

# National Park Service

## Urban Parks and Programs Affinity Caucus

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GRAND HYATT NEW YORK  
NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK  
JULY 18, 2012

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### PARTICIPANTS

Celeste Bernardo, *Superintendent, LOWE*  
Darren Boch, *Superintendent, PAGR*  
Tom Bradley, *Superintendent, JEFF*  
Maria Burks, *Commissioner, NPNH*  
Linda Canzanelli, *Superintendent, GATE*  
Cassius Cash, *Superintendent, BOST*  
Michael Creasey, *Director, Conservation Study Institute*  
Frank Dean, *Superintendent, GOGA*  
Constantine Dillon, *Superintendent, INDU*  
BJ Dunn, *Deputy Superintendent, INDE*  
Douglas Evans, *RTCA, NER*  
Mickey Fearn, *Deputy Director, Communications and Community Outreach*  
Elisabeth Fondriest, *Outdoor Recreation Planner, LWCF, WASO*  
Judy Forte, *Superintendent, MALU*  
Steve Golden, *RTCA, WASO*  
Bruce Jacobson, *Superintendent, BOHA*  
Jon Jarvis, *Director*  
Meghan Kish, *Chief of Interpretation, SAMO*  
Paul Labovitz, *Superintendent, MISS*  
Catherine Light, *Superintendent, CHAM*  
Lucy Lawliss, *Superintendent, GEWA*  
David Luchsinger, *Superintendent, STLI*  
Tara Morrison, *Superintendent, ROCR*  
Peggy O'Dell, *Deputy Director, Operations*  
Jenny Powers, *Albright Fellow*  
Susan Snow, *Archeologist, SAAN*  
Bob Ratcliffe, *Chief, Conservation & Outdoor Recreation, WASO*  
Dennis Reidenbach, *Regional Director, NER*  
Patti Reilly, *Superintendent, GOIS*  
Alex Romero, *Superintendent, NACE*  
Morgan Smith, *Chief I&E, JOMU*  
Vince Vaise, *Park Ranger, FOMC*  
Morris Vogel, *President, Lower East Side Tenement Museum*  
Bob Vogel, *Superintendent, NAMA*  
Rich Weideman, *Chief, Office of Partnerships, WASO*  
Steve Whitesell, *Regional Director, NCR*  
Jerry Willis, *RTCA, NER - NYC*  
Patty Wissinger, *Superintendent, CHAT*  
  
Delia Clark, *Facilitator*

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## AGENDA

- 8:00 Opening  
Welcome – Maria Burks, Commissioner, National Parks of New York Harbor  
Charge to the Urban Parks and Programs Leadership – Jon Jarvis, Director
- 8:30 Identifying Emerging Directions for Urban Parks and Programs  
Reflection on insights gained at Greater & Greener Conference
- 9:40 Building on Our Current Base
- Current status of NPS urban parks and programs in three topic areas:
    - Stan Austin – CUVA
    - Patti Reilly – GOIS
    - Bob Ratcliffe – RTCA
  - Small groups focus on what is currently working well and not working well in:
    - Diversifying the employee pool
    - Outreach to diverse constituents and stewards
    - Partnerships, the new model
- 11:00 Realizing Our Potential for Organizational Relevance
- Case studies and current thinking about the added value that urban national parks bring to urban areas and the principles of urban parks that are fundamentally different from other parks:
    - Frank Dean – GOGA
    - Linda Canzanelli – GATE
    - Celeste Bernardo – LOWE
  - Small groups focus on common principles that distinguish urban parks and programs
  - Preliminary recommendations for action items to address these principles including changes or additions to the C2A and any recommendations to the NLC for support.
- 12:15 Lunch
- 1:00 Skill Sets and Competencies for Managing 21st Century Urban Parks and Programs
- Current challenges unique to NPS urban parks and programs.
  - Small groups focus on skill sets and competencies required to meet these challenges, for successful management of 21st century urban parks and programs.
  - Preliminary recommendations for policies to support the development of a workforce with these skill sets and competencies.
- 2:15 Building a Community of Practice for NPS Urban Parks and Programs
- Recent research and pilot testing carried out by The Collaborative for Innovative Leadership, Michael Creasey, Conservation Study Institute
  - Plenary discussion of goals, lateral communication methods, shared resources and support and next steps
- 2:45 Action Agenda
- Develop and prioritize recommendations in the areas of:
    - Emerging directions for urban parks and programs
    - Current successes and challenges in NPS urban parks and programs
    - Recommendations for policies to support the development of a NPS workforce with the skill sets and competencies required for management of urban parks and programs
    - Action items to address key principles of urban parks and programs, including suggestions for changes/additions to the C2A
    - Tactics to keep the emerging community of practice connected
- 4:00 Adjourn

