

# **EVALUATION RESEARCH TO SUPPORT NATIONAL PARK SERVICE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY RELEVANCY INITIATIVES**

**Project Partners:**

**NPS Conservation Study Institute  
NER Interpretation and Education Program  
University of Vermont**

**Conducted by:**

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# Trends in the Literature

- **Theories regarding racial and ethnic minority underrepresentation** (Floyd, 1999; Gomez, 2002; Johnson, Bowker, English, and Worthen, 1998)
  - Marginality, Subculture/Ethnicity, Discrimination, Acculturation, Opportunity
- **Barriers to recreation** (Payne, Mowen, and Orsega-Smith, 2002; Solop, Hagen, and Ostergren, 2003; Tinsely, Tinsley, and Croskeys, 2002)
  - Transportation, Knowledge, Expense, Interpretation, History

# *Keeping National Parks Relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

- Focus areas:
  - working with others to tell inclusive stories;
  - engage in an ongoing dialogue with openness, sensitivity, and honesty;
  - sustain community relationships;
  - create a workforce reflective of society

(Mitchell, Morrison, Farley, and Walter, 2006)

# Research Themes

- Examine current state of knowledge and learning needs of NPS
- Identify opportunities, barriers, and key ingredients
- Serve as a foundation for future evaluation research

# Methods

- Qualitative interviews
- Snowball sample
- 25 study participants
  - 16 NPS personnel
  - 9 Non-NPS
  - Culturally diverse
- Open-ended coding
  - Patterns and themes
  - Multiple coders (coder reliability)

# Interview Protocol

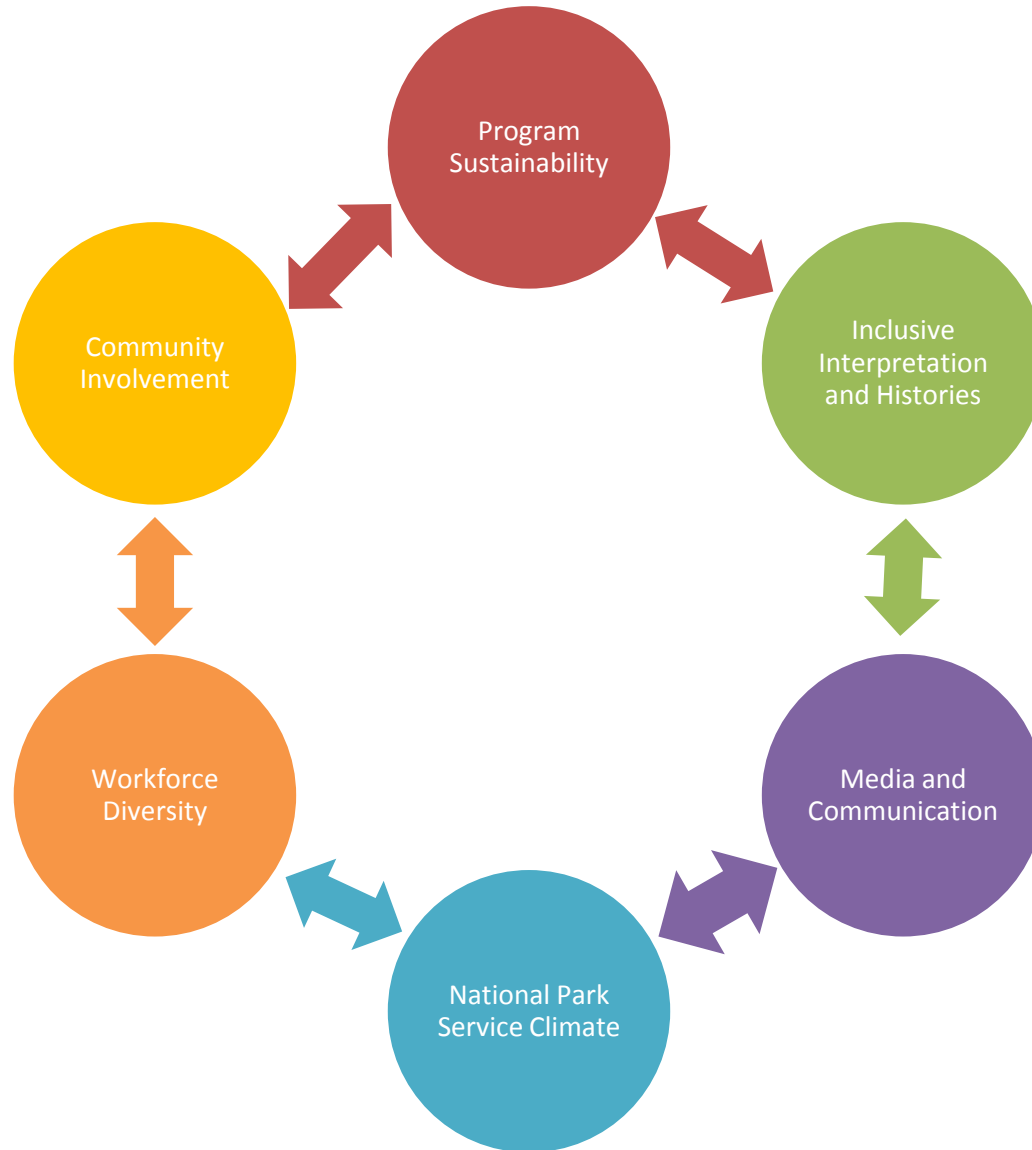
- Asked questions regarding what programs had been successful and what had not been successful
- Asked questions regarding opportunities and challenges
- Asked questions about social science reasons for racial/ethnic underrepresentation

