



June 18, 2020

To Our Boulders Community:

When we closed on March 17th, three months ago yesterday, we couldn't have anticipated how much the world would change before we re-opened again. At the same time, much of what we're experiencing in the world now is in response to things that should've changed a long time ago. As we re-open to the public after our closures for COVID-19, we realize that we have a tremendous opportunity to do a complete reset of our operations and communications. Our goal is to align ourselves with a new and necessary focus on health and wellness, and perhaps more importantly also on inclusion, diversity, and equity.

The first step to this is the creation of our [three pledges for equity and inclusion](#) - one each for Boulders, our staff, and our community - and we published these last week to strong support and overwhelmingly favorable response. We really appreciate the encouragement and belief in what we're doing, and we also want to recognize that this was simply the first step. Setting our intentions is important, but it's meaningless if we don't follow up with action.

As part of what's next, last week we also opened an online comment box to take feedback specifically about equity and inclusion at Boulders. While we did receive some comments about equity and inclusion at the gyms, we also received a fair amount of opinions about a wide range of gym-related topics. From this point forward, we'll be responding to feedback more regularly, and we will gather it more deliberately, as well. This letter is the first of these responses. We'll address comments by category, below.

Thanks again for everything. You'll hear from us soon, and we'll also be listening intently. In this regard, please feel free to reach out at any time. We are honored to serve our community of climbers in Madison, and appreciate each and every one of you for who you are.

Sincerely,

Boulders Climbing Gym

Feedback About Feedback:

Comment: *I believe the way you framed the one question in your survey was too open ended and was too overwhelming for people to answer.*

Response: We didn't intend for this initial brush to be a survey, per se. Rather, it was a themed online comment box to start the conversation. We are creating a series of surveys that we will repeat frequently so we can measure progress against specific goals about community climate in our gyms. We are also creating (or have created) online comment boxes for regular feedback in regards to equity in the gyms, about setting, and for general comments, too. Stay tuned...

Comment: *Continue to have an avenue for comments and a way for people to report harassment and inappropriate comments from staff and others at the gym.*

Response: This has been created, thanks! You'll see posters in both gyms when you come next, pointing to an online portal for reporting these incidents.

Feedback About Facilities:

Comment: *You should put up more visible bulletin boards at the Downtown location (Eastside one is not too bad) because online communication for a business this size isn't efficient.*

Response: We are moving one of the large bulletin boards from the Eastside to the Downtown location, for this very reason. Thanks for the suggestion!

Comment: *Your dressing rooms on the Eastside need to be updated.*

Response: Why stop with one update? We've been busy there and you'll see how, starting this Friday. We hope you like the updates!

Comment: *The showers Downtown are basically unusable because there are no hooks or benches or chairs to put any of your clothes on.*

Response: Thanks for pointing this out! Our showers are closed at the moment in order to mitigate COVID-19 spread, however we've ordered some items to help solve this for later.

Feedback About Inclusion, Gender:

Comment: *Discourage beta spraying towards women in particular. This is frowned upon universally but happens more commonly toward women regardless of ability. Perhaps have signs to this point or include this information in orientations.*

Response: Great idea, we're creating signs and will post these ASAP. We've also instructed staff to intervene and have some other related projects to address this. Thanks for the suggestion: Stay tuned!

Feedback About Inclusion, Diversity:

We received a number of comments here, many of which said the same things. One particular comment came as a list that covered so many other related comments, we're posting it here in its entirety and responding to each, after. (Thank you to whoever left this excellent list!) This covers almost all of the other comments about inclusion as they pertain to diversity.

Comment:

1. *Hire more BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Womxn staff members*
2. *Diversify your route setting staff (the people should be reflected in the climbs. they're not right now)*
3. *Clear and enforced inclusionary guidelines. You have an inclusionary statement now, but it needs to be clear, specific, and enforced for it to matter.*
4. *BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Womxn specific climb times (with regularity)*
5. *Community outreach/ collaborate with BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and feminist organizations already putting in the work*
6. *Scholarship programs for BIPOC/LGBTQ+ youth to join teams*

Response:

1. We're aligned with this and you'll see it as you return; Historically our challenge has been that the pool of applicants has been of primarily all one type. We're looking at ways to diversify the pool, specifically through our Climb For Community project, and the 1Climb initiative with the Boys & Girls Club. Stay tuned...
2. Our Climb For Community project has a Community Set component for the setting team, so we hope to attract, develop, mentor, train, and hire a more diverse setting team accordingly.
3. Our inclusionary statement is indeed the first step towards clarifying expectations, and we will enforce it. In addition to this statement we've updated our employee handbook to include language and measures that will hold us all accountable.
4. We have these already under Madison Women Climbers, Queer Climbing Social, and Climb For Recovery, and we'll be expanding this under our Climb For Community initiative. We really need a Climbers Of Color group, and need community involvement to make this happen. We have capacity for 6 nights per month devoted to this initiative, and so far we're only using three. We would love to work with others to fill this capacity with communities that need support.
5. You offer a great suggestion here! Send them our way! We're reaching out, too. Our 1Climb projects with Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County are a big step for us, but only the first.
6. We are so glad to receive this feedback. We recently created a scholarship program through our Team Booster organization (which will debut this fall), and we actively apply for and seek grants to secure additional scholarship for youth climbers. Previously we had focused exclusively on financial need; in response to this suggestion we are now also looking into specific inclusion, scholarship and outreach opportunities for our BIPOC/LGBTQA+ youth and community.

Feedback About Pricing, Equity:

Comment: *I've wondered if a discount program for individuals and families below a certain income level or those receiving BadgerCare would be possible.*

Response: We don't want anybody to be turned away from climbing at Boulders or being a part of our programs because of financial need. Our Climb For Community program will address this specifically, providing funding for scholarships for our programming as well as alternative membership structures to allow everyone access to the gyms. We will debut the Climb For Community program shortly.

Feedback About Pricing, Value:

Comment: *Monthly membership prices are very high compared to gyms of similar size in similar cities. The staff are very nice and I appreciate Boulders' events but I can't justify the cost.*

Response: We are aware of how our pricing compares to other gyms in the region (somewhat higher), across the country in similar real-estate markets (high average), and as compared to other recreational and fitness opportunities - both for adults and kids - in Madison (quite a bit lower.) This said, it's important to us that we have not raised pricing ever without also providing a back-door to lower-priced options through frequent sales of day-passes, punch-passes, and memberships. Our pricing model has allowed us to meet required financial metrics while providing the best possible customer experience given our facilities. All of this is key as we prepare to roll out other new gym(s) in Madison.