

National Park System Advisory Board

ENGAGING/BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

May 21, 2014

A high priority goal of the National Park Service is to ensure that its mission remains relevant in a world of rapid and accelerating social change. The nation's more diverse population and increasing urbanization suggest opportunities to introduce more people to the benefits and the values the Service and its partners have to offer. To institutionalize this work, a broader base of organizational experience and knowledge is needed and systems to share learning Service-wide.

In 2012, an Advisory Board team collaborated with Cuyahoga Valley National Park to plan and facilitate pilot dialogue sessions in a number of diverse communities adjacent to the park. An objective was to connect with people unfamiliar with the park and not connected in any way to the NPS. The meetings successfully stimulated substantially increased interest in the park, with (1) many participants expressing interest in further contact and in volunteering to reach back supportively into their communities; and (2) park leadership informed anew about views and concerns of its neighbors and potential ways to engage them in park life. The NPS's *Call to Action* (C2A #13) envisions an expansion of community engagement in every region.

Current Activities

The success of the Cuyahoga pilot prompted thinking about how the Board's role supporting this work might be broadened beyond one-time activities in a select few parks. To that end, a program of web-based conversations has been proposed on the topic "Building Community Relationships." The program concept is inspired by the 2013 Conservation Study Institute's "Urban Matters" initiative, a series of web-facilitated employee and partner discussions that created Communities of Practice to support development of a NPS Urban Agenda. The Urban Matters sessions focused on issue-relevant case studies, with short introductory presentations followed by group discussion. The same format and process is suggested for the Board's program, working in collaboration with the Conservation Study Institute.

Planning for this new Board role coincides with a recent NPS decision to extend the Urban Matters webinar series. Our thinking is to combine the two efforts. The NPS priority to ensure mission relevance is clearly integral to accomplishing the agency's goal of becoming a more active and vital part of urban environments and city life. A Board team has been identified to work with the Conservation Study Institute in developing the program. Employee participation will be voluntary, as it was with Urban Matters. The series will feature examples of different ways parks approach, build and manage community relationships.

Next Steps

- Refine concept with the Conservation Study Institute, NPS Regional Directors Stan Austin and Chris Lehnertz (C2A Champions), and Associate Director for Workforce, Relevancy and Inclusion Michael Reynolds
- Identify a formal support team to assist in coordination
- Launch