

2016

National Park Service  
CENTENNIAL

# Urban Agenda

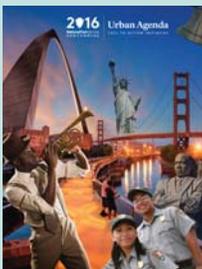
CALL TO ACTION INITIATIVE



# Urban Matters: The Call to [Urban] Action

MARCH 2015

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## ON THE COVER

The imagery on the cover is a collage of iconic images of urban national parks and programs – the industrial backdrop of the “new” Lowell demonstrates the power of preservation and relevancy; the New Orleans Jazz trumpeter suggesting a clarion call that urban matters; the MLK Memorial as a beacon of hope; millennial urban rangers recognizing the next generations of stewards; the Gateway Arch as a symbol for pioneering efforts and innovation; Lady Liberty as a symbol for inclusion and strength; the Liberty Bell ringing from above reminds us of our liberties for all; and the Golden Gate Bridge acts as a connector of urban landscapes to places of beauty and nature.



# Foreword

The father of American landscape architecture, Frederick Law Olmsted, and a key contributor to the establishment of the National Park System, said of urban parks:

*It is one great purpose of the Park to supply to the hundreds of thousands of tired workers, who have no opportunity to spend their summers in the country, a specimen of God's handiwork that shall be to them, inexpensively, what a month or two in the White Mountains or the Adirondacks is, at great cost, to those in easier circumstances.*

Olmsted understood the relevance of urban parks to all city residents, especially those who may not be able to access the more distant park lands like Yellowstone, Yosemite, and the Grand Canyon, the kind of places for which the National Park Service (NPS) is well known. We are less known for our work in the urban space and therefore are less relevant to the lives of an increasingly urban America. The arch at the entrance of Yellowstone states, "For the Benefit and Enjoyment of the People" and those who visit certainly benefit and enjoy this natural wonder. But those who live near Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco benefit and enjoy that national park every day, as it is an integral part of their urban life.

Urban environments present a higher density and more diverse population, lands that often have past industrial or disturbance legacies, and a complex set of overlapping jurisdictions. These challenge

the NPS to look for new models, policies and approaches beyond the traditional experiences born of the large western landscapes. As the NPS looks to its second century of stewardship and public engagement, some of the greatest innovations are now occurring in urban spaces. The NPS, through its many programs and parks, has much to offer the urban dweller: a sense of place, an escape from cubicle confines, recognition that everyone's history is important, a restored and accessible waterfront, and a threshold experience to a greater outdoors.

It is time that the NPS strategically organize its many urban parks and programs towards building relevancy for all Americans, to connect with their lives where they live, rather than only where some may spend their vacation. Extraordinary innovation is already out there, with mayors and city leaders, businesses and NGOs all investing in new parks, new park designs, and new ways to engage communities in creating healthy and livable cities. This is an exciting time for the NPS to join in this national movement, to offer our assistance and active participation, to listen to new perspectives and help build communities across the urban landscape. There are pioneers within the National Park Service and many partners pushing us forward to embrace our urban mission as a critical component of our second century. I invite you to engage in this Agenda for the benefit of the National Park Service and especially for the benefit of the people.

*Jonathan B. Jarvis, Director*



Historic University  
New York



# Introduction

*Why do urban environments matter to the National Park Service?* In many ways, the environmental, economic and social well-being of the nation hinges on the vitality and prosperity of its cities. Cities are dynamic cultural and information hubs constantly driving new ideas, trends and innovation out across the nation. They have enormous influence on shaping the lifestyles, preferences and values of new generations of Americans.

Since the creation of New York City's Central Park in the mid-19th century, urban parks have been essential cornerstones to building and maintaining healthier and more livable cities and communities.

The National Park Service has been part of a larger urban parks movement from the earliest days of the agency's founding in 1916. Starting with the nation's capital city in the early 1930s, Congress has gradually expanded the urban footprint of the National Park Service by authorizing more programs to serve urban communities and establish units of the national park system in 40 of the country's 50 most populated metropolitan areas.

Not only are urban national parks and programs an essential component to the social fabric of a city, but they, as never before, represent an essential component of the national park system itself. Urban national parks are particularly well positioned as places where young people, many from diverse and often underserved communities, can experience

close-to-home outdoor recreation and nature; arts, culture and history; and perhaps most importantly, gain some sense of confidence and encouragement about their own future.

While the National Park Service Urban Agenda is focused on the work of the NPS in metropolitan areas, ultimately the relevancy and sustainability of every national park can be strengthened by this work. It reaches beyond city limits, seeking to strengthen the intersection between urban populations and more remote national parks. The Agenda challenges national parks and programs operating in both cities and more distant locations to creatively rethink how we can connect to the 80% of Americans residing in urban areas. It is critical to ensure that all national parks, both urban and rural, are accessible, relevant, and meaningful to urban audiences.

The NPS Urban Agenda contains a number of specific strategies, but most importantly it puts forth a way of working that is more intentional, collaborative and ultimately more sustainable. The Agenda recommends an unprecedented strategic alignment of parks, programs and partners—a mobilization and coordination of all NPS resources. Success is dependent on keeping focused, improving lateral communication, messaging and setting shared objectives and priorities.

This Agenda is for everyone!

## CRAFTING THE URBAN AGENDA

This Urban Agenda is derived from the voices of many National Park Service (NPS) professionals and partners across the nation with deep passion for and experience in engaging with urban America. These voices are represented in this living document and each of us has an opportunity to put these principles into practice in our respective parks, cities, and programs. The principles and priorities of the Agenda originate from those who will utilize it to strengthen the urban parks and communities they serve.

