



Beyond Outreach

*Sharing Innovative Approaches for
Engaging Youth from Diverse Communities*





This handbook is the twenty-second in the Conservation and Stewardship Publication Series produced by the National Park Service (NPS) Conservation Study Institute (Institute). The series provides information on conservation history and current practice for professionals and the public. This volume was prepared in cooperation with the University of Vermont, the NPS Northeast Region Office of Interpretation and Education, and Santa Monica Mountains and Boston Harbor Islands national recreation areas.

The Conservation Study Institute was established by the National Park Service in 1998 to help the agency and its partners address critical stewardship issues and encourage the best thinking and practice in collaborative conservation. A partnership with academic, government, and nonprofit organizations, the Institute advances innovation for the stewardship of our national system of parks and special places, and assists the NPS and its partners in becoming more creative and effective in meeting twenty-first century challenges. The Institute is based at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park in the Northeast Region of the National Park Service.

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Other publications on relevancy and community engagement in the Conservation and Stewardship Publication Series:

No. 21 *Beyond Outreach Handbook: A Guide to Designing Effective Programs to Engage Diverse Communities*, 2011 ([pdf](#))

No. 19 *Engaging Young Adults in a Sustainable Future: Strategies for National Parks and Other Special Places*, 2009 ([pdf](#))

No. 16 *Stronger Together: A Manual on the Principles and Practices of Civic Engagement*, 2009 ([pdf](#))

No. 8 *Keeping National Parks Relevant in the 21st Century*, 2006 ([pdf](#) and print)

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All photos in this publication courtesy of the National Park Service except for the Boston Harbor Islands photos, which are courtesy of the National Park Service, Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center, and Captain David Weinstein.

On the cover:

UPPER LEFT: As part of the SHRUB program (Students Helping Restore Unique Biomes) at Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, fifth-grade students take apart plants and learn to identify their parts with the help of an NPS ranger.

UPPER MIDDLE: The EcoHelpers program at Santa Monica Mountains provides service learning opportunities for high school students, such as this habitat restoration project.

UPPER RIGHT: Anahuak Outdoors, created by NPS partners Anahuak Youth Sports Association and Mountain Recreation and Conservation Authority, combines a junior ranger program and youth soccer league to enhance youth appreciation of Santa Monica Mountains through activities such as family camping. Credit: Mountain Recreation and Conservation Authority.

BOTTOM: The Harbor Connections program at Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area introduces urban middle-school students to the island park; here, students receive hands-on learning as they plot charts and prepare logs.



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for Engaging Youth
from Diverse Communities*

Prepared by the

National Park Service Conservation Study Institute
and the
University of Vermont

In partnership with the

National Park Service Northeast Region Office of Interpretation and Education
Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area
Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area

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Participating in a service project for civics class, ninth graders from a Boston public school remove invasive pepperweed from Lovells Island, part of Boston Harbor Islands national park area.





Introduction

About This Report

Engaging the full spectrum of Americans in the stewardship of our parks and special places is now recognized as crucial to the future of the national park system. This report shares lessons learned at two locations where the National Park Service (NPS), working with partners, has been successfully engaging diverse local communities. Other managers and practitioners within and outside of the NPS may find that adapting these lessons to their situations can help to enhance the effectiveness of their own engagement efforts.

The report is based on the findings of a research project that probed what constitutes good practices for engaging diverse communities and enhancing the relevancy of the national park system.¹ The project was conducted by the NPS Conservation Study Institute (Institute) and the University of Vermont (UVM) in cooperation with the NPS Northeast Region (NER) Office of Interpretation and Education and Boston Harbor Islands and Santa Monica Mountains national recreation areas.

The report has two main sections. Section I presents the research context and background (chapter 1) and a guide to designing programs to successfully engage diverse communities (chapter 2). The program design guide helps practitioners identify gaps in readiness and informs the development of an effective engagement strategy. Section II discusses the research project in greater depth, starting with its goals and approach (chapter 3) and continuing with the research findings (chapters 4 and 5) that underpin the program design guide. Chapter 6 offers closing thoughts.

The design guide can also serve as a vehicle for incorporating new learning from engagement initiatives in different park-community-partner settings. To stimulate further dialogue, the Institute welcomes feedback on the guide and will share additional learning that emerges from its application elsewhere. Please email comments and suggestions to stewardship@nps.gov.

Terminology Used in the Report

Because some of the terms below can be used in various ways, the following definitions are provided to clarify their intended meaning in this report.

- **Deep engagement:** The ongoing engagement of community members that builds strong connections with NPS programs and parks and provides a continuing pathway for deepening park-community relationships. As a result, the park becomes an integral part of the community and an asset to its quality of life.
- **Relevancy:** The ability of a park or program to connect with a person or group in a way that is meaningful on an individual level and leads to further interaction.
- **Diverse communities:** Refers to communities (often but not limited to those of color) that have traditionally been underserved by and underrepresented in national parks.
- **Communities of color:** Refers to all people who are not white; this term is preferred over other terms such as “non-white” or “minority.”
- **National park:** Refers to any unit of the national park system or related area for which the NPS has management responsibility, regardless of specific nomenclature (e.g., national monument, national historic site, national trail, national heritage area).
- **NPS program:** Refers to the full range of programs offered by the NPS (e.g., Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance and the various NPS heritage documentation programs).
- **National park system:** Collectively, the national parks (as defined above) and the programs of the National Park Service.
- **Qualitative research:** Research designed to understand human behavior in depth and in context and to explore meanings, concepts, characteristics, etc.; contrasts with quantitative research, which focuses on counts and measures.

Boston area seventh graders take in the adventure of a beach landing to study the geology of a drumlin as part of their Harbor Connections experience.



Section I.

Moving Beyond Outreach: Practicing Deep Engagement with Diverse Communities

The SHRUB program at Santa Monica Mountains brings fifth graders to the park to learn about stewardship of park resources; the program uses hiking to help meet the California physical education standard and get students moving.



Chapter 1

The Importance of Maintaining and Enhancing Relevancy

In recent years, national parks, National Park Service programs, and their partners around the country have increasingly sought to engage diverse communities and to enhance service and relevancy to all Americans. The emergence of innovative and successful programs provides an opportunity to learn from and share knowledge among parks, programs, and partners across the national park system.

To better understand what constitutes good practice for maintaining and enhancing relevancy, the NPS Conservation Study Institute undertook a research project in partnership with the University of Vermont, the NER Office of Interpretation and Education, and two national recreation areas: Santa Monica Mountains and Boston Harbor Islands. The latter participated in order to learn from their experiences and share their learnings with others—national parks, NPS programs, and partners—who might build on and adapt this knowledge to their own situations. In this way, the learning at these two sites can be leveraged across the national park system. This is a good example of how the NPS can “think like a system” to improve program practice and delivery.

In every system, the solutions we need have already been discovered and are being practiced somewhere in the system. We always need first to look within the organization to see what’s been invented and what’s working.²

– Margaret Wheatley, Commissioner
National Parks Second Century Commission

Over the course of this research, the concept of “deep engagement” emerged, characterized by six essential processes that were common to success in all the programs studied in this project. Based on these findings, a “readiness guide” has been developed to help park and partner practitioners design effective initiatives for engaging diverse communities (see chapter 2).

A. Context

The National Park Service has long been aware of substantial differences between the demographics of the United States population and the makeup of the NPS workforce and national park visitation. Information gathered at 12 national parks during 2009 and 2010 through the NPS Visitor Services Project reveals that an overwhelming majority of visitors—as high as 95 percent—are white.³ Similarly, the NPS workforce today is not



WORKFORCE DIVERSITY	White	African American	Hispanic	Asian	Other	Total
National Civilian Labor Force*	72.7	10.5	10.7	3.6	2.5	100.0
Federal Civilian Workforce	66.8	17.6	7.2	5.4**	3.0	100.0
National Park Service Workforce (Temporary and Permanent)	82.7	6.9	4.7	1.6	4.1	100.0

Table 1.1. Workforce diversity: federal civilian workforce as of March 2008⁴; NPS workforce and national civilian labor force both as of September 2010⁵ (percentages).

* All people aged 16 or over in the United States who are not in the military or institutions such as prisons or mental hospitals and who are either employed or unemployed and actively seeking work.

** Includes Asians and Pacific Islanders.

as racially and ethnically diverse as either the national civilian labor force or the federal civilian workforce, as can be seen in table 1.1.

National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis identifies relevancy as one of four priority areas for the agency to address. Numerous opportunities to enhance relevancy can be found in current societal trends and challenges, including declining historical and cultural literacy, the disconnection of youth from nature, a more urbanized and diverse population, concerns over obesity and health, and the constant use of increasingly sophisticated technology. These all provide opportunities to work with partners to diversify visitation, engage new communities, and introduce more of the American population to all that the national park system and its partners have to offer.