# Preliminary Research Findings

## 6 Themes

- Program sustainability
- Inclusive interpretation and histories
- Media and communication
- NPS climate
- Workforce diversity
- Community involvement

# A NPS Diversity/Relevancy Model





# Theme 1: Program Sustainability

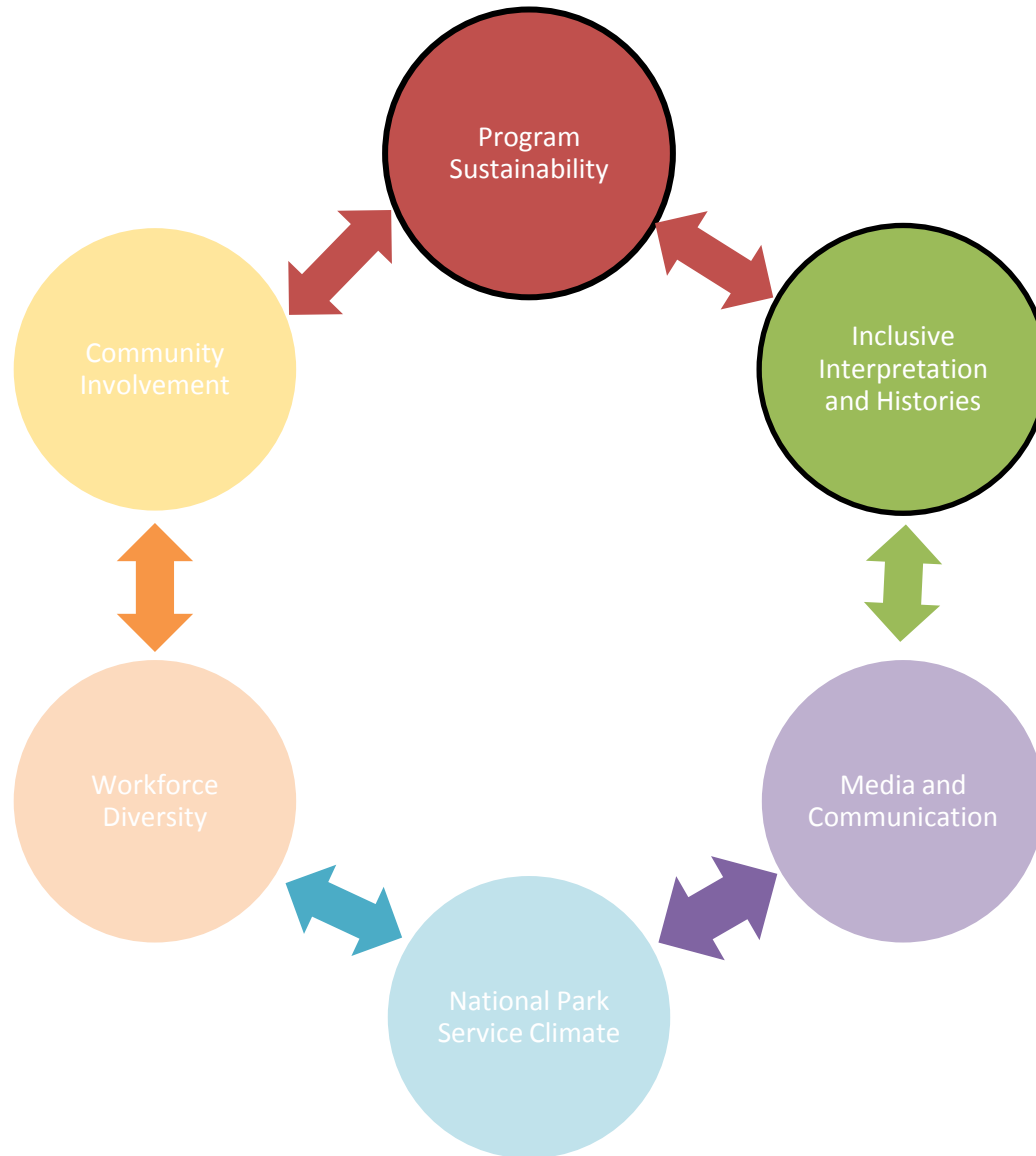
“So it died for these two reasons. I think one because there was no sense of connection among the students and two because it was so [hinged] on one individual that when he left, there was no way to keep the program up” ID#016

# Theme 1: Program Sustainability

## 3 Sub-themes

- 1) Consistency in message
- 2) People involved in the program
- 3) Building meaningful, intentional relationships

