

**National Park System Advisory Board**  
**RELEVANCY COMMITTEE SUMMARY REPORT**  
**Building Community Relationships**  
**November 2012**

**Background**

National trends such as a more diverse population, growing urbanization and increasingly sophisticated communications technologies are providing the National Park Service with opportunities to connect with new communities and introduce more people to what the NPS and its partners have to offer. The Advisory Board's Relevancy Committee has collaborated with the Park Service to explore approaches for more expansive public engagement and help the NPS build relationships with diverse communities and demographic segments of American society.

**Addressing the Task**

Early in 2012, Relevancy Committee representatives worked with Cuyahoga Valley National Park to develop and pilot a concept for facilitated park-community dialogue sessions. A 22-mile long linear park in Ohio running from Cleveland in the north to Akron in the south, Cuyahoga Valley National Park is surrounded by a rich mosaic of diverse populations. With support and leadership of the Superintendent, a Committee team engaged park staff to learn more about its work, patterns of park visitation, and perceptions of surrounding communities to get input and ideas about the pilot effort. The Superintendent and CEO of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CCVNP), the park's friends group, jointly invited a representative group of local civic leaders to consider the initiative with them and Committee team, and contribute to its development.

**Progress Report**

The park, Conservancy and Advisory Board sponsored four separate dialogue sessions with residents of four separate communities adjacent to the park. The Committee assisted with meeting facilitation, partnering with a skilled facilitator from the local area, an important element in connecting with the meeting communities. A key objective was to identify people not familiar with the park nor connected in any way to the Park Service. The meetings were a great success, with many of the meeting participants following-up with the park requesting that the meetings be continued, and volunteering to serve as ambassadors communicating supportively back to their communities.

A major outcome of the effort is the creation of a formal community citizens' advisory group. The park and its friends group, the Cuyahoga Valley National Park Association, found the citizen conversations quite valuable and want to continue the effort. Based on suggestions of citizen participants, the advisory group has begun working with the park to help broaden community engagement and assist community members in learning more about the park in an effort to continue to build strong relationships between the park and the local community.

**Realizing Our Vision**

The Advisory Board believes that these conversations will assist the NPS in (1) developing a broader base of experience and knowledge about the country's changing social landscape and (2) cultivate opportunities to share the learning Service-wide.

**Follow Our Work**

This section will include web links to a full report and other backup information.