

NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

To showcase the versatility of the Urban Agenda, NPS chose to pilot the Urban Fellows program in the most populous city in the United States. Serving 8.5 million residents and 60 million visitors, New York City is an international hub for arts, culture, and history, and features one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the U.S. From the beacon of liberty welcoming visitors to the city to the cumulative 27,000 acres of Gateway National Recreation Area nestled in the dense urban environment, the National Park Service is part of the extensive preservation community devoted to protecting and increasing the access to these resources.

The NPS arrowhead can be seen not only at all of the nine national parks; it appears at more than 900 historic sites and structures across the city. In conversation with Floyd Myers, the Urban Fellow in New York City, Myers expressed a need to both highlight this substantial Park Service presence, as well as push the NPS beyond the boundaries of these units.

“The malleability of park boundaries always resonated with me,

so I wanted to expand the visible presence of the National Park Service beyond its units’ boundaries through strategic partnership,”

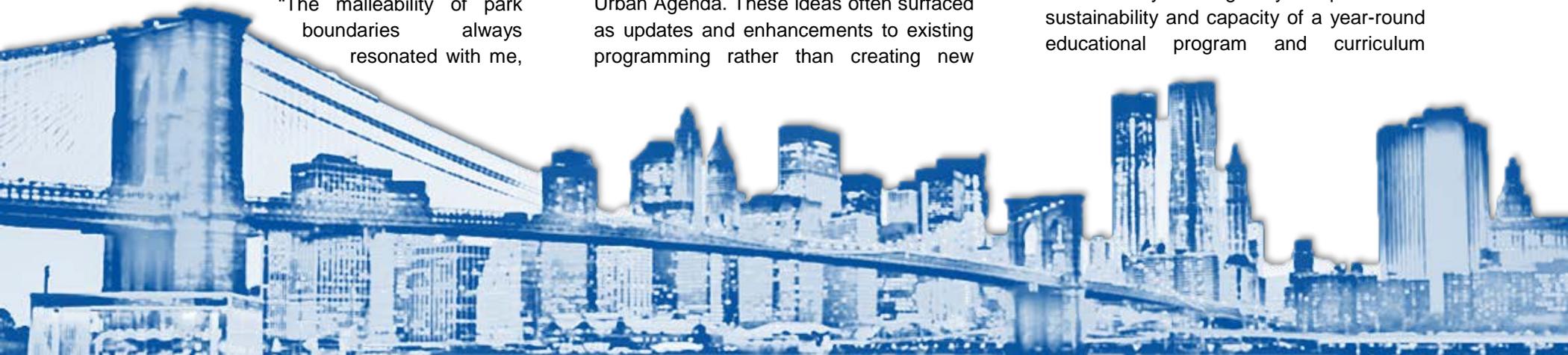
Myers notes about entering into the position. Myers worked to connect the goals and priorities of the national parks operating in the area. He also served not only as a bridge between NPS and its non-federal partners, but as a link among the nine park units’ staff across the city. NPS fostered relationships among staff of different levels, and created a platform for their “boots-on-the-ground” interpretation and maintenance workers to engage with the Urban Agenda. These ideas often surfaced as updates and enhancements to existing programming rather than creating new



Growing a WILD NYC!

redundant programming from scratch, allowing for smoother and more supported implementation of the Urban Agenda principles.

Myers highlighted a signature project of the pilot period: the Growing a Wild NYC program. NPS partnered with Groundwork Hudson Valley, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, the Department of Education, and Battery Park Conservancy to greatly expand the sustainability and capacity of a year-round educational program and curriculum



related to native pollinators. Through hands-on learning by planting pollinator gardens, and an associated STEM-focused curriculum in class, students create dozens of new pollinator-friendly school gardens while restoring important habitat in their closest national park.

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LESSONS LEARNED

Find a Reason to Say Yes

“Often times you find that there are nine reasons to say no to a project before you find the outweighing single reason to say yes,” Myers quipped. So much of community network building takes an intimate understanding of partners; the specific rhetoric used to draw support of one group may not galvanize another. With flexibility, and through creative leveraging and concerted relationship-building, NPS can continue helping align the missions and goals of involved project partners to find the “reason to say yes” to new programs.



Network at All Levels

Creating meaningful relationships with interpretive rangers, facility workers, educational staff, and others is paramount to building support for the Urban Agenda principles. Myers asserts, “Not only are these the people with the ideas, but boots-on-the-ground staff will take these principles back to their leadership, thus developing park buy-in to the Urban Agenda.” Myers adds that this is true for building relationships within parks, but also for connecting with other park units. Myers related this to a principle of the Urban Agenda—“One NPS,” which calls for the unprecedented alignment of the Park Service by connecting the work in its 400+ units and 50+ community assistant programs via a unified conservation, education, recreation, and economic strategy. Myers notes that networking at all levels allows for staff in each park to understand the perspective and goals of the other, and move NPS closer to fully activating “One NPS.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Myers closed with two major recommendations when reflecting on how to continue applying the Urban Agenda principles in the work of NPS and its partners. “You have to engage your local community—particularly communities beyond your boundaries rather than your immediate neighbors.” There are millions of residents of New York and other major

cities who do not differentiate between the levels of public land management agencies (city, state, federal), or who do not know what the National Park Service is, nor its mission. To be relevant, and to find new partners to collaborate with, the Park Service must prioritize outreach in areas in which it may not be comfortable.