A large segment of the American public does not know who we are [or] what we do or see themselves working in the [NPS]... We need to make the national parks and the work of the National Park Service relevant to all Americans.⁶

– Jon Jarvis, Director, National Park Service

The independent National Parks Second Century Commission has also acknowledged the importance of engaging all Americans. Calling national parks “community-builders,” the commission’s 2009 report, *Advancing the National Park Idea*, declared that “the long-term viability of national parks and the quality of life in surrounding communities increasingly depend on the Park Service building strong constituencies across the full spectrum of our population.”⁷

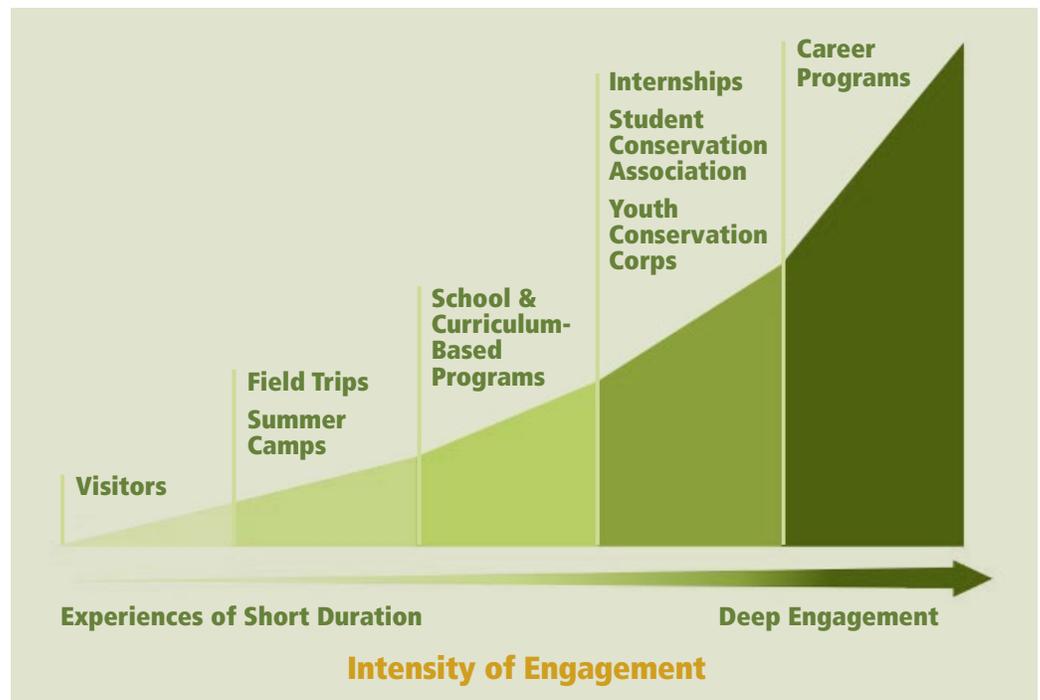
Reaching a broader segment of the American public requires new approaches. Encouragingly, more and more national parks, NPS programs, and partners across the United States are initiating creative ways to engage new and diverse communities. Many recent innovative programs involve youth from surrounding communities, building their connections to the park and developing their sense of stewardship. Some of these initiatives also provide an avenue for young people to consider career opportunities with the NPS.⁸

B. Exploring “Deep Engagement”

The concept of deep engagement (see terminology box on page 2) emerged from the research conducted at Boston Harbor Islands and Santa Monica Mountains national recreation areas. The project examined seven youth programs that are successfully engaging communities of color (see chapter 3 for more details). Working closely with local partners, these parks are building strong connections with neighboring diverse communities through long-term, carefully crafted initiatives. Their efforts extend beyond traditional outreach activities to provide in-depth, hands-on learning and a continuing pathway for deepening park-community relationships. Although the research findings are based on programs that engage youth and communities of color, the two parks’ practices are consistent with the principles of effective collaboration and partnership in general.⁹ Therefore it is reasonable to assume that the practices of deep engagement are transferable to communities representing other types of diversity.

Through parks and programs, the NPS and its partners successfully offer opportunities for recreation and education that are valued by the public, yet most of these experiences are of relatively short-term duration and are often one-time or infrequent occurrences. The findings reported in chapters 4 and 5 illustrate the potential effectiveness of complementing these short-term experiences with programs that build strong connections through longer-term, carefully crafted initiatives. Figure 1.1 illustrates a spectrum of opportunities for the visiting public and local communities to engage with national parks and NPS programs. On the left side are the programs for which the NPS is most well known and that serve as valuable short-term experiences. Moving to the right, programs focus increasingly on building long-term relationships and represent examples of deep engagement.

Figure 1.1. Intensity of engagement programming by the NPS.¹⁰





Chapter 2

A Guide to Designing Effective Programs to Engage Diverse Communities

This chapter provides a guide to developing new programs and improving existing ones in order to engage diverse communities. The guide represents an “actionable” distillation of key lessons that emerged from the research project described briefly in chapter 1.¹¹ It will be useful to managers and practitioners within and outside of the NPS who are interested in improving their understanding and practice of civic engagement with diverse communities.

A. Essential Processes of Deep Engagement

The Institute-UVM research identified six essential processes that were common to success in the programs studied (below, left column). The findings, discussed in greater detail in chapter 5, indicate that effective engagement between parks and diverse communities involves synergistic interactions among the six processes. Working together, the processes accomplish long-term outcomes (below, right column) that in turn support and maintain the park-community relationships that are critical to enhancing relevancy.

Essential Processes of Deep Engagement and the Long-Term Outcomes That Result

Essential Processes	Long-Term Outcomes
Develop awareness and knowledge of local culture and diversity	Staff involvement with local communities
Build a skilled staff	Inclusive interpretation and stories
Create a supportive leadership environment	Effective communication and use of media
Work with schools and community groups	Supportive NPS climate
Provide benefits to communities and the NPS through community service	Diverse workforce
Recruit new park and community stewards	Program sustainability

The complex and dynamic nature of deep engagement requires a strategic approach that is thoughtful, comprehensive, integrated, and tailored to the unique characteristics and needs of specific parks, local communities, and other partners. Deep engagement also calls for flexibility, resilience, and perseverance to integrate the six processes into an overall program effort. The research indicates that attention to any one process alone does not necessarily result in successful engagement. While all processes do not need to be addressed at once, it is important to consider all of them within a long-term strategy and, over time, integrate them into the program design.

B. Assessment of Park and Program Readiness for Effective Deep Engagement

Organized around the six essential processes discussed above, the material that follows guides managers and practitioners through an assessment of park and program readiness to implement a deep engagement initiative. Each section includes an overarching readiness question. This is followed by a detailed guide to help identify gaps that need to be addressed (e.g., additional skills training, the need to secure buy-in from key members of the management team, or further engagement of community partners), which in turn can inform development of a strategic approach to deep engagement.

To learn more about the approach taken by Santa Monica Mountains and Boston Harbor Islands to integrate the six essential processes, including initial steps taken and how these affected the programs over time, see chapter 5, beginning on page 26. The tables in chapter 5 are provided as examples to stimulate thinking; other parks and programs will need to tailor approaches to their own situations.

The SHRUB program at Santa Monica Mountains is interdisciplinary to better meet the needs of different student learning styles; here, fifth graders are learning about NPS sites through art.





DEVELOP AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF LOCAL CULTURE AND DIVERSITY

*How well do program staff understand local
community culture and context?*

- I. Assess the extent to which park and partner staff:
 - a. understand the importance of having knowledge of local culture
 - b. are able to communicate with diverse communities (including speaking the language)
 - c. reflect local community culture
 - d. are involved in the community
 - e. understand community demographics and how they are changing
 - f. use media outlets and technologies that appeal to the community
 - g. are aware of how the park and the federal government are perceived by various diverse communities
 - h. have the training and skills to handle difficult community situations (e.g., polarization or anger that may stem from poor relationship-building in the past)
2. Assess opportunities for:
 - a. programs to be structured to meet multilingual needs
 - b. interpretive materials to include perspectives from the local culture
 - c. someone on the staff to be an “ambassador” for the program to the community



BUILD A SKILLED STAFF

*Do program staff—park and partners—collectively have the right
competencies and skill sets to ensure programmatic success?*

- I. Assess the extent to which park and partner staff collectively have or are capable of developing:
 - a. an understanding of the importance of relevancy and of engaging communities of color
 - b. the ability to learn from communities of color
 - c. the ability to mentor
 - d. the ability to work collaboratively
 - e. an understanding of youth development and leadership
 - f. an understanding of the issues diverse youth are facing in their communities and families
 - g. knowledge about ways to access “wraparound” services (i.e., social services that help youth with issues in their personal lives)
 - h. a willingness to experiment
 - i. the ability to negotiate
 - j. the ability to facilitate

2. Assess the extent to which park and partner staff:
 - a. need and can access appropriate and adequate cultural competency training
 - b. have management support and resources to implement this type of engagement



CREATE A SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP ENVIRONMENT

How supportive is the program's leadership environment?