The genesis for the Urban Agenda was in 2012 when a small group of NPS leaders met as a caucus at the City Parks Alliance conference in New York City. Together, these leaders identified the foundational elements of the NPS Urban Agenda. That initial group of 39 went on to enlist over 350 people from within and outside NPS, representing almost every state and over 40 park units, to help create the NPS Urban Agenda. This process relied upon highly intentional actions to create channels of connection between urban practitioners. It included multiple modes of communication (websites, face-to-face, webinar, conference call, and social media) and facilitated discussions on key urban topics, beginning with those identified at the initial NPS urban caucus.

This Agenda is just the beginning. Continuing to exchange experience and broaden understanding of the full NPS portfolio across departments will help to move the Agenda forward, improve decision-making, and enhance problem-solving in times of challenge and change. The team that convened the urban community of practice will continue to provide opportunities to develop skills, curricula, webinars and other opportunities to spread good practice. To activate the Urban Agenda go to: [www.nps.gov/urban](http://www.nps.gov/urban)





## Why Urban Matters

The landscapes and stories of the national park system have evolved and diversified in dramatic and inspiring ways. The work of the NPS now represents American art forms, traverses multiple jurisdictions along water and overland trails, reaches deep into the oceans, extends into urban centers and connects people to places that are expressions of who we are as a nation.

Since the National Park Service was established, the demographics of the U.S. have changed dramatically. In 1916, the nation was 50% urbanized compared to today at over 80%. These demographic changes affect how parks are valued, how they are visited, what kinds of development are appropriate, and who will support the parks. Indisputably, much of the success of the National Park Service in coming years will depend on its ability to diversify and prove its relevancy to new populations. Strengthening the agency's external relationships, diversifying its workforce, and aligning with community-driven agendas that relate to the NPS mission are among the many strategies required to help NPS create relationships with new audiences.

In addition to protecting this NPS legacy, the diverse system of park units and the extensive portfolio of community, cultural, and land conservation assistance programs within the NPS can be leveraged to address challenges cities presently face. While there is still more to uncover about the potential of NPS urban parks and programs, the following graphics take a compelling look at ways the National Park Service is poised to pivot toward an increasingly urban and diverse citizenry.



# OUR CHANGING NATION

Increasingly, the communities where the majority of Americans live are more economically diverse and multicultural. The National Park Service must stay relevant in order to serve them.



Median household income has **decreased 6.6%** since 2000.



**Over 80%** of the nation's population now lives in urban areas, with cities growing faster than suburbs.



**Over half** of all newborns in the U.S. are racially diverse.



Median age is steadily **rising**.

And people of color are already the majority in **California, District of Columbia, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Texas.**



## WE NEED TO KEEP UP

36%

36% of the U.S. population are people of color vs. only 18.6% of the National Park Service workforce.

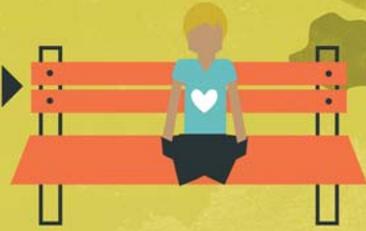


18.6%



Millennials are less likely than previous generations to value spending time outdoors.

Recent visitors to national parks are disproportionately white and non-Hispanic.



## NOW THAT WE KNOW

It is time to join the leading edge of urban park practice, stay relevant to a critical base of supporters, and step into our power to enhance the economic welfare of our nation. Visit [www.urbannps.com](http://www.urbannps.com) to connect with peers and take action.

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Brownstein, Ronald. "The New America." National Journal, March 31, 2011. | City of New York, Department of Parks & Recreation. "Hearing on the Mayor's Fiscal 2013 Preliminary Budget & the Fiscal 2012 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report." March 2012. | Department of the Interior. | Kate, Frances E., and William C. Sullivan. "Disproportion and Violence in the Inner City: Effects of Employment and Mental Fatigue." Environment and Behavior, July 2007, 38, 543-571. | Kate, Frances E., and William C. Sullivan. "Environment and Crime in the Inner-City: Does vegetation reduce crime?" Environment & Behavior, May 2001, 29(3), 343-362. | National Park Conservation Association. | National Park Service Public Law 96-581 Office. | National Park Service. "Comprehensive Survey of the American Public," 2008-2009. | National Park Service FY 2012 Greenbook (Budget). | Trust for Public Land. "City Park Facts Report," 2012. | US Census Bureau.

# URBAN MATTERS

The National Park Service is already more urban-oriented than you might think.

## OUR URBAN PRESENCE

- The National Park Service has sites in 40 out of 50 of the most populous cities in the U.S.**
- Comprising 30% of NPS's operating budget.**
- More than one third of all national park sites are located in metro areas.**
- 36% of all NPS visitation takes place in our urban units.**
- Which are home to 17% of NPS employees.**
- NPS's urban park sites alone generate an estimated \$1.8 billion in labor income and \$4.7 billion in economic output.**
- 26% of the total economic output of National Parks visitation.**

## LEVERAGING NPS RESOURCES

In addition to our urban park sites:

- Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) State and Local Assistance grants have created close-to-home parks, playgrounds, ball fields in over 42,000 communities across the country.**
- Over 40 NPS programs serve urban communities.**
- NPS's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program catalyzes 300+ community-led projects in over 8,000 communities across the country.**
- More than 1,520 park and recreation areas have been touched by Urban Parks and Recreation Recovery money in 43 States, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.**
- The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program, administered by the NPS, has generated over \$69 billion in private investment in historic rehabilitation and created over 2.4 million jobs.**

This presence serves as a great frontier to reach Americans where they live.

## JOIN THE COMMUNITY

Our contributions to urban communities are core to our service, and should be well known and well understood by the American public.

Get involved by visiting [www.urbannps.net](http://www.urbannps.net) and team up to help urban parks step into their power.