# A NPS Diversity/Relevancy Model



# Program Sustainability → Inclusive Interp. and Histories

“So your message has to be consistent. That you’re interested; that you’re a representative; that your storyline is representative; that your visitorship is diverse; and that you have multiple meanings and multiple messages for these places...You have to have a multi-vocal approach.” ID#004

## Theme 2: Inclusive Interpretation and Histories

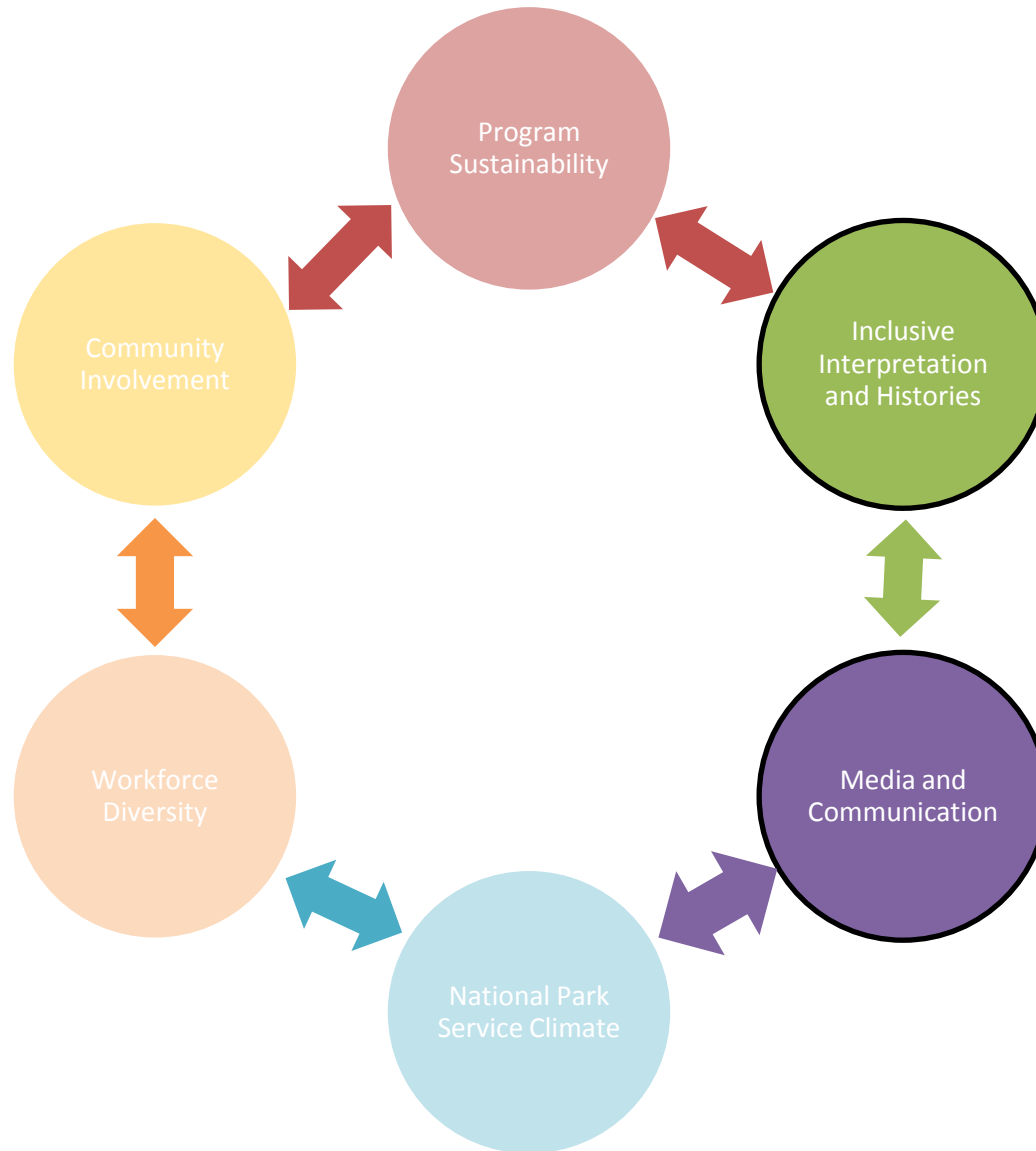
“But if you look at America what is determined to be historically significant... has usually been determined around criteria of its architectural significance as opposed to its social or historical significance...And very often the diverse communities have not been at the table when the importance of things or places is determined so criteria used for the primarily European American community may or may not be applicable to why a place or a building is of importance to my community” ID#004

# Theme 2: Inclusive Interpretation and Histories

## 3 Sub-themes

- 1) Addressing differing values regarding historical and cultural importance
- 2) Making thematic interpretative connections across sites and time
- 3) Engaging target communities in interpretation

# A NPS Diversity/Relevancy Model



# Inclusive Interp. and Histories → Media and Communication

“And I think that the other one – advertising and marketing. That one is very important but if you just market and advertise and you’re bringing the people out or you’re telling them about the parks or these open spaces – these historical sites that are...but then you don’t have someone who is sensitive to these visitors or has a cultural understanding or is going to be a little bit more inclusive, then it’s not going to function. It’s not going to work.” ID#022



# Theme 3: Media and Communication

“if we’re thinking that the program alone is going to do it and we’re relying on our normal promotional materials for the general public it’s a lot more hit or miss than when we’re really also including active promotion through outlets that people will connect with.”