## Urban Parks & Programs Affinity Caucus

To advance the National Park Service's urban agenda, a caucus was convened of National Park Service staff from urban parks and program areas across the country. The meeting immediately followed an international urban parks conference, "Greater and Greener: Re-Imagining Parks for 21st Century Cities," convened by the City Parks Alliance on July 14-17, 2012. The timing of the NPS meeting on July 18 took logistical and programmatic advantage of staff participation in the conference, which drew nearly 900 urban parks practitioners and policy makers to New York City. Both Secretary Salazar and Director Jarvis were featured speakers, as were many other NPS employees. The Greater and Greener Conference schedule and session downloads can be accessed at: [www.urbanparks2012.org](http://www.urbanparks2012.org).

The meeting was held at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Manhattan. Deputy Director Peggy O'Dell led the organizing effort, assisted by Superintendent Maria Burks and staff of the National Parks of New York Harbor. Discussions were facilitated by the Conservation Study Institute under the auspices of the emerging *Collaborative for Innovative Leadership*. Highlights of the caucus were captured in video clips and can be accessed at: [www.nps.gov/csi/collaborative](http://www.nps.gov/csi/collaborative).

### Goals

- Generate possibilities for urban parks and programs to prepare NPS for our second century.
- Identify ways that urban parks and programs can best realize the potential for improving our organizational relevance.
- Develop an action plan for creating and sustaining a community of practice for our urban park and program areas.

### Expected Outcomes

- Proposed Call to Action Amendments
- Proposed policy/training/other changes to support development of key skill sets and competencies
- Action items to support the development of an urban parks and programs "Community of Practice"

### The Charge

Director Jonathan B. Jarvis began the day, setting a tone to look beyond current practice and policy toward a second century vision of urban parks. He said that the National Park Service is in a process of "rethinking the foundations of the National Parks," and urged participants to "not look at policies as sacrosanct."

We have an opportunity to broaden our networks and constituencies for the National Park Service through our nation's growing and diversified urban centers. The caucus is intended to share the success models that are connecting people to parks and engaging diverse communities. We have the opportunity to explore how we can organize our work in urban areas, and develop a community of practice that we can use to leverage our opportunities that will help urban parks and programs "step into their power."

### Participation

The affinity caucus was a workshop of selected leaders in urban parks and programs, including superintendents, program managers, and the senior leadership of the National Park Service. As stated by the Director, the caucus participants were but a few of this larger community. Participants were asked to be the ambassadors to the rest of the Service in relaying the outcomes of the caucus.

The caucus progressed through stages of issue identification and discovery, discussion of strengths and weaknesses of experience to date, to articulation of action items. The day's activities included brief presentations, small group working sessions, plenary discussions, and synthesis exercises. All were designed to generate ideas and recommendations in the format of the expected outcomes.

Though initially billed as an urban parks meeting, early in the session National Park Service programs were identified as highly significant for reaching urban constituencies outside of NPS units. Therefore this report refers to both urban parks and programs; collectively referred to simply as "urban parks."

## **Reflections on the Conference & Suggested Emerging Directions**

- Enhance open spaces within historical parks to draw in local visitors, neighbors;
- Our streets are our parks, connect corridors to park experience, improve streetscapes;
- Playgrounds can be designed to be living classrooms and places that embrace history and environmental themes;
- Develop "human corridors" (similar to wildlife corridors) in cities that connect people to parks and open spaces;
- Parks should think of themselves as economic drivers and we should make these connections to communities;
- Ability to create "destinations" – parks connected to the broader needs of a visitor;
- Need to engage communities in "vibrant programming";
- Need to look at local parks policies and see how NPS policies match up in ways that can be collaborative;
- Connect to health and wellness issues within communities;
- Opportunities to connect to communities that have been "left out";
- Need to communicate among NPS urban parks and programs to share successful practices and ideas;
- Playgrounds can be "training grounds" for future stewards of NPS and community assets – "Groundworks" Program is an example of how to connect at a local level with broader NPS in mind;
- Look at creative solutions to economic issues related to distressed commercial real estate lands – "Redfields" to "Greenfields", opportunity to redevelop communities with forward thinking planning that could advance open space, outdoor recreation opportunities, environmental improvements, etc.
- Look beyond NPS park boundaries to connectors to other local parks, cultural sites, etc.
- Need to consider our NPS urban parks as "change agents" and "cultural drivers" that can address critical issues of our time;
- Need to engage internally in how NPS can use partnership dollars that will offset the constraint of Federal funding;
- Need to undergo fundamental changes in how we conduct business with our partners – need a more sophisticated and reasonable business model;
- We don't need to "own" everything to be relevant – define NPS role w/i urban environments;
- Should look at how we can hold events at our parks that on the surface might not seem relevant to an NPS unit- special community events may be the connector to building relationships;
- Need to look at our mission in a broader way so that it does not hold us back from being a member of our communities;
- Great opportunity to focus on health and outdoor recreation;
- Become more sophisticated in mapping our constituents and be open to listening to their desires and needs;