Brownstein, Ronald. "The Real America." National Journal, March 21, 2011. | City of New York Department of Parks & Recreation. "Hearing on the Mayor's Fiscal 2013 Preliminary Budget and the Fiscal 2012 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report," March 2012. | Department of the Interior. | Kral, Frances E., and William C. Sullivan. "Aggression and Violence in the Inner City: Effects of Environment via Mental Fatigue." Environment and Behavior, July 2001, 33, 543-571. | Kral, Frances E., and William C. Sullivan. "Environment and crime in the inner city: Does vegetation reduce crime?" Environment & Behavior, May 2001, 33(3), 343-367. | National Park Conservation Association. | National Park Service Public Use Statistics Office. | National Park Service. "Comprehensive Survey of the American Public," 2008-2009. | National Park Service FY 2012 Greenbook (Budget). | Trust for Public Land. "City Park Facts Report," 2012. | US Census Bureau.





A tremendous amount of innovation and political will went into the establishment of what are considered to be early models for how the NPS responded to America's growing urban needs for parks, open space and community revitalization. The traditional park model was twisted and rewired in the 1960s-70s into places like San Francisco's Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Los Angeles' Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, Massachusetts' Lowell National Historical Park and Atlanta's Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area. These are places that required collaboration, persistence, leveraging public and private funds, and creative responses to traditional ways of thinking. In addition to new types of parks, new programs such as Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance called for the NPS to be more accessible to communities.

These models, and others illuminated in the Urban Agenda, continue to evolve and respond to dynamic urban environments and our national priorities. Most importantly, they seek inclusive ways of building relationships that blend National Park Service and community values—approaches that can serve the NPS as a whole. The method for engaging employees and partners in crafting the NPS Urban Agenda has been to look at pioneering actions and innovative examples within the NPS as well as models around the nation that the NPS can emulate. However, the Urban Agenda suggests that we do more to unite parks, programs and partnerships with greater intentionality and demonstrate how a coherent system can work with an urban landscape.

It is clear from the many people who engaged in conversations over the last several years that the NPS is ready to activate an urban agenda to fulfill its mission and obligations to the American people.

## The Call to [Urban] Action

The National Park Service's *Call to Action* commenced new and expanded thinking about ways to better connect urban communities to their heritage, parks, recreational assets, waterways, and neighborhood ecosystems. The NPS Urban Caucus that convened in New York City at the City Parks Alliance meeting in 2012 reinforced a calling for urban parks and programs to “*step into their power.*” The discussions also revealed some of the obstacles facing the NPS. People described the organizational structure as siloed, hierarchical and risk-averse. There was general agreement that greater interdisciplinarity, expanded partnerships and better communications are critical to the agency's ability to address complex issues and present a more coherent system of parks and programs to the public. If the NPS can effectively reach across divisions, breaking down silos and traditional hierarchies, the extensive and diverse portfolio of the NPS can provide unique value-added services and support to urban populations and communities.

### The NPS Urban Agenda sets out three bold principles:

1. **Be Relevant to All Americans**
2. **Activate “ONE NPS”**
3. **Nurture a Culture of Collaboration**



# 1 Be Relevant to All Americans

*Relevancy to All Americans* — a bold challenge for the National Park Service, and not an easy undertaking. It is complex and assumes that the NPS and its partners have the ability and resources to uphold this goal. However, as demonstrated earlier in the Business Case, it is clear that within 30 years more than half the nation will be people of color; about one-third will be Hispanic. This demographic shift is not represented in the NPS workforce, themes interpreted in its parks, or in its visitors.

The late John Hope Franklin, a former chairman of the National Park System Advisory Board, stated in the report, *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century*:

*The public looks upon national parks almost as a metaphor for America itself. But there is another image emerging here, a picture of the National Park Service as a sleeping giant—beloved and*

*respected, yes; but perhaps too cautious, too resistant to change, too reluctant to engage the challenges that must be addressed in the 21st century. The Park Service must ensure that the American story is told faithfully, completely, and accurately. The story is often noble, but sometimes shameful and sad. In an age of growing cultural diversity, the Service must continually ask whether the way in which it tells these stories has meaning for all our citizens.*

Now considered an imperative, the NPS is retooling its strategy to address relevancy, diversity and inclusion (RDI) as a multi-dimensional approach in all its parks and programs. The strategy recognizes the need to address underrepresented people in national parks as well as the importance of workforce diversity and the role of national parks in the social fabric of local communities. While disparities in visitation and employment have been identified before,

commitment needs to be made to address the underlying institutional barriers that go beyond the NPS (i.e. hiring processes). To be inclusive as an agency and further develop long-term and dynamic relationships with local communities, the NPS will require a culturally competent workforce. Greater diversity in the NPS workforce will bring a broader spectrum of perspectives into decision-making.

## Stewards for the Future

Innovation is flourishing within youth programs that reach across all program areas including science, interpretation, natural resources, law enforcement, cultural resources, and administration. Dynamic new programs are emerging that create not just one-time experiences but instead build “ladders of engagement.” Santa Monica Mountains and Boston Harbor Islands national recreation areas have developed programs to engage youth of diverse backgrounds that go beyond short-term outreach activities to provide a continuing pathway for deepening park-community relationships (i.e., service learning experiences in parks and communities, summer work opportunities for young adults, or internships). Collaborating closely with community partners, these parks are building strong connections through long-term, carefully crafted initiatives that complement the more common short-term experiences and result in deeper engagement. These programs are being integrated into the RDI strategy for enhancing workforce diversity and building a growing constituency that supports the NPS mission.