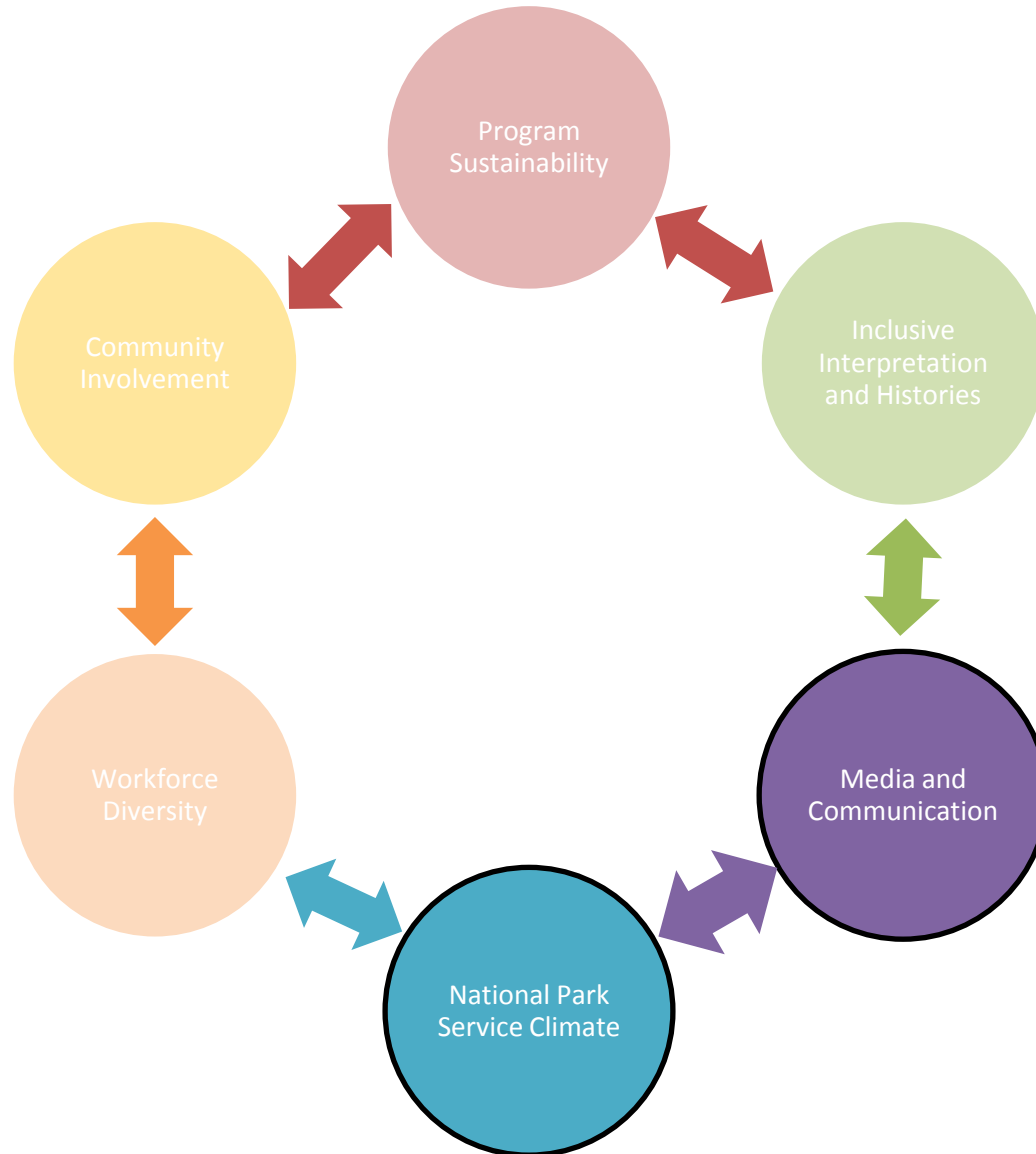
ID#005

# Theme 3: Media and Communication

## 3 Sub-themes

- 1) Education through press and media
- 2) Language and cultural considerations
- 3) New media outlets and technology

# A NPS Diversity/Relevancy Model



# Media & Communication → NPS Climate

“We’ve got to understand that they [youth] communicate in a different kind of way. They’re texting ...we’ve got to understand that if we’re going to be successful in engagement and listening to them. They’ve got a whole different ethic and a mindset that’s quite different from where we are and if we think that we bring them to our world with the same values and tools that we might have historically used, uh-uh – not going to work.” ID#006