1. Assess how and the extent to which:
 - a. the superintendent and management team “buy into” and advocate for the program
 - b. the organizational culture exhibits and encourages collaborative leadership
 - c. park management and program partners encourage experimentation and adaptation in program design and delivery, and consider challenges to be learning opportunities
 - d. there is clear and open communication between park divisions and between the park and its program partners
 - e. there is a “critical mass” of park staff who support program goals
 - f. the superintendent will make this program a funding priority



WORK WITH SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

How well-positioned are program staff—at all levels—to develop and deliver programs in partnership with diverse community and school groups?

1. Assess the level of understanding among staff, including park and partner leaders and program managers, about park-community interactions and the following park-community dynamics:
 - a. partnership opportunities between the park and key community groups
 - b. general history and context of park-community relationships
 - c. current community and school needs
 - d. potential barriers to access or to participation in an intended program
2. Assess how and the extent to which:
 - a. program staff interact with community groups *in* the community
 - b. staff consider community needs in developing programs
 - c. opportunities exist within the context of the program to establish partnerships that support and reflect diversity
 - d. organizational culture supports and values shared program development and delivery in a partnership context

- e. all partners, including the park, understand each others' organizations and cultures in order to build on strengths, avoid overlap, and work together most effectively
- f. park management and staff are willing to recognize prior "mistakes" or difficulties as learning opportunities and use them to improve program design and delivery
- g. park and partner leaders recognize and reward success



PROVIDE BENEFITS TO COMMUNITIES AND THE NPS THROUGH COMMUNITY SERVICE

*How well-positioned is the program to provide service
and "give back" to the community?*

- i. Assess how and the extent to which:
 - a. the program is designed around authentic and tangible work objectives that benefit the community as well as the park
 - b. participants help select service projects
 - c. park management and staff understand community needs and culture relative to park objectives, and how these can be integrated into the program
 - d. the community service opportunities address the park and NPS missions, and these are communicated to program participants
 - e. park management is prepared to make a long-term (5–10 years) program investment to meet these needs



RECRUIT NEW PARK AND COMMUNITY STEWARDS

*How well-positioned is the program to effectively engage
and recruit new park and community stewards?*

- i. Assess how and the extent to which:
 - a. the program demonstrates and communicates the NPS mission and its benefits to community members and organizations
 - b. the program is designed to introduce participants to the range of volunteer and career opportunities
 - c. program staff identify potential mentors from various divisions
 - d. park and program partners market volunteer and employment opportunities (e.g., using media that appeal to diverse communities, using terminology that connects with program participants, and providing information that fills gaps in knowledge)
 - e. mentoring and related support are provided for new employees
 - f. the park has the human and financial resources to sustain these programs
 - g. opportunities or potential pathways to NPS employment are identified for program participants

- h. opportunities are identified for program participants to stay involved with the park after the program concludes

C. Provide Feedback on This Model

The deep engagement approach presented here will always be a working model because the readiness assessment can serve as a vehicle for incorporating new learning. As deep engagement initiatives mature and expand to include new and different park-community settings, the model can evolve to reflect new understandings. For this reason the Conservation Study Institute welcomes and requests your feedback. Please email comments and suggestions to stewardship@nps.gov.

Boston Harbor Island Ambassadors assist scientists in research and restoration projects, such as this eel grass restoration in Boston Harbor.



Section II.

Understanding Deep Engagement: The Research Behind the Guide

Urban high school students learn about NPS careers through summer employment in the SAMO Youth program at Santa Monica Mountains. This 2004 summer crew is bound for the Channel Islands to experience a different national park. Credit: Abel Solorio.



Chapter 3

Project Approach

This chapter, and the two that follow, describes the Institute-UVM research project and its findings in greater detail.¹² The project was built on a body of research that over the years has found consistent and substantial evidence of the lack of diversity in outdoor recreation, particularly in national parks. Researchers have also examined potential reasons for this situation, including barriers to participation.¹³ In the meantime, national parks have increasingly sought to engage more diverse communities, yet there is little information on what constitutes effective practice to guide such efforts at the park-community level.

Within this context, the Conservation Study Institute and the University of Vermont, in partnership with the NPS NER Office of Interpretation and Education and Boston Harbor Islands and Santa Monica Mountains national recreation areas, initiated qualitative research to (1) identify opportunities and challenges in the NPS and in parks for addressing diversity concerns, (2) look for patterns in programs that have effectively engaged communities of color in national parks, and (3) distill key success factors from the programs analyzed. The ultimate objective of this research—and this report—is to share the lessons learned, including program design tools that can help guide and support national parks, their partners, and other practitioners in their efforts to more effectively engage the full spectrum of American society.

The Institute-UVM research effort consisted of four components:

1. A **literature review** was conducted on topics related to engagement of diverse audiences, examining both scientific and practitioner sources. The results are reported in appendix A as emerging principles associated with engaging new audiences and building new constituencies (see page 37).
2. **Scoping interviews** were conducted with 25 individuals—16 NPS employees and 9 people outside of the NPS—who were selected for their knowledge and experience regarding diversity in national parks. As a group, they were racially and ethnically diverse and from geographically varied locations. The interviews were qualitative in nature and structured to identify (a) past and present programs to enhance cultural diversity in national parks, (b) the outcomes of those programs and reasons for success or failure, (c) future NPS goals and objectives for relevancy, and (d) reasons for the underrepresentation of communities of color in national parks. The findings from the scoping interviews are reported in chapter 4 (see page 17).
3. **Site-based research** was carried out at Santa Monica Mountains and Boston Harbor Islands national recreation areas to apply and field-test the findings from the scoping interviews. Seven specific programs were selected for study, all of them aimed at engaging youth of diverse backgrounds from adjacent urban areas (see boxes beginning next page). In-depth, qualitative interviews were conducted with 74 people involved

in various aspects of these programs, including staff, partners, and youth participants and their families. The interviews were structured to collect information about how each program works and to identify common patterns in program design and implementation. At each park, the preliminary findings from the site-based interviews were discussed and refined at a workshop with program managers, other park and NPS staff, and partners. These results are reported in chapter 5 (see page 26).

4. A **synthesis** was conducted to integrate the learning from the various research components. It is presented in chapter 2 of this report (see page 7) as a practitioner guide to designing effective programs to engage diverse communities.

Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area

includes 12 islands that are readily accessible to visitors, and 22 more that form an island wilderness. In all, the islands comprise 1,600 acres and 35 miles of undeveloped ocean shoreline. More than four million residents can access park ferry docks via Greater Boston's public transit system. The National Park Service does not control the land in the park; instead, the NPS and eight federal, state, municipal, and nonprofit agencies manage the islands in partnership. The NPS and its partners engage youth at various ages at school and through after-school, internship, and community-based programs. Three of these programs were examined:¹⁴

- **Harbor Connections**, a yearlong school program for grades five through eight, connects teachers and schools to active science in the park through a standards- and place-based curriculum that includes school visits by park rangers and at least one island visit.
- **Island Ambassadors**, a year-round program for urban high school students, introduces youth to NPS career opportunities and provides paid park employment in areas such as habitat restoration and public interpretation and education.
- **Native American Youth Media Institute**, a media production program for Native American youth ages 13 through 18, helps them understand their cultural connections to the islands. It offers hands-on experience in documenting the stories of native communities, including the Nipmuc, Wampanoag, and Massachusetts, for a broader audience.



Youth employed in the Island Ambassadors program learn about the Boston Harbor Islands, receive leadership training, and help educate their communities about the park area.

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

is the largest urban park in the national park system, encompassing 153,000 acres woven into the city of Los Angeles. Within the park boundary are towns and cities, private land, and state and federally owned property; 300,000 people live within its boundary. Park management is partnership-based, as the NPS works collaboratively with state and local governments and the private sector. Santa Monica also uses partnerships to develop and implement programs to engage the diverse communities surrounding the park. The park's approach to youth engagement includes education and service learning, outreach, volunteer activities, and employee recruitment. Four programs were examined:¹⁵

- **SHRUB** (Students Helping Restore Unique Biomes) brings fifth graders to the park multiple times each year to help with restoration activities and non-native species abatement, helping them understand how citizens can help care for park resources.
- **EcoHelpers**, a one-time program for high school youth, provides service learning opportunities that focus on habitat restoration; these enhance students' understanding of ecology and build a sense of ownership and stewardship toward the park.
- **SAMO Youth** introduces young adults to career opportunities in the NPS through summer employment in the park; they work side-by-side with park staff who explain how their work helps to protect resources and achieve the park's mission.
- **Anahuak Outdoors**, a junior ranger program involving a youth soccer league, provides educational activities such as day trips to the park and community service projects. The program enhances youth appreciation of the park and furthers park-community relationships.

