

National Park System Advisory Board 2013 Report

Task 9: Build Community Relationships

National trends including 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 NPSAB's Relevancy Committee has collaborated with the NPS 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 NPSAB Relevancy Committee representatives worked with Cuyahoga Valley National Park to develop and pilot a concept for facilitated park-community dialogue sessions. A 20-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 park superintendent, a Relevancy Committee team engaged park staff to learn more about its work, patterns of park visitation, and perceptions of surrounding communities to obtain input and ideas about the pilot effort. The park superintendent and CEO of the Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CCVNP), and the park's friends group, jointly invited a representative group of local civic leaders to consider the initiative and contribute to its development.

Progress Report

Cuyahoga Valley National Park, CCVNP, and the NPSAB Relevancy Committee sponsored five individual dialogue sessions with residents of four separate communities adjacent to the park. The committee collaborated with a local facilitator to conduct the meeting, an important element in connecting with the communities. A key objective was to identify people not familiar with the park nor connected in any way to the National Park Service.

The meetings were a great success, with many of the meeting participants following up with the park to request that the meetings be continued, and volunteering to serve as ambassadors by communicating back to their communities.

The park and its friends group found the citizen conversations quite valuable and want to continue the effort. As a result, a major outcome of the effort is the creation of a Community Engagement Council. Based on suggestions from 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.

Priorities Through 2016

The NPSAB Relevancy Committee will continue to encourage these conversations on a Systemwide basis in order to assist the NPS in (1) developing a broader base of experience and knowledge about the country's changing social landscape and (2) cultivating opportunities to share the learning throughout the NPS.

Follow Our Work

Download "A Toolkit for Engaging Communities and Fostering Relationships" at www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm. Visit the *Call to Action* website (*Item 13*).