# Theme 4: NPS Climate

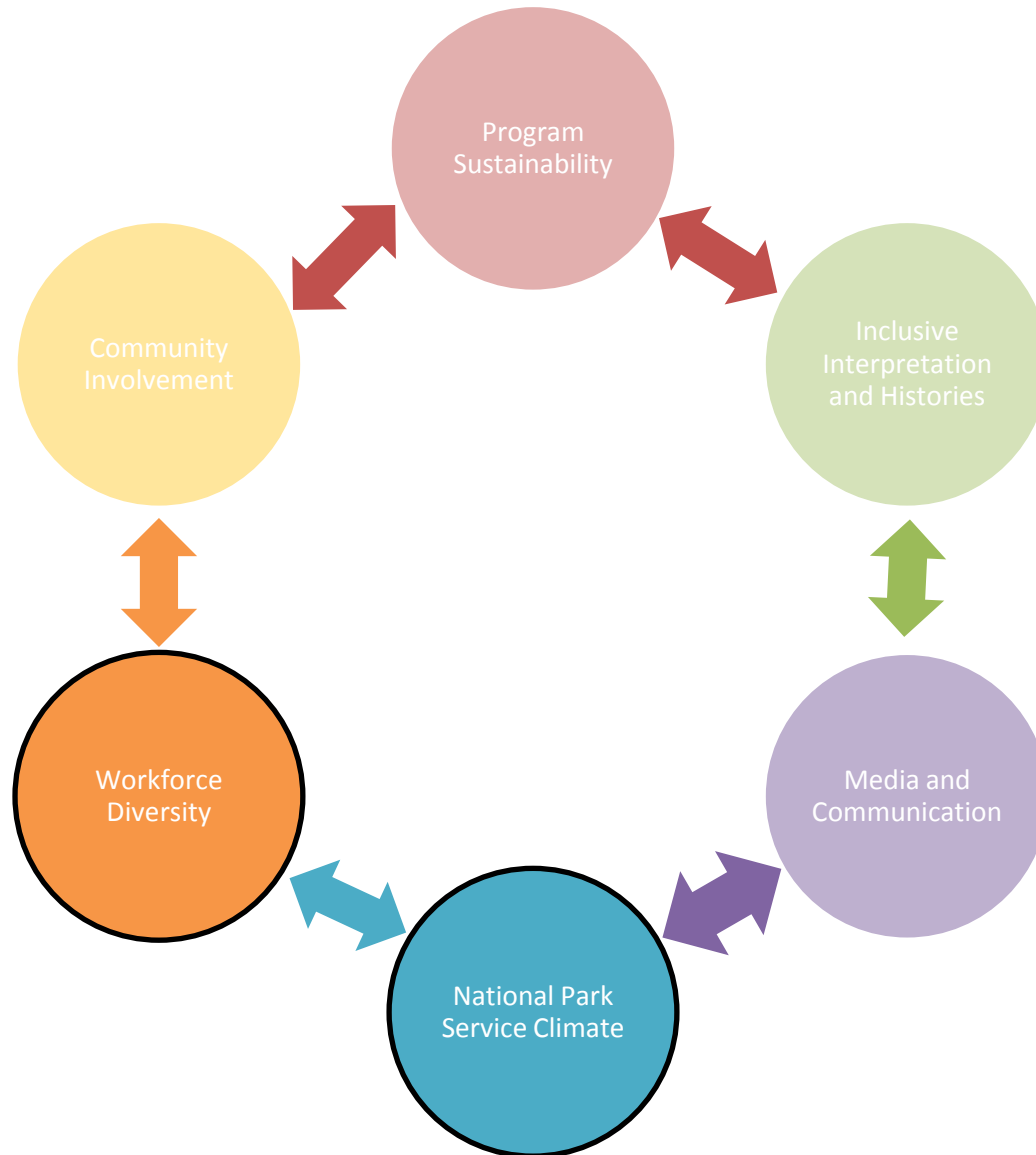
“It’s not a nice to-do, but a must-do. But that’s going to need to be followed by a willingness to fund, a willingness to experiment. Actually, a barrier might be that we have very traditional ways of doing things in national parks and that can create cultural barriers essentially. We need to do programs differently, offer services differently, you know, based on what audiences might need.” ID#005

# Theme 4: NPS Climate

## 4 Sub-themes

- 1) 21<sup>st</sup> Century careers
- 2) Cultural mindset
- 3) Supportive authorizing environment
- 4) Welcoming, non-intimidating atmosphere

# A NPS Diversity/Relevancy Model



# NPS Climate → Workforce

“...I think in the internship or sort of on the job kind of shadowing possibilities we bring folks in and if we don't have the right support system there, you know, the agency can be pretty intimidating. There's not a lot I think that's available that sort of gives you a sense of introduction and everybody's moving so fast and people are so overloaded with stuff these days that we don't necessarily provide that.”

ID#002



# Theme 5: Workforce Diversity

“I think we need to have a better understanding of different ethnic and cultural understandings and I think that’s going to happen by having people on the workforce so that if we broaden our workforce it means that we’re going to have more opportunities to have focus – that have, you know, different viewpoints involved in making these connections so we would have more critical mass in making that happen.”