- Use the City Parks Alliance as a resource;
- Feeling safe is an important factor in our parks and in communities;
- Need to look at what other agencies are doing in urban areas and find ways to partner and define what NPS 2.0 will look like;
- Need to recognize that people/communities have their own values, which might not necessarily match NPS values – need to look at end users;
- A lot of communities have beautiful parks in the wealthiest neighborhoods (Central Park, Prospect Park, etc.) – might the NPS think and act differently and embrace diverse stories and recreational opportunities in all communities?;
- There was not a lot of people suggesting that the Federal government should be solving their problems, we are in a time that people embrace partnerships and we should know how to best define our roles;
- There are current constraints in our policies, however, they are not unchangeable;
- Words that were spoken the most: partnerships, connections, people, playgrounds, permeable boundaries, innovation, and entrepreneurialism;

## Critical Considerations

### Workforce

- Build greater authority for alternative hiring practices through techniques such as interagency recruitment, grassroots recruitment, and streamlining.
- Active Recruitment
  - Identify places that are excelling in partnering with diverse groups and institutionalize their efforts through sharing and learning from successes
  - Address fragmented efforts for recruitment (currently optional on diverse hire)
  - Increase recruitment at job fair and schools
  - Work closely with parks and potential employees to avoid hiring mismatches
- Address organizational resistant to change.
- Focus on stories so people can identify with the NPS and potential career paths.
- Ensure clear paths to career employment for new and potential employees.
- Get urban and “big”/traditional parks to partner on second hires, recruitment, and leadership.



### *Learning as an Organizational Value*

- Foster learning as an organizational value through approaches such as mentorships and using better tools.
- Parks should be seen as change agents and cultural drivers. At the local level this represents an opportunity for engagement and stewardship.
- As partnerships expand and become increasingly complex, it is necessary to recognize the importance of compromise when working with local and state governments and partners. The goal should be to view national parks as fountains of democracy and connectors because they do not need to rely on fundraising in the local community.
- Urban communities have very complex value systems that are often seen as different from traditional NPS values. The Service, partners, and communities should work together to highlight where there is commonality in values and work toward mutually beneficial goals. The Service needs to recognize that change cannot happen until we understand that we are part of the problem.
- Parks need to look outside their boundaries to benefit the community at large. The Service needs to recognize that there doesn't need to be ownership for something to have relevance as an NPS resource.
- Create cultures in parks that recognize the authority and opportunities for action that parks possess and create partnership with groups who can create inclusive infrastructure and opportunities. The Service needs to listen carefully to our partners and make their priorities part of our priorities.
- Continue hiring highly motivated employees that are fueled by their passion for reaching out to all, including those who have been left out of conversations and decision making previously.

### *Evaluate needs and supply resources*

- Evaluate urban population needs for park and program services by state and support unit managers in identifying needs in their communities by providing tools, interns, consultants, and other resources.

### *Branding and Identity*

- Carry out NPS urban parks and programs branding through approaches such as “doing business as national parks.”
- By January 2013, have a fully formed plan for a campaign leading to 2016 (funded by the National Park Foundation). Ensure that urban parks have a streamlined message and identity.

### *NPS Policy*

- Tackle approximately 5 policy opportunities and explore methods for modifying them to allow urban parks to be effective partners, recognizing the need for park to be relevant and nimble and fix regulations and policy that impede working with our communities.

### *Capacity and Education*

- Create mechanisms for increasing urban park and partner capacity by sharing information and resources through tools such as links, TED talks, twitter, confidential conversations, facilitated dialogue, and other collaborative online tools.

