historically has; that it is inappropriate to suggest that mine or any white family's wealth has been generated by theft via blanket statement; that I believe it hardly to be a good recipe for progress for any subset of people to vilify another; and that I'm skeptical at best of the data that suggests that reparations, unequal pricing, or radical redistribution of wealth are effective ways to combat serious and longstanding social issues."

Issue #1, partnerships: Boulders Climbing Gym recognizes that not every member of our gyms will agree with every partnership that we as a business choose to undertake. We value individual opinion, and don't require support of all partnerships. We choose organizations that we agree with and stand behind, but if any member does not share that position, they will never be forced to engage with a partner organization. However, these partnerships are made with our mission and visions in mind, and we will stand by the organizations and the work that they do.

Issue #2, racial inequity: As most climbing gyms are, Boulders is a PWI (primarily white institution). That means that our staff, members, and audience is disproportionately white. That isn't by accident. We are well aware of the history of exclusion, othering, and violence that PoC, specifically Black and Indigenous people, have faced in the outdoor industry. Given that history, we don't believe it is appropriate for us to remain "race neutral", or claim simply to not be racist. Instead, we are interested in cultivating a space that is actively pro-Black, pro-Indigenous, and pro-any other group that has been intentionally excluded from our space. Imagine, if you were historically met with violence every time you went into a grocery store, it would hardly be enough for grocery stores to quietly stop that violence, without addressing any of the residual harm.

Issue #3, reparations: If you follow us on social media, this likely isn't the first time you've seen us engage with the subject of reparations, or the push for Land Back, which is rooted in a similar concept. While we aren't interested in convincing you to agree with the idea of reparations, nor do we find ourselves qualified to do so, we do urge you to look into these issues more deeply before making straw-man arguments. What we can tell you is that we believe wholeheartedly in reparations, in critical race theory, and in the addressing of harm rather than sweeping it under the rug. The reality is, white people have had a violent history on this continent. The sooner we address that harm, and try to right some of it, the sooner we can move towards what we believe we all want, which is a racially just society. We will link some resources below, if anyone is interested in engaging with them.

Issue #4, community engagement: You may well be thinking, reading this, *why is Boulders engaging in social issues? Isn't this just a climbing gym?* And we have to tell you, we think that sometimes too. However, the very nature of our work demands that we engage in community construction, and we can't do that effectively without a keen eye for equity. We take these issues very seriously (in fact, our entire management team is currently engaged in White Supremacy in the Workplace training), and believe that this engagement allows us to better fulfill our mission: improving the world in which we live, work, and play, one climb at a time.

Resources for further reading:

[*The Case for Reparations, a magazine article by Ta-Nehisi Coates*](#)

[*On intergenerational wealth, an academic report*](#)

[*On Mutual Aid in the COVID era, an article*](#)

[*Project ReCo's website, which is referenced in the initial feedback*](#)