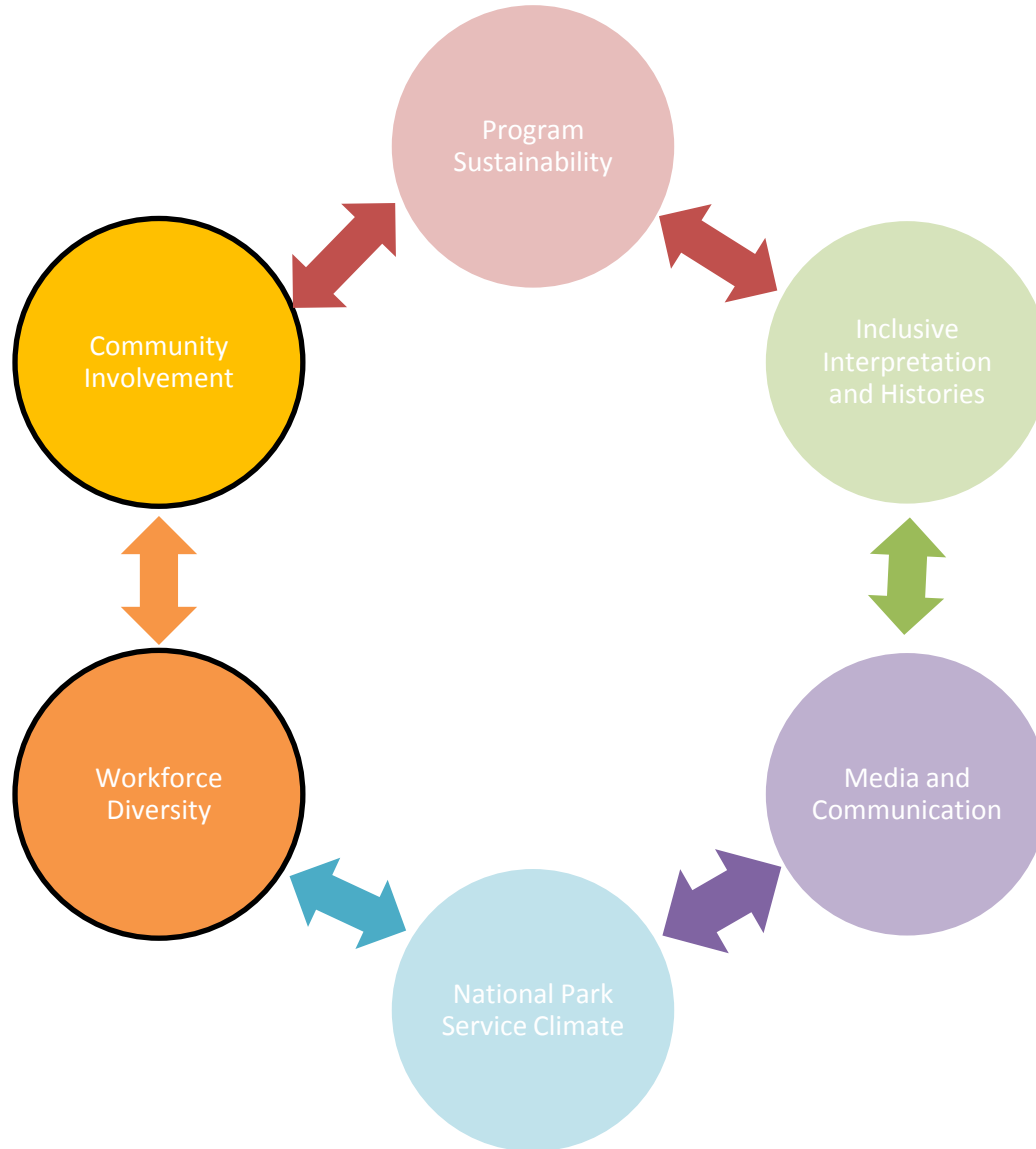
ID#002

# Theme 5: Workforce Diversity

## 4 Sub-themes

- 1) Career opportunity education
- 2) Employees from the local community
- 3) Support system
- 4) Potential jobs in the future

# A NPS Diversity/Relevancy Model



# Workforce Diversity → Community Involvement

If everybody in a National Park looks the same, then it is an unspoken message that this is a place for them and not for you. And I think that it's critical in a relation-building capacity that we have a diverse group of people working for us. That's not always possible in tiny parks with one or two people, but it should be made up with volunteers, with interns, with young people who are engaged and involved and certainly assertive outreach." ID#020