SHRUB students participate in an educational hike in Santa Monica Mountains national park, led by the fifth-grade teacher who co-created the program.



Chapter 4

FINDINGS: Common Elements of Effective Deep Engagement Programming

The 25 participants in the initial scoping interviews identified six elements of successful National Park Service diversity initiatives: staff involvement with local communities, inclusive interpretation and stories, effective communication and use of media, a supportive NPS climate, a diverse workforce, and program sustainability. Subsequent analysis of the research data found that these elements are in fact “long-term outcomes” of effective deep engagement, and they are identified as such in chapters 2 and 5. The scoping interviews also highlighted three systemwide opportunities for enhancing relevancy programming.



While on their way to Lovells Island, students check a harbor chart and prepare for a Harbor Connections field trip with their teacher and an NPS ranger.

A. Elements That Influence Program Effectiveness

The six elements identified in the scoping interviews are interconnected, which suggests that addressing concerns for relevancy is complex and that a comprehensive approach is needed to attract diverse audiences to national parks. Each section that follows includes a discussion of factors that help to incorporate the elements into an engagement program.

1. Staff Involvement with Local Communities

I'm a proponent of going into the community and taking the park to the people. [Often] people are uncomfortable going into a new environment, and if they don't see people of their own...culture group, it's harder for them to feel comfortable.¹⁶

Encouraging park staff to interact with people from local communities—both in the community and in the park—fosters understanding of diverse cultures and begins the engagement process. A presence at community locations and events allows local residents to get to know their national park and its staff. There may be substantial value in working directly with communities of color or collaborating with nontraditional partner groups already working locally to address diversity issues. Four factors were identified as contributing to effective staff involvement with local communities:

a. Proactively engaging residents of diverse communities

Welcoming diverse constituencies requires more than just being open to visitors; it means going into the community and reaching out to people of color. Helping communities to get to know the park, its mission, and its staff in a setting that is comfortable, informal, and familiar to them (e.g., local schools, recreation centers, churches) can help build relationships. It also enables park and partner staff to better understand the local community.

b. Addressing barriers to park visitation

It is important for park managers and partners to understand and respond to the challenges that some groups face regarding visitation. One significant barrier that communities of color commonly contend with is transportation—the lack of it (both public and private), its cost, or inadequate information about its availability to reach park areas. Working together with communities to identify specific needs such as these, then crafting strategies to respond, can be the foundation for building relationships.

c. Connecting with schools

Many successful engagement efforts involve schools—particularly programs that introduce the park and its partners to the school and use the opportunity to encourage full family visitation. Engaging youth is one way to attract entire families to park activities, and engaging families helps to keep youth involved.

d. Strategically using partnerships to advance diversity goals

Partnerships are an important way to attract and engage diverse communities. Reaching beyond traditional partner groups and working with community organizations such as local recreation centers, government agencies, and churches is one way to engage diverse constituencies. Another is partnering with museums and other groups that are already developing initiatives to increase participants' diversity.



SHRUB students, helped by a volunteer, set up the plot that they will monitor throughout the school year to learn about scientific research and park stewardship.

2. Inclusive Interpretation and Stories

Historical significance...has usually been determined around criteria of architectural significance as opposed to social or historical significance...Very often the diverse communities have not been at the table when the importance of things or places is determined. So criteria used for the primarily European American community may or may not be applicable to why a place or a building is of importance to my community.

The stories told at national parks, as well as how they are told and by whom, are critically important to a park's relevancy to diverse communities. Ensuring that interpretive programs encompass the experiences of all people associated with a particular story is crucial for increasing visitation and building relationships with underrepresented communities. Three factors were identified as influencing the inclusiveness of interpretation:

a. Addressing different values regarding historical and cultural importance

It is essential that diverse groups be involved in deciding what resources are considered “important” enough to interpret or protect. As the above quote suggests, many structures or places of historical significance to communities of color may be connected with buildings of little architectural significance. Consequently, the culturally important stories associated with these places may not be well documented or interpreted. The interview data suggest that for park managers to know what resources to interpret and protect—and how—they need to work with community partners on an ongoing basis to better understand the stories, values, perspectives, and experiences of different cultural groups.

b. Engaging diverse communities in interpretation

Ideally, to present stories inclusively from the perspective of various cultures, members of those cultures should be part of the process of story development from the beginning. When possible, they should also participate directly in the interpretation of those stories. For example, the story of the Underground Railroad transcends national parks and boundaries and lends itself to interpretation by a broad base of individuals beyond just NPS staff. Avenues for engaging diverse communities in interpretation can include using local volunteers, partnering with local historical societies, and increasing the park’s workforce diversity.

c. Connecting interpretation thematically across sites and time

One approach to enhancing relevancy is to consider how interpretation at a specific park may connect to broader stories or themes across the national park system. For example, there may be opportunities to thematically link the sites and themes of the Civil War with those of civil rights, which may then expand the context for interpreting other important historical figures or events. While not every national park will be relevant to every racial and ethnic group, connecting interpretive themes across time and space enhances the system’s overall relevancy and may strengthen the ability of specific national parks to connect with communities not yet engaged.

3. Effective Communication and Use of Media

If we’re thinking that the program alone is going to [attract communities of color] and we’re relying only on [general] promotional materials, it’s a lot more hit-or-miss than when we’re also including active promotion through outlets that people will connect with.

Using nontraditional and culturally specific media outlets and technology may encourage broader visitation to national parks and enable the NPS to connect to a more technology-savvy generation. The content of communications is also important. Providing information that is specific to communities of color and fills knowledge gaps about the NPS can enhance engagement effectiveness. Three factors were identified as enhancing the effectiveness of media and communications:

a. Educating through the media

Educating communities about the NPS and the programs and activities available at a national park can be done successfully by using appropriate press and other media, particularly those outlets that serve communities of color. This allows dissemination of specific information about the national park experience that might appeal to those communities, such as certain activities or services offered, new exhibits and interpretive materials, or volunteer opportunities.

b. Addressing cultural and language considerations

It is crucial to understand the different cultural contexts and the languages spoken, then adapt media and communications strategies appropriately using terms and techniques that resonate with the communities a park or partner is seeking to engage. Cultural barriers can go beyond language differences, so it is also important to understand how different cultures access information. For example, traditional forms of advertising may not reach certain communities, and radio ads may have more impact on some communities than others.

c. Using new media outlets and technologies

It is important to consider nontraditional media outlets, and when possible plan for newer technology like MP3 players, web-enabled cell phones, and social networks. Exploring ways that technology can enhance a national park experience and bridging gaps between nature, culture, history, and technology are essential to engaging youth and enhancing park relevancy to all, regardless of race and ethnicity.



This 2010 SAMO Youth summer crew has just completed a post-and-rail fence reconstruction project. Credit: Antonio Solorio.

4. Supportive NPS Climate

[Relevancy] is not a “nice-to-do,” but a “must-do.” But that needs to be followed by a willingness to fund, a willingness to experiment... We have very traditional ways of doing things in national parks and that can create cultural barriers. We need to do programs differently, offer services differently...based on what audiences might need.

The organizational climate of the NPS relates to relevancy concerns in different ways. For example, the NPS’s orientation toward diversity in general—how it presents itself in this regard and addresses diversity concerns—influences how communities of color perceive the agency and their inclination to participate in park activities. Successfully addressing relevancy goals requires an organizational climate characterized by a willingness to “walk the talk” and experiment with new ideas, as well as a commitment to fund initiatives to engage communities of color. Four factors were identified as contributing to a supportive NPS climate:



a. Developing a culturally aware mindset

Park employees should recognize the importance of diversity and be culturally aware and competent, and should receive appropriate training in these areas. It is important that park and partner staff understand the value systems of the people they are engaging, then adapt program materials and techniques to account for varying perspectives. As one interviewee said, “Everybody’s not going to [look at] the scenery and get the same impact.” In addition, different cultural groups may have differing perceptions of the role of national parks. Understanding these perspectives is a necessary first step if park staff are to help broaden public understanding of the role of the national park system and the mission of the NPS in society today.

b. Offering viable careers

Offering career opportunities that will attract people of color is one way to influence how these communities view the NPS. To be relevant in this regard, the NPS must be competitive in the contemporary job market. This will require understanding the changes in societal perspectives on employment. For example, the idea of public service and caring for resources for future generations may not attract individuals to NPS jobs today as it did in the past. Also, young adults now coming into the workforce may change jobs 15 to 20 times over their careers. Other related factors include competitive salaries, the desirability of work locations, the potential need to leave one’s home community, and a welcoming workplace atmosphere (see further discussion in section d below).

c. Creating a supportive authorizing environment

It is critical that there be a strong, consistent voice and support for addressing diversity concerns from all levels of NPS management, particularly regional and national leaders. This includes support and funding for specific programs and initiatives and for employee training.

d. Creating a welcoming, non-intimidating atmosphere

The environment created by NPS staff, policies, and traditions and by NPS partners can affect both employee and visitor experiences. Agency culture may pose challenges to newly hired employees of color and make the work environment difficult. For example, employees in remote locations may find it isolating to be the only person of color on staff or in the community. Having a support network in these instances is very helpful. In addition, creating a welcoming, non-intimidating atmosphere for park visitors relies on park and partner staff who are culturally competent and supportive. Visitors can pick up on subtle, sometimes unintended signals and become uncomfortable.