*The following examples exemplify this principle:*

### Bridging the Gap Between Urban and Rural

#### NORTH COAST AND CASCADES NETWORK

Many of our nation’s more rural parks are already taking steps to build meaningful connections to urban populations. The city of Seattle represents an ideal entry point to an array of NPS parks and programs. This metropolitan area is surrounded by eight national parks, all within two to four hours of the city. These national parks are invaluable interfaces between urban and rural. Many Seattle youth are aware of the existence of Mount Rainier because they can see it from the

city, but few knew it was part of a national park or had ever visited any national parks in the Pacific Northwest.

A recent project initiated by the North Coast and Cascades Network (NCCN), a network that includes the eight national parks surrounding Seattle, looks at how these national parks can reach audiences in the Seattle metro area. The project sought to enhance connections between urban youth and national parks and looked to urban youth organizations as potential connectors between youth and the more rural national parks. To determine effective ways to build these connections, the project identified youth organizations that would benefit from programs offered by the region’s national parks. Organizations like the YMCA, nonprofits, and parks and recreation community centers represented valuable partners for the NPS to work side by side as they built a ladder of engagement with urban youth.



### Connecting Urban Youth to Nature

#### CANOEMOBILE

Canoemobile is a national program aimed to meet urban youth where they are, literally and figuratively, with high quality environmental education and outdoor learning experiences in their own backyard.

The Canoemobile event catalyzes federal, state, and local governments, school districts, and non-profit service providers to come together to provide environmental education “where it is least expected”—in locations close to neighborhoods and schools. Local partners continue to provide overnight and multi-day outdoor experiences for urban youth following the event,



making routine efforts to incorporate the families of the students into the relationship building process. Canoemobile works to complete the cycle of engagement by establishing an Outdoor Jobs Council made up of members of the community and leaders in public-private organizations that provide employment and education in environment and outdoor-related jobs. Coordinated by Wilderness Inquiry, Canoemobile has

reached over 7,000 youth in 20 cities including Chicago, Milwaukee, Michigan City, Louisville, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, and New York.

## 21st Century Parks: Change and Continuity

Progressive cities across America are recognizing the importance that parks, open space, historic preservation and protected natural areas have in elevating economic vitality, public health, recreational benefits, educational experiences, and a sense of place. In places where public spaces are scarce, people are reimagining underutilized spaces for new and creative uses. For example, in New York City, the “High Line,” a 1930s elevated freight line, outlived its functionality and became derelict. When it was proposed to be demolished, a group of local activists challenged the proposal and ultimately developed a vision to reclaim the rail line as a public space. Now considered to be one of the great transformations of an urban space in the U.S., the High Line integrated historic preservation and creative design into a remarkable outdoor space. But it was the overarching vision and shared values that made this *adaptive reuse* approach viable, embracing both change and continuity.

As in the case of the High Line, the NPS can point to models that demonstrate the value of integrated multi-objective city/park design. For example, the redesign of the St. Louis waterfront connects the Gateway Arch with the Mississippi River, the east bank in Illinois and the greater St. Louis region; Golden Gate’s Crissy Field connects San Franciscans with their industrial waterfront heritage while restoring and conserving

### PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS LEND SUPPORT

Some examples that are making a difference:

- The National Park Foundation is funding innovation grants and creative programs that directly address park needs and engage new diverse audiences;
- The Student Conservation Association in partnership with the NPS has created the NPS Academy, a program that is targeting minority college students; and developed inner-city programs in places like Detroit, Baltimore and Chicago to provide career exploration in park management and conservation;
- The National Parks Conservation Association – Center for Park Management is working directly with urban parks on spawning innovative ways for civic engagement and design thinking tools that can assist park leaders in building relationships with communities; and
- The Greening Youth Foundation is partnering with the NPS to connect Historically Black Colleges and Universities to provide career exploration and NPS experiences to students.

its natural and ecological values; and, the restored canalways and redeveloped mills of Lowell are all stunning examples of public lands designed for the dual purpose of preservation and increased community use. All of these projects have taken an entrepreneurial approach to refresh existing assets, leverage partnerships to activate these sites with programming, and have depended on community insights to ensure they stay relevant and well used.

For the NPS to achieve greater relevancy is a complex but vital challenge. The NPS is making progress in its quest for greater relevancy, but there is still a long way to go. The National Park System Advisory Board pointed to many occasions when the NPS was not willing to work toward consensus with municipalities and nonprofit organizations on the grounds that it would set a poor precedent elsewhere for the Service. The Advisory Board reported, “this is probably the single most common reason for strife between the NPS and its potential partners in urban areas.” The Urban Agenda calls for a bold approach that adapts traditional park models to urban environments by using inclusive, collaborative methods and structures in order to best serve the communities living around national parks. Success in this area is deeply tied to strengthening a culture of collaboration through outreach, building relationships, and forging equitable, transparent partnerships.

*The following examples exemplify this principle:*

### Reimagining Urban Spaces ST. LOUIS GATEWAY ARCH

Since the completion of the Arch in 1965, local leaders have been discussing ways to better connect the iconic structure to the city it represents. In 2009, a collaborative approach to the park’s General Management Plan was leveraged into an opportunity for NPS to pivot its efforts toward shared community goals, create an added \$367 million dollar impact and generate 4,400 jobs for the region. CityArchRiver 2015—a partnership among local, state and federal government entities, civic organizations, private businesses, and citizens—created a new design for the park and surrounding grounds and is now constructing the project. These plans will not only increase visitation and make new

connections to underserved communities, but will have an economic impact on the overall city.

### National Heritage Areas RIVERS OF STEEL, PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

National Heritage Areas (NHAs) further the mission of the NPS. Distinctively different from national parks, NHAs typically do not own land, do not possess regulatory powers and are required to leverage federal funds. NHAs are lived-in landscapes. Consequently, NHA entities collaborate with communities to determine how to make heritage relevant to local interests and needs.