# Theme 6: Community Involvement

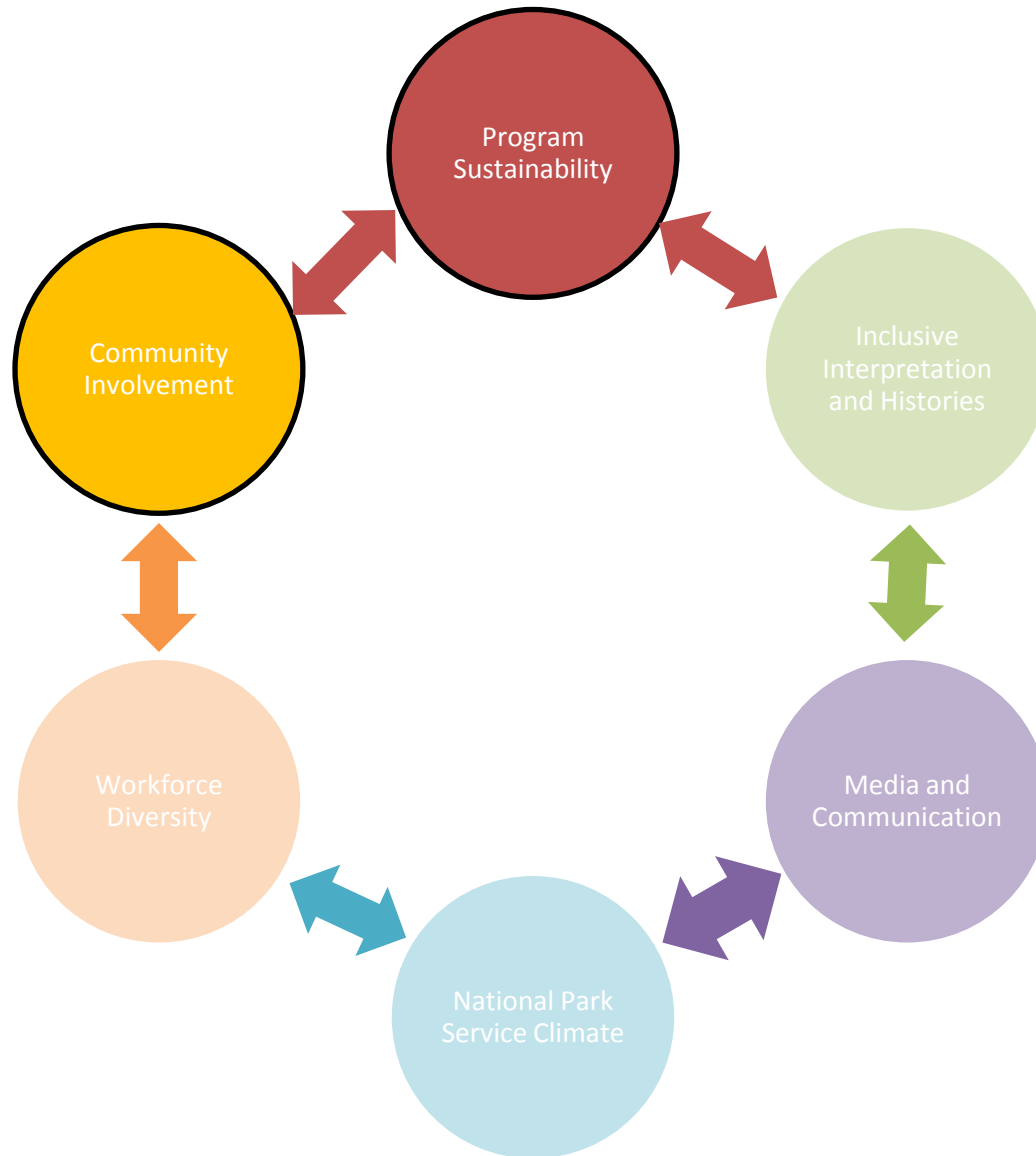
“But I’m really a proponent of going into the community and taking the park to the people. A lot of the times people are very uncomfortable going into a new environment or if they don’t see people of their own, you know, type, class, culture groups – it’s a little bit harder for them to feel comfortable... Speak to groups that are already established like you know, museum groups that are in the city and try to build some sort of partnership or network...” ID#022

# Theme 6: Community Involvement

## 4 Sub-themes

- 1) Active invitations to participate
- 2) Addressing barriers
- 3) School involvement
- 4) Using partnerships strategically to advance diversity goals