5. Diverse Workforce

If you have a cross-cultural workforce, then you have a cross-cultural connection to communities and that is extremely advantageous.

Diversity in the workforce demonstrates a commitment to relevancy and is more welcoming for communities of color. A diverse workforce provides a range of interpretive voices and may create new avenues for connecting with new communities. Four factors were identified as enhancing workforce diversity:

a. Providing career opportunity education

Providing educational materials and outreach for youth and other potential employees about the array of NPS career opportunities can help address the perception in some communities that the NPS only offers “ranger-type” jobs. Developing relationships with high schools and universities and using career fairs and new media and technology are also helpful in reaching diverse audiences.

b. Hiring employees from the local community

Hiring locally, especially for parks adjacent to diverse populations, can increase workforce diversity and strengthen relationships with key local partners. Hiring locally helps to connect with community groups that can assist with interpreting local stories, and can link to the employee’s social network and provide entrée for others to visit the park.

SAMO Youth summer crews participate in naturalist training, as is this 2011 crew, to familiarize themselves with the resources of the Santa Monica Mountains. Credit: Antonio Solorio.



c. Creating support systems

As discussed earlier, new employees and interns of color often need some type of support system to ensure their successful transition into the NPS. Possible approaches include team-hiring practices (hiring two or more people at one time) and team-building retreats before new employees report to their duty stations. For new employees at parks with little or no staff diversity or adjacent communities of color, connecting the new employee with other staff or mentors who understand this situation may be especially important. Providing a mentoring network within the NPS for new employees of color may also help to ensure their success.

d. Expanding potential future jobs

Youth of color who are park interns are often highly qualified and trained by the completion of their internship, yet in many instances no position exists to hire them. A “pipeline” approach would be useful, whereby a park would create direct opportunities for interns to come on as staff upon conclusion of their internship. A similar pipeline for employment could be established agency-wide by coordinating with NPS programs and partners who arrange for internships regionally and across the national park system.

6. Program Sustainability

The program died for these two reasons: because there was no sense of connection [with the park] among the students, and because it was so [dependent] on one individual [that] when he left there was no way to keep the program up.

For a program to be sustainable over time, the local community and partners must feel invested in it. Such an investment depends on having a mutually beneficial program and strong interpersonal relationships—between the park and its local partners, between the park and diverse communities, and between the program and its participants. Strong local investment and relationships will then help to weather the inevitable personnel shifts and funding uncertainties. Programs that extend beyond single-event experiences build more lasting connections with local partners and communities. While one-time, special events may provide an opening to connect with communities not yet engaged, programs that take place over a few weeks or months, or longer, form deeper relationships. Three factors were identified as contributing to program sustainability:

a. Having a consistent message about diversity

To connect with communities of color, everything a national park does (e.g., programs, interpretation, advertising, workforce decisions) should reflect a commitment to diversity—even those aspects not obviously directly related as well as programs overseen by partners. Such consistency communicates a resolve to address underrepresentation and to be a welcoming place for all. For example, studies have shown that recreational styles across cultures differ, and that facilities and sites need to be more universally designed to accommodate different

recreational preferences.¹⁷ A park that has translated its interpretive materials into Spanish but does not provide facilities for extended family gatherings would be sending an inconsistent message to the community. Making a sincere effort to be welcoming to all will help to build local connections to the park, and over time local investment in the park's programs.

b. Having the right people involved and maintaining continuity

Program sustainability appears strongly linked to leadership and the involvement of skilled individuals, including from the local community. Having multiple community members participating in various capacities helps to ensure program success. Changes in key park and partner staff or in community member involvement are inevitable over time. Anticipating and planning for these changes can ensure continuity in vital programmatic connections and commitment.

c. Building meaningful, intentional relationships

It is important to take a systematic, long-term approach to relationship building. A sustained commitment to working and dialoguing with community members is essential to developing effective, robust relationships. Maintaining continuity in leadership and commitment also fosters trust and creates lasting connections between the park and the local community.



Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center, a key partner in youth programs at Boston Harbor Islands, helps transport urban youth to program activities in the island park.

B. Systemwide Opportunities to Enhance Relevancy of National Parks and NPS Programs

During the scoping interviews, as study participants discussed the challenges facing the NPS in increasing diversity in visitation, program participation, and the workforce, three further systemwide opportunities to enhance relevancy emerged.

1. Commit at All Levels to Addressing Diversity Needs

Consistent commitment and support from all levels of the NPS is essential in order to maintain leadership in addressing diversity needs, fund innovative engagement programs, and enhance staff (park and partner) cultural competency. Finding ways to share program leadership among NPS and partner staff and gain active support and guidance from all levels of the NPS may help to provide more continuity in commitment and funding.

2. Broaden the Perception of What a National Park Is or Can Be

Broadening the public's perception of national parks is challenging because it requires a cultural change within and outside of the NPS. Study interviewees noted that it is important to help the public to understand the variety of parks within the national system beyond the traditional, natural resource-based parks, and the many benefits that the system can provide to American society.

3. Collaborate with Nontraditional Partners and Groups Already Addressing Diversity Issues

Working more closely with nontraditional partners or groups that are already addressing diversity issues could provide new connections at the local level. It is important to note that building relationships and collaborative partnerships takes time and may not bring immediate results. First steps that help in making new connections involve researching potential partners to understand common values and developing a strategic approach. Program staff may need guidance and/or assistance in identifying and approaching nontraditional groups.

C. Shaping the Site-Based Research

The findings discussed in section A of this chapter have been presented as common program elements that characterize effective diversity initiatives. They can also be seen as long-term outcomes to be achieved through engagement processes. The site-based research conducted at Boston Harbor Islands and Santa Monica Mountains was designed to test the validity of these outcomes within the context of specific programs being implemented at the two parks. The findings show that in all seven programs examined, the long-term outcomes are being achieved over time through the application and integration of six essential processes. These processes are discussed in the next chapter.

Middle-school urban naturalists on a tidepool exploration in the Boston Harbor Islands as part of the Harbor Connections program.



Chapter 5

FINDINGS: Essential Processes That Support Deep Engagement

The research conducted at Santa Monica Mountains and Boston Harbor Islands identified six processes that are essential to the successful practice of deep engagement:

- develop awareness and knowledge of local culture and diversity
- build a skilled staff
- create a supportive leadership environment
- work with schools and community groups
- provide benefits to the community and the NPS through community service
- recruit new park and community stewards

The processes interact synergistically and were found to be present and highly consistent in all seven programs examined. The discussion that follows considers each process separately and describes how it operates to influence success. In each case, important initial program components affected the dynamic at both parks. Tables generated from the research analysis show the evolution of each process over time and the long-term outcomes achieved. The tables are intended to stimulate thinking on how to proceed; program staff at other parks will need to tailor approaches to their own situations.

A. Develop Awareness and Knowledge of Local Culture and Diversity

Both Boston Harbor Islands and Santa Monica Mountains national parks and their partners have diverse staffs, with many able to speak the various languages of the communities the parks are seeking to engage. When program staff are conversant in the pertinent local language(s) and knowledgeable about diverse cultures, members of the community feel more comfortable and welcome in the park and its programs. As a result, staff can often connect with participants in ways that transcend potential cultural impediments between parks and neighboring communities. When staff and partners are able to communicate openly with diverse communities, programs are more likely to address barriers to visitation and meet local needs.

One interviewee spoke about the value of having a diverse staff with local knowledge: “I think it’s really important that you know your community and...have representation within your organization that reflects the community. Like I said, John speaks Spanish; he’s Latino. He’s able to clearly and easily relate to the Latino community here.” Another person observed: “For some kids, seeing people that look exactly like them is an opening step. And the language is key [in instances where] English is not a first language...That makes a difference.”

Working with specific cultural groups also requires that parks and partners understand cultural differences among these communities and the larger population. Boston Harbor Islands was able to address this challenge with the Native American Youth Media Institute by ensuring that native culture was at the forefront of the program. As a program staffer observed, “We saw that we were really missing a piece—a cultural consultant to work side-by-side with [other staff] just to ensure that the community is being represented accurately and [that] youth voices are represented.”