Located in western Pennsylvania, the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Corridor’s mission integrates conservation, preservation, interpretation, recreation, and economic revitalization, with a community-based focus that emphasizes the importance of the Corridor’s heritage story. This broad mandate, established by Congress in the authorizing legislation, helps to ensure the relevancy of Corridor programs and provides a “big tent” for collaboration and building partnerships. The planning completed at the local level led to support from state and federal agencies to support projects such as rail trails, the development of museums and visitor centers, river landings for community development and recreational boating, a branding and wayfinding system, historic restoration of mills and historic properties, oral history projects and more.





## 2 Activate "One NPS"

*Engaging the Entirety of the National Park Service* – Imagine the collective power the agency would have if the National Park Service truly performed as a “system” of national parks and programs – an integrated conservation, education, economic and recreation strategy for the nation. By proximity, urban parks and programs hold the potential to connect to more Americans—and more underserved Americans—than perhaps any other segment of the National Park System. The Service has a tremendous opportunity to expand people’s understanding of its national parks and program offerings as a whole by reaching into metropolitan regions where most Americans live, work and play.

### An Evolving System of Parks and Programs

As the American landscape and its narrative have evolved, so has the National Park Service. It reflects both our vast natural and cultural heritage, but also the many powerful stories of its people. Today, the NPS is the steward of over 400 diverse park units and more than 40 programs that serve communities across the country.

The lesser known parts of this portfolio include the many programs that expand its conservation reach

into communities and beyond the boundaries of the National Park System. National Park Service programs, like the parks and themes represented in the national park system, are diverse in their purpose, scope, and history. Some programs, such as the Historic American Buildings Survey and Historic American Engineering Record, have long histories as part of the federal historic preservation movement. Others, like the Land and Water Conservation Fund Program, enhance immeasurably the quality of life in local communities. Still others, such as the National Heritage Areas program, empower citizens to protect the natural and cultural heritage of their region.

Working together, the NPS portfolio has the power to:

- **Engage the Next Generation:** The millennial generation is one of the most important stakeholders for the future of the United States. This cohort will be the next generation of advocates and stewards for the NPS. The Department of the Interior’s “Play, Learn, Serve, Work” initiative reflects the continuum of experiences that the NPS seeks as young people develop in their lives and find opportunities in parks, places and programs.

- **Expand Engagement and Support of Communities:** Through a diverse system of park areas and extensive community, cultural resource and lands assistance programs, the National Park Service substantially contributes to the social, health, environmental and economic goals of urban communities.
- **Collaborate through Partnership:** The NPS includes more than two dozen unique community, cultural, and resource assistance programs which are built on collaboration and excel in community partnerships. To achieve success, the NPS needs to focus on collaborating with others, building partnerships, and defining the agency's unique complementary role in the urban arena.
- **Promote Healthy, Active Outdoor Recreation:** The positive connection between levels of physical outdoor activity, and access to parks and public health is now highly documented. Programs such as Healthy Parks Healthy People and Park Prescriptions demonstrate how the NPS can work with national, state, and local parks, as well as healthcare providers, foundations, and advocacy organizations to provide people with equal access to green space and expand the health-related role that parks can have in our society.
- **Build Relevancy and Value:** In order for the NPS to remain relevant to an increasingly diverse American population, it must reach out to urban areas, diverse communities, and youth. Utilizing parks and programs to reach diverse communities, enhance educational opportunities, and foster partnerships and relationships will be critical to fulfilling the mission in the second century of the Service.
- **Provide Leadership in Heritage Conservation and Restoration:** Natural spaces and cultural resources are of high value for education, recreation, economic and ecological benefits. As places to experience nature and act as natural buffers to the effects of climate change, natural spaces in urban areas are increasingly important as the NPS and partners develop management and mitigation

plans. NPS cultural resource programs, working with preservation partners, provide additional opportunities to support preservation of historic resources, economic revitalization, tourism, and sustainability.

*The following examples exemplify this principle:*

### Urban Ecology and Resilience GATEWAY NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

In recent years the National Park Service and the City of New York have created a productive partnership to plan for the future in an era of climate change. The City of New York and the National Parks of New York Harbor are united in recognizing that simply managing the resources within each agency's respective boundaries no longer guarantees the resilience of natural resources. Adaptive management approaches to account for factors beyond park borders such as surrounding development, air quality, water pollution, climate change, and political conditions are needed. Managing the impacts of Hurricane Sandy has already challenged traditional strategies and posed difficult questions such as how much to intervene in habitat creation and the park's responsibility to protect neighboring communities from future weather events. Gateway and local partners increasingly rely on each other to balance community and political agendas with resource protection goals. A new Science and Resilience Institute at Jamaica Bay coordinates local stakeholders in the metro area to share knowledge, planning efforts and progress, and taps global expertise in resilience planning and urban ecology to enrich local efforts.





### Blending Park and Community Values LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

Lowell National Historical Park has found a way to balance park and community values that leverages the full arsenal of NPS programs with local, state, and federal resources. Lowell's moniker, "the City is the Park and the Park is the City," describes the level of collaboration that has been embedded in Lowell since the Park's establishment. Through this partnership, Lowell has attracted more than \$1 billion in private investment and nearly 500 buildings have been restored with technical and/or financial assistance from the National Park Service over the Park's 36-year history. The vast improvement in community pride and self-confidence is

evident in the many initiatives that have revitalized this city—characteristics that were in short supply when the Park was authorized by Congress in 1978. In addition to the preservation and rehabilitation of Lowell's infrastructure, programmatic partnerships in cultural heritage, education, and tourism have also been important to Lowell's economic development. Events co-produced by the Lowell Festival Foundation attract 100,000 – 150,000 people each summer. The award-winning Tsongas Industrial Center and the Center for Lowell History, managed in collaboration with University of Massachusetts Lowell, host some 50,000 students annually and have been essential to the Park's success in historic research and educational outreach.