# A NPS Diversity/Relevancy Model

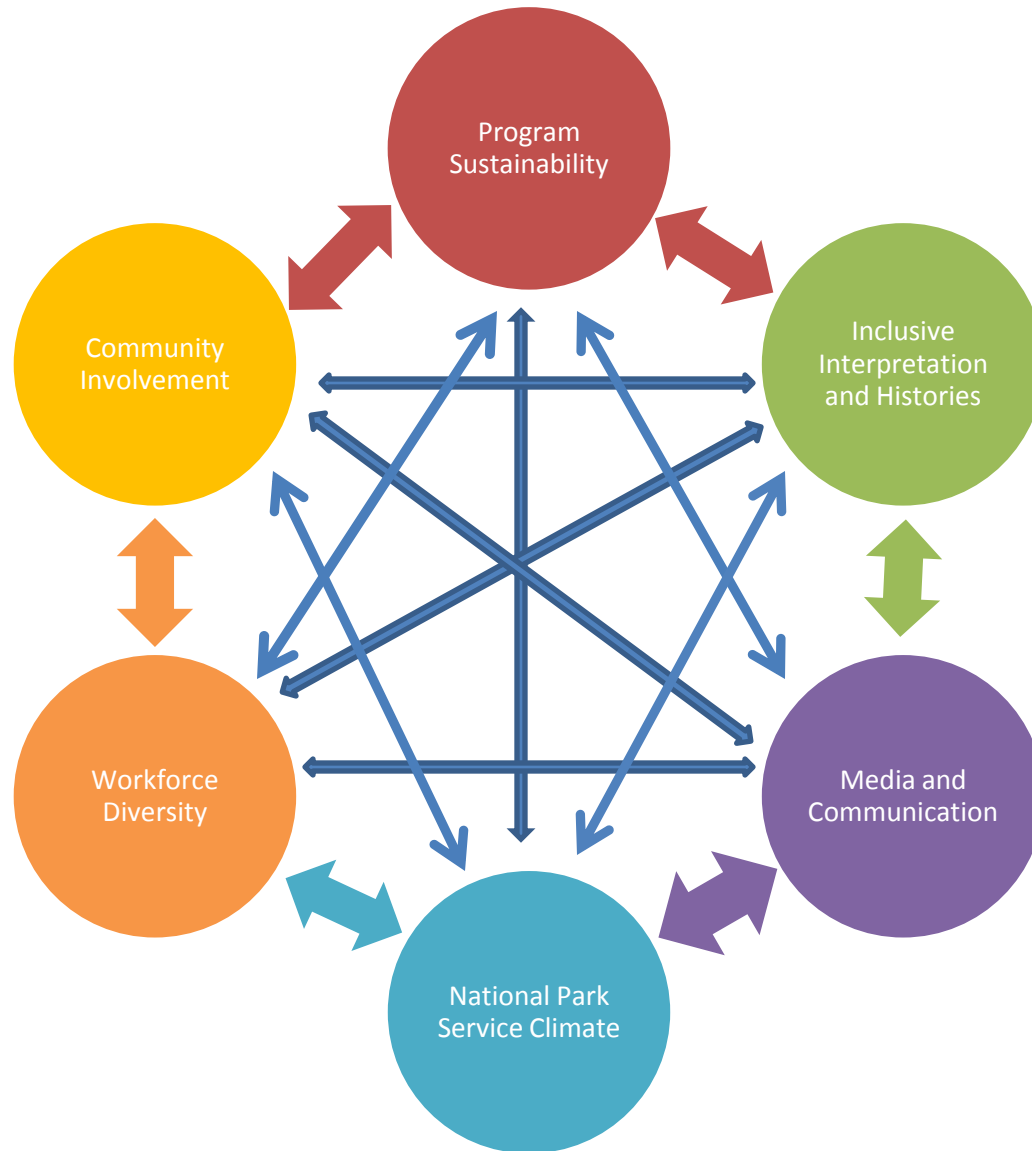


# Community Involvement → Program Sustainability

“But you establish relationships with teachers, you establish relationships with community leaders, and you establish relationships with people on your workforce who have connections to those communities you’re targeting. So I think that that’s very key. It means that time has to be spent doing that kind of thing.” ID#020



# A NPS Diversity/Relevancy Model



# Cyclical Model

“We need to make a commitment, put money into positions that are going to work with us. We have to do this from top to bottom. We have to do it in the employees that we’re hiring – we have to do it in the audiences that we’re reaching out to. We have to do it in the content of our stories that we’re telling, that they’re inclusive. It has to be part of everything we do. And we have to be committed to making mistakes and continuing forward. And we can’t do it alone. We have to work with communities and other groups, partners to do it...We can’t just target one thing and go for that because they will always be able to point to the others and say, but you’re doing this, but you’re not doing that.” ID#010

“...if we’re going to choose, we’re not going to be successful.” ID#008

# Key Challenges

- Lack of consistent commitment from NPS staff
- Broadening the understanding of what a national park is or can be
- Working with non-traditional partners (organizations and communities)
- Collaborating with groups already doing the work

# Get Out, Get Up, and Go: Cuyahoga Valley National Park

Program Sustainability	Inclusive Interpretation and Histories	Media and Communication	National Park Service Climate	Workforce Diversity	Community Involvement
Funding Sustainability: Program is funded by outside sources	Addressing current community issues: health and obesity (PE was cut from local schools)	Neighborhood Recreation Centers	"Outside the Box" in terms of partners	Recruit diverse volunteers	Churches, Boy Scouts, Local Housing Authority, Akron Police Department
6-week program, twice a week (more than 1 touch)	Addressing current community issues: crime and youth delinquency (Involvement from the Akron Police Department)	Newspapers and church newsletters ran advertisements	Focuses on health benefits of park visitation		City provides free transportation to the park

# BEAN: Boston Harbor Islands

Program Sustainability	Inclusive Interpretation and Histories	Media and Communication	National Park Service Climate	Workforce Diversity	Community Involvement
Funding sources from outside the park	Addressing different community preferences for recreational activities and temporary displays	Personal relationships with teachers and schools main tool for communication	B.E.A.N. Participants active in visitation and recruitment plans	Career Exploration days to introduce youth to careers in the NPS	Developed relationships with local schools (one on one relationships with teachers)
Long term afterschool program (more than 1 touch)				Provide internships to diverse youth	Paid internships (allowing youth to participate while earning money)

# Next Steps

- Connect this work at site and/or programmatic level
- Continue to develop and refine this work as an evaluation tool to support staff development as well as program development and delivery
- Based on points 1 and 2 we will have systematic information about the key ingredients associated with successful programs and/or projects