## Action Items

The workshop identified six (6) action items, linking them to the Call to Action and identifying persons and entities for implementation. These are summarized in the table below:

<i>Action Item &amp; How</i>	<i>Who?</i>	<i>Who II</i>	<i>Call to Action</i>
Tackle approximately 5 policy opportunities and explore methods for modifying them to allow urban parks to be effective partners, recognizing the need for parks to be relevant and nimble and fix regulations and policy that impede working with our communities.	Chief of Policy; hand selected superintendents; contracting (if app.)	Rich Weideman Patty Wissinger Bob Ratcliffe Linda Canzanelli	5, 7, 34, a new one?
Create mechanisms for increasing urban park and partner capacity by sharing information and resources through tools such as links, TED talks, twitter, confidential conversations, facilitated dialogue, and other collaborative online tools.	Collaborative for Innovative Leadership	Michael Creasey Bruce Jacobson Maria Burks Vince Vaise	31
Build greater authority for alternative hiring practices through techniques such as interagency recruitment, grassroots recruitment, and streamlining	New Workforce Management Lead	Tara Morrison Patti Reilly Dennis Reidenbach Lucy Lawless Celeste Bernardo	36, 5, 7
Foster learning as an organizational value through approaches such as mentorships and using better tools.	L & D, Communications, AD, Supts.	Jerry Willis Alex Romero	30, 31
Evaluate urban population needs for park and program services by state and support unit managers in identifying needs in their communities by providing tools, interns, consultants, and other resources.	NLC endorses Collaborative—> RTCA	Doug Evans Judy Forte Bob Ratcliffe Steve Golden	5, 11, 4
Carry out NPS urban parks and programs branding through approaches such as “doing business as national parks”. Ensure there is an urban park messages in forthcoming NPS promotional campaign	Sue Waldron Superintendents	Costa Dillon Darren Boch Patty Wissinger Frank Dean Dave Luchsinger Paul Labovitz	4, 5

## Building a Community of Practice

The *Call to Action* has challenged the Service to become a more flexible and adaptable organization that encourages innovation, collaboration and entrepreneurship. C2A #31 - *Destination Innovation* recognizes the need for the NPS to accelerate the spread of ideas and inspire peer-to-peer collaboration across the Service. The “Collaborative for Innovative Leadership” emerged as a platform to begin to work with strategic initiatives such as the Urban Parks and Program Caucus to define an agenda for National Parks and Programs in urban settings.

*The Collaborative* works under the assumptions that:

- The solutions we need are already here;
- People support what they create and act responsibly when they care;
- People are skillful and creative;
- People are motivated and ready to move forward;
- People want to find meaning in work;
- People are powerful, though they may not know this;
- Leaders are responsible to support people to realize their power.

What are communities of practice? In brief, they’re groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a shared topic or joint enterprise. Inevitably, people in communities of practice share their experiences and knowledge in free-flowing, horizontal, creative ways that foster new approaches to problems.

The expected outcome, “supporting the development of an urban parks and programs community of practice” suggests a different approach to engaging urban parks and programs across the Service. A collaborative approach would extend the energy of the initial meeting and leverage the intellectual capital of those who are experienced and passionate about the National Parks Service’s work in urban areas. Rather than identify deficiencies and set arbitrary targets, a collaborative approach will identify successes and pioneers, evaluating them qualitatively and sharing important lessons learned across the system in mediums that are easily accessible by others. The collaborative approach will connect people to help ensure the Service is continually learning from pioneers and effectively implementing successful practices to reduce or eliminate the barriers to greater success.



## Conclusion

By their nature, urban parks and programs hold the potential to connect to more Americans—and more underserved Americans—than perhaps any other segment of the National Park System. National Park units in urban areas have grown in recent decades, and programs such as Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance, the Historic Register program, Historic Tax Credits, Land and Water Conservation Fund, etc. reach urban cores across the country. Despite those successes, this session was organized because of recognition that the potential of urban parks remains largely untapped.

The one-day caucus with urban park superintendents and other managers was successful in meeting its stated objectives and building on the rich program of the Greater & Greener Conference. The affinity caucus surfaced many issues related to urban parks and programs, highlighting both their uniqueness and important position in the National Park System. It was effective in bringing out the best thinking in the National Park Service on more effectively connecting with urban audiences and diverse constituencies. At the conclusion of the caucus, a participant recalled an urban parks conference that took place in 1987 under NPS Director Mott's tenure. The findings and recommendations of this conference, held almost exactly 25 years ago, also in New York City, are very similar to the outcomes of this 2012 version. North Atlantic Regional Director Herb Cables observed, "If we succeed, the Park Service will be greatly strengthened. If we fail, through apathy or opposition, to develop our urban parks aggressively, we will miss an unparalleled opportunity and weaken the entire National Park System." The report can be accessed at: [www.nps.gov/csi/NPS\\_urban\\_parks\\_conference\\_1987](http://www.nps.gov/csi/NPS_urban_parks_conference_1987). This report should be a motivator for us as we begin to act upon these recommendations and step into our power as urban park leaders.