## 3 Nurture a Culture of Collaboration

*Engaging in a National Movement* – The upcoming NPS Centennial provides a platform to engage in a national movement with local and national leaders that are looking at parks and conservation as a strategy for creating healthy and liveable cities. It will, however, require some internal reflection to envision the systemic changes needed for acting upon the NPS Urban Agenda.

The complex mission of the National Park Service in many ways reflects many of the core values of most American cities – education, economy, environment, culture, and health. Taken in sum, the offerings of national parks and programs can be thought of as critical factors in building a sense of community. Much like that of a city, national parks also have a responsibility to provide infrastructure and resources to be vital while also supporting activities that serve the human spirit. The jurisdictional boundary of a city, or a park, is defined for political and management purposes. Within these boundaries, they connect with a myriad of other jurisdictions and systems that help to define who is responsible for what. But when we get to the edges, boundaries need to find connection and context – e.g., transportation systems, ecological systems (air, water, wildlife, trails, etc.) It is at these intersections

that the need for interdependency becomes apparent. Working in dynamic urban environments and in an era of financial constraint means that no one division, program, park, or the agency itself, has sufficient resources or knowledge to address problems on their own.

A culture of collaboration that fosters mutual respect, strong working relationships, and shared operational goals is required to deploy One NPS successfully. Internally, the NPS will need to support collaborative leadership and experiment with new management structures that break down silos and make full use of the Service's skills, authorities, and programs. Leadership can help facilitate cross-departmental understanding of NPS and its parts, empowering and resourcing staff to reach out for information across the system and with partners that can aid decision-making or leverage resources toward common goals.

Externally, the NPS will need to find its place on a crowded stage of social and economic development actors. Put simply, the National Park Service cannot go it alone, and this is especially true in urban areas. To be successful, the NPS will need to re-tool itself to add value in complex partnerships.



**2,540**  
National Historic Landmarks

**6,800**  
Historic Preservation Fund Grants

**45,939**  
Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) / Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) Sites

**40,400**  
Historic Tax Incentives

**49**  
National Heritage Areas

**90,540**  
National Register of Historic Places

**7,500**  
Rivers & Trails Assistance (RTCA) Projects

**42,000**  
Land & Water Conservation Fund Projects

**1,500**  
Urban Park Recovery Projects



*The following examples exemplify this principle:*

### Blurring Jurisdictions to Serve Common Goals

#### HEALTHY PARKS, HEALTHY PEOPLE

Golden Gate National Recreation Area partners with over forty public health, healthcare, land management, and community organizations in a collaboration called Healthy Parks Healthy People: Bay Area (HPHP Bay Area). Together, these organizations provide a suite of culturally-relevant programs that supports communities with high health needs to access and enjoy parks. HPHP Bay Area programs now take place in 35 parks, serving over 100 new park users in the Bay Area each month. Before taking action, NPS staff attended a series of meetings with pediatricians and public health personnel to better understand the needs of San Francisco's most underserved communities. The NPS also collaborates with other park agencies, such as East Bay Regional Park District and San Francisco Recreation and Parks, to map recreation offerings in the region. A nonprofit partner, the Institute at the Golden Gate, serves as a neutral facilitator to help partners across fields identify a common agenda and continues to coordinate action and collect program data that informs collective decision-making.

### Connecting Urban Residents to Public Lands

#### EL PUEBLO DE LOS ANGELES

El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument is located in one of the nation's most densely populated, diverse, and historic neighborhoods. It is a hub for cultural preservation, with nearby partners including the La Plaza de Cultura y Artes, Avila Adobe, the Chinese American Museum, and America Tropical. El Pueblo is also strategically located for developing public lands engagement, located one half mile from the Los Angeles River, a half mile from Los Angeles State Historic Park, and blocks away from the Los Angeles Conservation Corps office. A new Urban Outreach and Education office located in the historic Quon Building at El Pueblo is a partnership between the National Park Service, California State Parks, the City of Los Angeles, the US Forest Service and the Western National Parks Association. The outreach office serves as an introduction for local urban residents to nearby public lands. It provides a home for traditional programming in non-traditional urban settings, such as a recent Los Angeles River campout; volunteer and service-learning projects; and is a launch point for excursions to lands within Santa Monica Mountains. The outreach office sits directly across from Union Station at the intersection of Los Angeles's public transportation networks.







The NPS will demonstrate how a *coherent system* of national parks, programs and partnerships can be deployed in 8-10 in urban landscapes. Feedback has been received from people at all levels of the agency—from the directorate to superintendents to partners—that parks are not fully aware of what NPS programs are doing just down the street, and vice versa. Partners are confused about who to turn to for assistance. Application of scarce resources is more diffuse, and therefore less effectual than it needs to be. The NPS models will be designed to link national and regional resources and people at local scale. Applying its full portfolio of resources in strategic ways, these models will test opportunities for organizational shifts that promote and promulgate individual and park/program successes that can be shared across the system. It will also allow the Service to more effectively communicate the value of its work and brand at the community level. Model cities will be chosen to reflect the challenges and opportunities the NPS experiences in the following areas:

### 1. A Park Within a City

This is the most obvious case—urban park(s) embedded in a city. Model projects will develop strategies for alignment of park, program and partner resources to serve and pilot in major urban areas. This strategy will target coordinated NPS work in metropolitan areas or other locations where the agency already has significant on-the-ground resources that can be coupled with agency programs and regional partners to significantly contribute

to the quality of life, economy and conservation agendas of urban areas. Pilot efforts would focus on opportunities for community engagement and resource leveraging; joint or cooperative management of parks, sustainable services and facility operations; planning and implementation of access and transportation enhancements, and other ways that both parks and programs can better serve and support common park and community goals.