It can be valuable to have a community member who can provide entry into a local community or act as an ambassador for the park, especially in an urban area where there may be little awareness of the park. In the words of one interviewee, “We’re kind of a foreign entity... We’ve found we can go in with an intermediary who is familiar with the community and helps make an introduction and helps us extend the invitation and provide the welcome. It’s much more effective than if we were to go into a community in our ranger uniforms and try to do that.”

Communities of color are more likely to engage with the park or program if they feel they are understood culturally, and reaching this understanding can take time. One interviewee spoke in terms of developing trust: “It can take a while for communities to open up... They need time to build trust... The program can start to do that but people have to have patience... Knowing the history and the people helps.” Having staff and partners who are able to interact effectively with program participants and local communities enables programs to address local needs, adapt to challenges, and capitalize on opportunities as they arise. Having culturally competent staff who understand the local culture can lead to meaningful involvement with the community, better communication, more inclusive interpretation and stories, a more open organizational climate, and program sustainability.

Table 5.1. Developing awareness and knowledge of local culture and diversity.

Initial Components	Early Impacts	Later Impacts	Long-Term Outcomes
Staff who are well versed in the local culture Diverse staff who can speak the same language as the community	Participants feel comfortable with staff and welcome in the park or program setting Local community feels comfortable with program staff	Participants are more willing to interact with staff beyond the ones they know Program staff are better able to communicate with local communities Park-community relationships are strengthened Programs are better able to meet community needs and address barriers to participation	Staff involvement with local communities Effective communication and use of media Program sustainability Supportive NPS climate Inclusive interpretation and stories

B. Build a Skilled Staff

All seven programs examined have staff who are skilled in youth development and reflect the diversity of the local community. This leads program participants to feel comfortable and enables staff to act as mentors within and outside the program. A former participant said, “I felt comfortable with [the staff] because they grew up around the same area...I could relate to [them], so I didn’t feel so nervous...I knew I could rely on [them].” Programs at both parks bring youth together from different backgrounds, which can be challenging at first. One program staffer spoke about helping to make youth more comfortable: “[At first] the kids stayed together in separate groups, suburban kids and city kids...but the staff were great with the kids and made them feel at ease.”

Both parks have worked with their partner organizations to ensure that program staff collectively have the necessary skills in youth development and leadership. An NPS interviewee commented on this with respect to handling issues that arose during a summer program group exercise: “None of us [on the park side] really had the [training to] deal with the group dynamic, but the Outward Bound instructors did and it was really amazing. That’s huge.” By partnering with an organization well versed in youth development, the staff overall had the experience and knowledge necessary to address potential challenges.

Such staff-participant interactions create a welcoming environment and begin to build connections with local communities. One staffer described a particular interaction that demonstrates this: “We wanted to make [participants] feel comfortable enough so they want to come back [to the park]. One of the things I [did] was to make sure we had the same people show up so that the kids knew them by name. I think that makes them feel comfortable... Just last week three girls came up and were asking for the ranger: ‘We want to see Ranger Jane and say hi to her.’ I think the connection with the park staff was a key to making it successful.”

Program staff at both parks also understand the critical importance of mentorship and effective communication. As one staffer commented, “I definitely see [mentorship] as part of my job, even if I’m not being paid to do it. A continual mentorship is very important...I had to get text messaging when I worked with these youths...because that’s how they communicated. I wasn’t getting through to them any other way and I found a way to communicate with them on their level.” By having the necessary skills and awareness of the importance of mentorship and communication, program staff are able to connect youth with different aspects of a program in ways that engage their interests. A former participant spoke to the staff’s ability to discover participants’ interests: “The program leaders have dedicated themselves to each [young person]. Even the youth who are not very committed to the project, they still find a way for them to get something out of it...and find what they can run with.”

Over time, these interactions help to create trust and build deep and sustainable relationships between the youth, local communities, and the park and its partners. In building a skilled staff, Santa Monica Mountains and Boston Harbor Islands ensure program sustainability and address aspects of NPS climate, communication, workforce diversity, and community relationships.

Table 5.2. Building a skilled staff.

Initial Components	Early Impacts	Later Impacts	Long-Term Outcomes
Staff and partners skilled in youth and leadership development Diverse staff who reflect the local community and work directly with participants	Participants feel comfortable and connected with staff Staff mentor participants during the program and their daily lives	Welcoming environment is created Deep relationships develop between participants, staff, and organizations	Program sustainability Supportive NPS climate Staff involvement with local communities Effective communication and use of media

C. Create a Supportive Leadership Environment

Managers at both parks support relevancy initiatives and encourage park and partner staff to experiment and be innovative in developing and delivering programs. One staff member, speaking about the park and its partners, said, “We have amazing leaders who want to do this... They [are] very passionate and they infect others with that passion... They understand the importance of it and are truly engaged.” Another interviewee spoke of the superintendent’s support: “The support is coming from the very top...the superintendent [is] behind us 100 percent...[This] overwhelming support means that the rangers can give their time to it...”

A supportive environment fosters creativity, honesty, and flexibility in developing and delivering programs. Both parks encourage park and partner staff to take risks and adjust programs, and to view challenges as learning opportunities. Often programs begin as pilots; if they don’t work it is important to understand why and adapt appropriately. As one interviewee said, “If something doesn’t work, take the time to figure out why, but [don’t] let it stop you.” Being flexible enables staff and programs to better meet local needs and respond to challenges and opportunities as they arise. A commitment to seeking funding is also part of a supportive leadership environment, especially in the early stages of a pilot initiative.

Leadership flexibility also plays a role in the partnering environment, as does understanding the importance of emphasizing the unique strengths that each partner brings to the collaboration. One partner commented: “[Our organization] doesn’t have the policy manuals and rules that the Park Service and state park system sometimes come burdened with. We can move quickly, which is why I think the partnership with the park works so well...[We all] work really well together. It’s like ‘here’s the mission, here’s what we want to accomplish, [now] how do we get it done and...get it done fast?’”

Table 5.3. Creating a supportive leadership environment.

Leaders who support innovation and flexibility, encourage staff to take risks and learn from challenges, promote park-community collaboration, and look for creative ways to fund diversity initiatives provide the work environment that allows these initiatives to flourish. This in turn contributes to a supportive NPS climate and program sustainability.

Initial Components	Early Impacts	Later Impacts	Long-Term Outcomes
Authorizing environment that supports diversity and engagement efforts	Program staff are able to experiment with program design and delivery Program staff have flexibility when implementing programs	Programs are adapted to serve communities Staff are able to adapt programs in response to opportunities and challenges	Supportive NPS climate Program sustainability

D. Work with Schools and Community Groups

Boston Harbor Islands and Santa Monica Mountains both rely on partnerships with diverse community groups and schools to be successful. The parks and their partners developed their programs through community dialogue to ensure that school and community needs would be met, which took time and considerable effort. One interviewee reflected on the challenge of working together to develop a useful program: “It was difficult at the beginning letting the rangers know what our needs were and coming together with them. It took many meetings...with a lot of players coming to the table and saying what they could do, what they were willing to do, and also what they could not do.”

Community involvement is key to ensuring that a program meets local needs and can be adapted as these needs change. Programs that emerge from community-park dialogue and involve multiple partnerships secure stronger local support and are better able to deliver services that will be used by local groups. Park-community interaction better equips programs to address barriers to visitation and, for education programs, to help meet school standards. This process of community dialogue strengthens relationships and relies on staff involvement with the local community.

Building relationships with school leaders at various levels is important to program success. One program developer especially highlighted the necessity of teacher buy-in: “I learned early on [that] if the teachers are not really interested, it’s not going to work.” Teacher support is important in pre-trip preparation, linking with required curriculum, student behavior, and post-trip follow-up. Without a commitment from teachers, students may not be well prepared for field activities and may not connect classroom concepts with on-the-ground experiences.

To be successful, school programs must be monitored and adapted when needed to ensure that they meet state standards and align with the classroom curriculum. One program staffer spoke to the essential role of teachers in facilitating such changes:

“We have to adjust and include materials that are useful for teachers [and that address standards]...Most teachers are really good about helping us...If not, the program wouldn’t be as good as it is and it wouldn’t have lasted.”

With time and effective communication, these programs have developed in ways that meet community needs, but this would not have been possible without the commitment from all parties to build a solid relationship. Through this process of working with schools and community partners, the two parks are able to enhance community involvement and ensure program longevity.

Table 5.4. Working with schools and community groups.

