

National Park System Advisory Board
CENTENNIAL CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE SUMMARY REPORT
Developing A National Park Service Centennial Campaign
November 2012

Background

While national parks are greatly admired, opinion polling indicates that public awareness of the complexity and geographical extent of the National Park System is very limited, as is understanding of the broad scope of community-focused programs the NPS administers. Over the past century, the Park System has grown dramatically and the role of the Park Service has been greatly expanded. The NPS today has a significant educational and science research capacity and now collaborates extensively to promote stewardship with public and private institutions of all kinds. This work reflects a contemporary mission to help address societal challenges such as climate change, the decline in cultural literacy, the obesity epidemic, and growing alienation between people and the natural world. The Centennial of the National Park Service in 2016 is an opportunity to inform the public anew of the success, benefits and values of the National Park Idea.

Addressing the Task

In June 2011 NPS Director Jarvis asked the Board for advice in developing a communications initiative “to introduce more of the American people to all that the National Park Service has to offer looking to its second hundred years of public service.” He said the effort should identify target audiences and offer an overarching theme or message that invites public understanding of the role that the modern, 21st Century NPS plays enriching the Nation’s public life.

Progress Report

At each meeting, the Board considered possible actions and needed resources to develop and implement a Centennial campaign. In November 2011, the Board arranged meetings for the Director with four professional advertising/marketing firms to explore ideas about possible activities, content and costs of a Centennial public information campaign. The Director spoke of the purposes of parks, described NPS programs, and stated that a campaign should stress the public benefits and values of the NPS mission. He said the goal was to have a campaign plan in hand by the New Year.

From the beginning, it was agreed that funding support for a campaign would not come from congressional appropriations, but rather private sources, i.e., foundations, individuals, and corporate sponsors. The National Park Foundation (NPF) was recognized as the appropriate and natural conduit to receive donations for the initiative, and the organization to contract with an advertising/marketing firm to create and implement the campaign. In May, the NPF Board made public its intent to help fund a campaign and to take action to get planning underway. The Advisory Board created a team to coordinate its input to the Director on the selection of a firm to develop the effort. In July, Director Jarvis, a small task force of NPS senior leaders, representatives of both the National Park Foundation Board and the Advisory Board met with a number of advertising/marketing firms which had responded to an RFP to present proposals for developing the

campaign. Two firms emerged as strong contenders and a follow-up meeting was scheduled with each. After these meetings the decision was made to contract with Grey Advertising to develop the Centennial campaign.

Realizing Our Vision

A next step in campaign development is to involve directly the broad community of individuals and organizations that support the NPS mission. Engaged and collaborating to promote campaign themes and to participate in campaign activities, these partners, advocates and ambassadors, will significantly help advance the central purpose of the enterprise – to strengthen and expand the mission of the National Park Service.