### 2. Larger Regional Landscape that Includes Urban-Rural Interface

Although many national parks or other designated areas (heritage areas) are not embedded in cities, they are—or could be—serving urban populations. The NPS would explore a new paradigm for the NPS role and engagement in these peripheral parks/areas and encourage and develop a professional cadre of staff community outreach and relations, including: expanding collaboration with local, state or regional entities on coordination of urban roles and agendas, and improving coordination with other Federal entities that complement priorities of the NPS in select urban areas.

### 3. City Without a Physical NPS Presence

The models will develop strategies for the alignment of park programs in coordination with partners to create viable and effective service capacity in urban areas with little or no physical park presence. This strategic approach would target high potential urban areas where park unit presence is minimal but park programs—including technical and financial

assistance from the agency’s community, cultural and historic programs—could be aligned to complement and assist existing regional collaborative or partnership efforts across the country.

## Activating the Urban Models

As the urban models are developed they will employ entrepreneurialism and engagement so that there is agency ownership built into their creation. A backbone support team will provide operational and communication support.

Each model area will employ an “Urban Fellow” to collaborate with park and program leaders and partners. The fellows will act as a broker and facilitator in the park/city, helping to develop and maintain partnerships between the NPS, other agencies, city, and community organizations.

The goal for each model area will be to enhance the NPS role in:

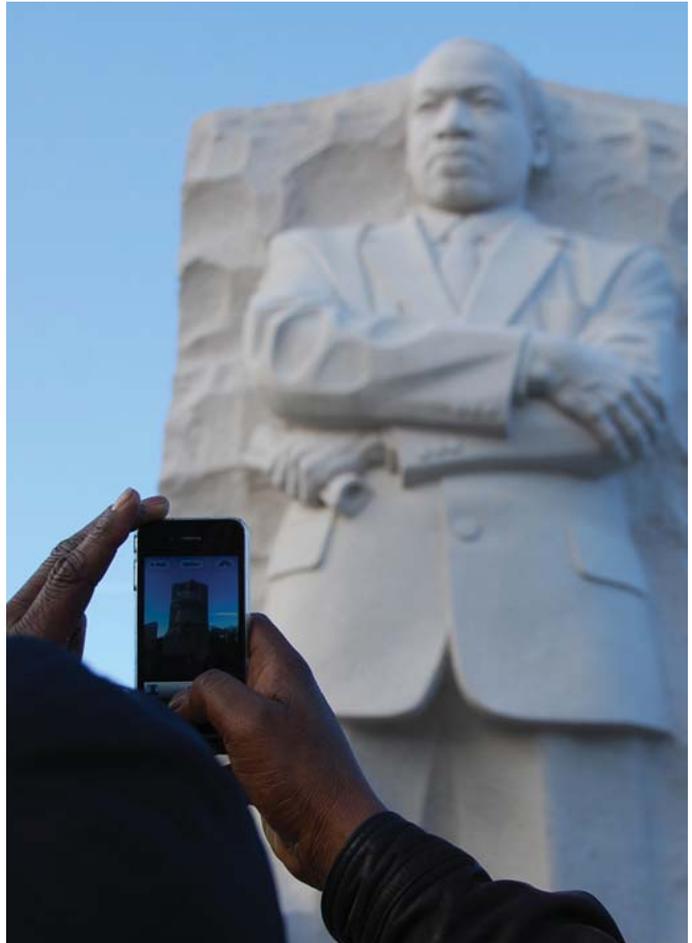
1. Engaging NPS programs in identifying values and strategic interests in their assigned model city through asset mapping processes and other innovative tools to assess opportunities and align resources;
2. Building alliances with federal, state and local agencies that help to identify shared goals and accelerate interagency collaboration and complementary action;
3. Building alliances with local non-profits, educational institutions, foundations, and others to help identify and achieve shared goals;
4. Designing and launching city-specific initiative(s) that leverage the full suite of NPS programmatic and park assets designed to protect resources and improve quality of life for urban residents; and
5. Developing consistent and comparable data resources that define measurable outcomes for evaluating models and sharing results with the national *Urban Matters* community of practice.



The role of the Urban Fellow in the model cities is not meant to be prescriptive but tailored by the parks, programs, and communities in which they will work. Given the unique opportunities, challenges, and landscapes of the model cities, the fellow position is designed to be flexible and address the needs of the model city.

Strengthening collaborative leadership skills across the NPS will help employees to partner with communities, other agencies, and mission-aligned organizations in recognition that “we are all in this together” socially, economically, culturally, and environmentally. Along with opportunities to model best practices in partnership, the urban models are intended to develop a pipeline of talented, 21st century leaders for the NPS who are primed to advance collaborative leadership within the NPS.

But it doesn't stop at the model cities. While the model cities are learning labs—places where the Service and partners can explore what it means and what it takes to truly activate One NPS—it will be through sharing the experiences of everyone working to bring forth the principles of the Agenda that will foster a culture of collaboration across the Service and beyond.







## A Call for Collective Action

*Urban matters to us all* – With over 80% of Americans now living in cities, there has never been a clearer call to strengthen our urban presence and broaden the base of understanding and support for the NPS. Connecting with Americans where they live is in the interest of all units and programs within the National Park System, as its ability to engage with urban residents and build relationships with new audiences will affect how parks are valued and supported. Urban areas also represent the clearest channel for engaging with the next generation of conservationists, preservationists, environmental leaders and stewards of the nation’s cultural heritage.