Initial Components	Early Impacts	Later Impacts	Long-Term Outcomes
Partnerships with diverse school and community organizations Programs that are collaboratively developed	Park and partners together identify community needs and how best to deliver services	Programs directly meet community needs Relationships with community are strengthened	Staff involvement with local communities Program sustainability Effective communication and use of media

E. Provide Benefits to Communities and the NPS through Community Service

Community service builds park-community relationships and provides benefits to youth participants. One program staffer commented, “With our program [of] planting native shrubs, the youth are making a contribution to the park. They’re learning about biodiversity and [concerns] with non-native plants...By participating in the program, they are giving back to the park. And they feel like, hey, I’m doing something for these mountains or for this climate.” A former program participant said, “With the jobs they [provided to us]...I felt like I was really doing something—I personally felt important. They didn’t give us uniforms, [but] we got a couple of shirts [that] said ‘volunteer’ and I felt important for doing that work every day.”

Community service projects provide participants with a general appreciation of stewardship and a personal sense of ownership toward park and community resources. One program staffer spoke about introducing these ideas: “Kids [would] go out there and feel an attraction to the resource and [feel] good about it. They know that this is a public space and it requires everybody to speak up and care about it...That is part of our conversation [with them].”

When youth participants connect with park resources, the park is also better placed to reach the larger community. Engaging youth provides an introduction to the park and its programs for other family or community members. One interviewee said, “Once the students are hooked, they can hook their parents...Also, they can hook other students, and their families can encourage other families to be involved. For tribal communities the family can be the most important community; they have to be involved and feel confident in sending their kids to the program...and we get siblings and cousins.”

Table 5.5. Providing benefits to communities and the NPS through community service.

Through the process of community service and giving back, the two parks encourage staff involvement with local communities. At the same time, the relationship-building that is at the heart of community service contributes to a welcoming NPS climate and to program sustainability.

Initial Components	Early Impacts	Later Impacts	Long-Term Outcomes
Programs with a community-wide service aspect and which benefit both the community and the NPS	Participants receive hands-on experience Participants gain a sense of pride and accomplishment in meeting park and community needs	Programs foster a sense of stewardship Park-community relationships are strengthened	Staff involvement with local communities Supportive NPS climate Program sustainability

A welcome banner encourages youth participating in Anahuak Outdoors and their families to visit Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Credit: Mountain Recreation and Conservation Authority.

F. Recruit New Park and Community Stewards

Whether or not a program is designed to focus specifically on career exploration, getting hands-on experience and interacting with different park staff introduces youth participants to the range of job opportunities with the NPS. Both Santa Monica Mountains and Boston Harbor Islands assist in placing students in internships or jobs that best suit their interests. One interviewee said, “I like programs that open up students to lots of different jobs and career opportunities. When [youth] get to see those things, it makes the program really successful...You can [even pursue an unrelated



career] and still be a steward [of] the park—you know, have an environmental ethic.” A youth participant spoke about the unique opportunity to see behind-the-scenes park management: “When you [are a visitor] to a park, you don’t get to see everything that... actually goes in to make the park what [it] is, so it’s nice to be...a part of it.”

Mentoring is important in helping youth identify their areas of interest and potential career paths. One youth participant said, “If you’re interested in things other than natural resources, they [connect you] with people who may be involved in things that you’re more interested in.” A staff member spoke about a particular youth’s interest in wanting to be an accountant. “I thought, okay, we’re going to work on that. It’s not one of the usual things we talk about in the Park Service, but we need that support. So let’s see if [we can find] something for you.”

Exposure to NPS career paths and the staff’s ability to help steer youth into opportunities that dovetail with their interests and talents both help to foster a desire to work in the NPS or to explore more volunteer options. A program staffer described this aspect of mentoring: “I have always looked at my job as...try[ing] to engage them in any way, so I think it’s good if we try things outside of just science, [such as] media production and outdoor recreation. We constantly try to engage them in several ways... Once that happens they are usually interested in a job or further volunteer opportunity.” A youth participant said, “I knew that I had a knack for [interpretation]. I would talk to everybody with this easy flow. I would just connect with people and connect them with the resource...And [a program staffer] told me, ‘You know what? You have a knack for this. Why don’t you try this out?’ And that’s how I got the position...as an interpretive ranger and it worked out fine.” Programs that provide for such youth-staff interactions and that educate about career options ultimately address workforce diversity and enhance communication and the NPS climate.

These kids go into the program not knowing what a national park is. They finish the program not only knowing what a national park is, but having visited a few of them, feeling like they belong in [this] park, and getting excited about [visiting] other national parks.

Table 5.6. Recruiting new park and community stewards.

Initial Components	Early Impacts	Later Impacts	Long-Term Outcomes
Career programs that expose participants to various aspects of park management and potential jobs Opportunities for hands-on experience and mentorship across park divisions	Program staff mentoring helps participants identify their interests and talents Program has the capacity to place participants in positions of interest or assist with placement at other sites	Participants are knowledgeable about career options and pathways to full-time employment Participants have a desire to work for the NPS	Diverse workforce Supportive NPS climate Effective communication and use of media

Table 5.7. Evolution of the six essential processes at Boston Harbor Islands and Santa Monica Mountains.

Processes	Initial Components	Early Impacts	Later Impacts	Long-Term Outcomes
Develop awareness and knowledge of local culture and diversity	Staff who are well versed in the local culture Diverse staff who can speak the same language as the community	Participants feel comfortable with staff and welcome in the park or program setting Local community feels comfortable with program staff	Participants are more willing to interact with staff beyond the ones they know Program staff are better able to communicate with local communities Park-community relationships are strengthened Programs are better able to meet community needs and address barriers to visitation	Staff involvement with local communities Effective communication and use of media Program sustainability Supportive NPS climate Inclusive interpretation and stories
Build a skilled staff	Staff and partners skilled in youth and leadership development Diverse staff who reflect the local community and work directly with participants	Participants feel comfortable and connected with staff Staff mentor participants during the program and their daily lives	Welcoming environment is created Deep relationships develop between participants, staff, and organizations	Program sustainability Supportive NPS climate Staff involvement with local communities Effective communication and use of media
Create a supportive leadership environment	Authorizing environment that supports diversity and engagement efforts	Program staff are able to experiment with program design and delivery Program staff have flexibility when implementing programs	Programs are adapted to serve communities Staff are able to adapt programs in response to opportunities and challenges	Supportive NPS climate Program sustainability
Work with schools and community groups	Partnerships with diverse school and community organizations Programs that are collaboratively developed	Parks and partners together identify community needs and how best to deliver services	Programs directly meet community needs Relationships with local community are strengthened	Staff involvement with local communities Program sustainability Effective communication and use of media
Provide benefits to communities and the NPS through community service	Programs with a community-wide service aspect and which benefit both the community and the NPS	Participants receive hands-on experience Participants gain a sense of pride and accomplishment in meeting park and community needs	Programs foster a sense of stewardship Park-community relationships are strengthened	Staff involvement with local communities Supportive NPS climate Program sustainability
Recruit new park and community stewards	Career programs that expose participants to various aspects of park management and potential jobs Opportunities for hands-on experience and mentorship across park divisions	Program staff mentoring helps participants identify their interests and talents Program has the capacity to place participants in positions of interest or assist with placement at other sites	Participants are knowledgeable about career options and pathways to full-time employment Participants have a desire to work for the NPS	Diverse workforce Supportive NPS climate Effective communication and use of media

Chapter 6

Closing Thoughts

The research reported here indicates that the closely related goals of enhancing diversity and maintaining the relevancy of national parks are complex and require a thoughtful, comprehensive approach. The findings identify important steps that can be taken to better engage diverse communities in national parks. Although the program successes at Boston Harbor Islands and Santa Monica Mountains do not provide a road map for deep engagement, they can help guide other parks and their community partners. Achieving deep engagement is a long-term commitment requiring openness, sensitivity to the needs and values of others, curiosity, willingness to listen, intentionality in building relationships, and, above all, perseverance.

The model of deep engagement presented in this report—the six essential processes that interact to achieve long-term outcomes—depends on synergistic interaction. Consequently, attention to one or two processes alone will not necessarily lead to success. Instead, all of the essential processes must be considered and, over time, integrated into the program. Together with the readiness assessment in chapter 2, the model provides guidance for program design, but the characteristics and specific needs of each park, its partners, and the local community will shape the site-specific application.

Sharing lessons learned—one of the goals of this research project—is an important step in improving engagement practice across the NPS. Ultimately, leveraging these lessons into a long-term commitment to deep engagement can contribute to a future National Park Service that reflects the diversity of American society and a national park system that is relevant and provides benefits to all Americans.

Boston youth, helped by an NPS ranger, practice scientific methods using quadrats in the intertidal zone while participating in Summer Connections, the summer school of the Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center.



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Appendix A

FINDINGS: Emerging Principles for Engaging New Audiences

For readers interested in the relevant literature, this chapter presents additional background on emerging principles for engaging new audiences and building new constituencies. This overview was developed from recent studies that explored key ingredients associated with successful youth engagement programs initiated by national parks and their community partners,¹⁸ as well as other well-documented sources from the social science¹⁹ and practitioner literature.²⁰ This topic area is growing rapidly, and the principles offered below will continue to evolve with further study.

1. Successful programs tend to be comprehensive, responsive, flexible, and persevering.

Drawing on nearly 20 years of research on community-based programs, author Lisbeth Schorr reports that successful programs tend to

- adopt comprehensive and long-term strategies;
- empower staff with enough discretion to be able to provide participants with what they need when they need it;
- be flexible enough to provide more than a single strand of service or support;
- persevere despite slow or unsteady progress.²¹

2. Innovations in program development tend to emerge “from the ground up” through dialogue and collaboration among partner organizations.

A growing body of social science and practitioner literature has documented the benefits of collaborative program development by organizations that share interests.²² Intentional yet creative dialogue among partners can promote new and innovative programs in ways that none of the participating organizations could develop independently. This underscores the importance of developing and utilizing networks of diverse partners in strategic ways.²³

3. Community-based programs tend to be most effective when they are designed and implemented in ways that consider participants within their family and community contexts.

Michael Quinn Patton reports that the most important factor influencing success is the degree of complication that participants must deal with in their lives outside the program.²⁴ Severe and excessively demanding external circumstances can overwhelm participants' ability to take part and truly engage in community-based programs. This notion is echoed by Lisbeth Schorr and emphasizes the importance of understanding the context within which participants experience the program.²⁵

4. Programs that respond to specific barriers to participation by new and diverse audiences are more likely to be successful.

A growing body of social science research has documented barriers to participation in national parks by culturally diverse groups.²⁶ These barriers tend to be context-specific. As a result, program managers, staff, and partners must understand the specific obstacles within participants' contexts and design programs to effectively overcome them.

5. Youth engagement programs can serve as an effective strategy for reaching new and diverse audiences.

A series of recent evaluation studies has explored and synthesized key ingredients associated with effective engagement of youth of color in programming for public lands and sustainability.²⁷ Practitioner literature also emphasizes these same points.²⁸ These studies found that youth programs are most likely to succeed in attracting youth of color when they

- offer authentic challenges that affect the lives, environments, and communities of program participants;
- ensure a diversity of participants and perspectives;
- empower youth to experiment, succeed, and grow;
- provide program participants with opportunities for critical reflection;
- employ a multi-year approach to engagement that provides for ongoing participation and supports the growth and development of program participants.

6. Community engagement programs tend to be most effective when program staff acquire and use certain skills.

Several studies have explored the skills associated with successful community-based program development and delivery; this research is reinforced in practitioner literature.²⁹ In specific instances, the ability of staff to serve as “mentors” to participants emerged as an essential skill. In addition, successful community-based programs often exist in dynamic and unpredictable environments—situations that require staff to apply network-building, facilitation, communication, collaboration, and negotiation skills with a host of partners in a variety of circumstances.

Appendix B Further Reading

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Notes

- 1 The research report (Rebecca Stanfield McCown, *Evaluation of National Park Service 21st-Century Relevancy Initiatives: Case Studies Addressing Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the National Park Service*), is available by request at stewardship@nps.gov.
- 2 From “Some of My Core Assumptions about Leadership,” prepared by Margaret Wheatley for the National Park System Advisory Board leadership retreat, September 2010.
- 3 The Visitor Services Project, an ongoing research project of the NPS Social Science Program, has conducted more than 165 in-depth studies in 140 NPS units since 1988 (see <http://www.nature.nps.gov/social-science/> and <http://www.psu.uidaho.edu/vsp.htm>). For more on the subject of multicultural use of national parks, see Myron F. Floyd, “Race, Ethnicity, and Use of the National Park System,” *Social Science Research Review* 1, no. 2 (1999); and Myron F. Floyd, “Managing National Parks in a Multicultural Society: Searching for Common Ground.”
- 4 Adapted from Table 13 in Curtis W. Copeland, “The Federal Workforce: Characteristics and Trends,” *Federal Publications*, Paper 551 (2008), http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/key_workplace/551.
- 5 Figures provided by the NPS Office of Workforce Management, Workplace Enrichment Program.
- 6 From remarks at the Northeast Region/National Capital Region Superintendents Conference, October 28, 2010.
- 7 National Parks Second Century Commission, *Advancing the National Park Idea*, page 22.
- 8 For example, see Jennifer Jewiss, Daniel Laven, and Nora Mitchell, *Lessons Learned from the Massachusetts Area Parks Student Career Intake Program (SCIP), Year 1*; and Michael Duffin et al., *Engaging Young Adults in a Sustainable Future*.
- 9 See the NPS web page on partnerships (<http://www.nps.gov/partnerships>), especially the page on success factors (http://www.nps.gov/partnerships/top_ten.htm). See also the principles for civic engagement on pages 29–32 in Jacquelyn L. Tuxill, Nora J. Mitchell, and Delia Clark, *Stronger Together: A Manual on the Principles and Practices of Civic Engagement*.
- 10 From Rebecca Stanfield McCown, *Evaluation of National Park Service 21st-Century Initiatives*, and based on discussions during an August 2010 workshop with staff from Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area.
- 11 See section 2 for more discussion of the research approach and findings.
- 12 For more information, see Rebecca Stanfield McCown, *Evaluation of National Park Service 21st-Century Relevancy Initiatives*.
- 13 Floyd, “Managing National Parks in a Multicultural Society”; Frederick Solop, Kristi Hagen, and David Ostergren, *Ethnic and Racial Diversity of National Park System Visitors and Non-Visitors Technical Report*; Paul Gobster, “Managing Urban Parks for a Racially and Ethnically Diverse Clientele,” *Leisure Sciences* 24, no. 2 (2002); and Kimberly Shinew and Myron F. Floyd, “Racial Inequality and Constraints to Leisure in the Post-Civil Rights Era: Toward an Alternative Framework,” in Edgar Lionel Jackson, ed., *Constraints to Leisure* (State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc., 2005), 35–22.
- 14 For more details on these programs, go to www.nps.gov/boha and search by program name.
- 15 For more details on these programs, email samo_education@nps.gov.
- 16 This quote and all others unattributed in this report are taken from the transcripts of interviews conducted as part of the research project; names have been removed to protect confidentiality.
- 17 Deborah Chavez, “Invite, Include, Involve! Racial Groups, Ethnic Groups, and Leisure,” in Maria T. Allison and Ingrid E. Schneider, *Diversity and the Recreation Profession: Organizational Perspectives* (State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc., 2000).
- 18 Duffin et al., *Engaging Young Adults*; and Jewiss, Laven, and Mitchell, *Lessons Learned*.
- 19 Julia M. Wondolleck and Steven L. Yaffee, *Making Collaboration Work: Lessons from Innovation in Natural Resource Management* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2009).

- 20 Tuxill, Mitchell, and Clark, *Stronger Together*; also Jacquelyn L. Tuxill, Nora Mitchell, and Jessica Brown, eds., *Collaboration and Conservation: Lessons Learned from National Park Service Partnership Areas in the Western United States* (Woodstock VT: Conservation Study Institute, 2004), <http://www.nps.gov/csi/pdf/westernCollaboration.pdf>.
- 21 Lisbeth B. Schorr, *Common Purpose*.
- 22 Raul Lejano, *Frameworks for Policy Analysis: Merging Text and Context* (London: Routledge, 2006); Jean Hillier and Joris Van Wezemae, "Opening Up What May Yet Come: Performing Civic Engagement in a Complex World," in Kaifeng Yang and Erik Bergrud, eds., *Civic Engagement in a Network Society* (Charlotte, North Carolina: Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2008), 149–185; and Maarten A. Hajer and Hendrik Wagenaar, eds., *Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- 23 Wondolleck and Yaffee (see note 19 above); Tuxill, Mitchell, and Clark, *Stronger Together*; and Tuxill, Mitchell, and Brown, eds., *Collaboration and Conservation* (see note 20 above).
- 24 Michael Quinn Patton made these observations during a presentation, "Evaluation for Dynamically Complex Contexts," at the 2009 American Evaluation Association Conference, Orlando, FL, November 13, 2009.
- 25 Schorr, *Common Purpose*.
- 26 Robert E. Manning, *Studies in Outdoor Recreation: Search and Research for Satisfaction*, 3rd ed. (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2010).
- 27 Duffin et al., *Engaging Young Adults*; and Jewiss, Laven, and Mitchell, *Lessons Learned*.
- 28 Tuxill, Mitchell, and Clark, *Stronger Together*.
- 29 Jewiss, Laven, and Mitchell, *Lessons Learned*; Wondolleck and Yaffee (see note 19 above); Tuxill, Mitchell, and Clark, *Stronger Together*; and Schorr, *Common Purpose*.

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