The NPS Urban Agenda recommends an unprecedented strategic alignment of parks, programs and partnerships to leverage the full portfolio of the NPS resources within urban areas. Collaboration is important everywhere, but the density and social complexity in urban areas make it imperative. Urban practitioners from across the National Park System have provided their experience and insight to illuminate three bold principles: Be Relevant to All Americans – Activate One NPS – and Nurture a Culture of Collaboration. These principles are not confined to urban work. This Agenda calls for modeling their adoption first in urban areas but ultimately across the Service.

The NPS is committed to supporting the principles of the NPS Urban Agenda and to providing resources that will help them take hold across the Service. Urban Fellows in model cities across the U.S. will employ facilitative leadership to increase alignment

within the NPS and the communities it serves. A community of urban practitioners continues to convene and champion key urban topics, including specific strategies and recommendations for enacting the Agenda. A central meeting space is online at [www.nps.gov/urban](http://www.nps.gov/urban). Partners are also encouraged to learn more about the NPS Urban Agenda by joining the online community of practice and by reaching out to local NPS staff.

The NPS Urban Agenda challenges employees across the entirety of its diverse divisions and departments to embrace a fundamentally different way of working. The Agenda invites the NPS to embrace the inherent tensions between preserve and serve, between protect and extend, and to enroll the expertise of other agencies, partners, and community stakeholders to interpret the best-fit solutions that meet shared goals and community needs. The NPS Urban Agenda shines light on innovators who have embraced a culture of shared responsibility and shared success, who have leveraged the many assets of the NPS to tackle complex challenges, and who have demonstrated a community commitment that is genuine and long-term. These bright spots across the nation demonstrate the potential of a more collaborative, facilitative, and entrepreneurial approach to fulfilling the mission of the National Park Service. It is the aim of the Urban Agenda that these practices become the new business as usual.

**To engage in the National Park Service Urban Agenda, go to: [www.nps.gov/urban](http://www.nps.gov/urban)**





## Appendix

The National Park Service Urban Agenda was derived from many voices – NPS professionals, partners, city planners, park enthusiasts and others who saw new and enhanced opportunities for the National Park Service in urban landscapes. To activate the NPS Urban Agenda we encourage your continued involvement by going to [www.nps.gov/urban](http://www.nps.gov/urban).

### **NPS Directorate**

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### **NPS Urban Strategists (2012-2014)**

*Following the 2012 Urban Caucus several urban leaders were identified to design a process for engaging a large number of NPS and partners in a conversation on the National Parks Service in urban environments.*

*Participants included:*

Stan Austin, Regional Director, Southeast Region

Celeste Bernardo, Superintendent, Lowell

Mike Caldwell, Regional Director, Northeast Region

Frank Dean, Superintendent, Golden Gate

Mickey Fearn, former Deputy Director

Bruce Jacobson, Superintendent, Boston Harbor Islands  
(retired)

Paul Labovitz, Superintendent, Indiana Dunes

Robert Ratcliffe, Chief, Conservation & Outdoor Recreation

Patty Wissinger, Superintendent, Chattahoochee River

### Urban Agenda Support Team

*The Stewardship Institute (formerly the Conservation Study Institute) and the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program provided the organizing support for the follow-up to the 2012 Urban Caucus where the Urban Matters Community of Practice was initiated. These conversations became the foundational elements for the Urban Agenda. The team includes both NPS and partner organizations:*

#### NPS Support

Michael Creasey, Director, Stewardship Institute  
 Rebecca Stanfield McCown, Program Manager, Stewardship Institute  
 Robert Ratcliffe, Chief, Conservation & Outdoor Recreation  
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#### NPS Urban Advisors

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#### Partnership Support

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### National Park Service Urban Advisory Board

*The committee will help the National Park Service explore policy and organizational changes to support developing a robust urban agenda. It will offer counsel on strategies to align more effectively its park, tax, and grant and technical assistance programs to serve urban communities, to forge new relationships, and to design and manage a select number of projects in urban areas to pilot these and other approaches to strengthen National Park Service urban connections and enhance the value the National Park Service brings to urban Americans.*

Belinda Faustinos, Chair  
 Loran Fraser, Senior Advisor to NPS Director  
 Carlos Alcazar, President and CEO of Hispanic Communications Network  
 Adrian Benepe, Senior VP/President and Director of City Park Development, The Trust for Public Land  
 Alvin Brown, Mayor, Jacksonville, Florida  
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 Melinda Pruettt-Jones, Executive Director, American Ornithologists' Union  
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 Jennifer Wolch, Dean, College of Environmental Design, UC Berkeley

## Urban Matters Community of Practice Participants

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**Learn more about the NPS Urban Agenda at [www.nps.gov/urban](http://www.nps.gov/urban)**

The Urban Agenda is the product of a collaborative effort that emanated from the NPS Urban Caucus held in New York City in 2012. The National Park Service Stewardship Institute was asked to lead an effort that would engage a broad and diverse segment of the National Park Service and partners in defining the role of the NPS in urban areas and connect with urban residents on the mission of the National Park Service. The Institute is a small team with a large network, advancing learning through cultivating networks of inspired people. This report was developed by the Stewardship Institute in collaboration with the Quebec-Labrador Foundation, Atlantic Center for the Environment, Center for Park Management and the Institute at the Golden Gate.

Learn more about Stewardship Institute by visiting us at [www.nps.gov/stewardshipinstitute](http://www.nps.gov/stewardshipinstitute).

National Park Service

**Stewardship**  
INSTITUTE





DEDICATED TO  
PATTY WISSINGER

The National Park Service Urban Agenda is dedicated to the late Patty Wissinger. Patty was the Superintendent of Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area during the development of the Urban Agenda and played a vital role as an “urban strategist.” Her years of experience as an exemplary national park manager and her passion for youth, diversity and innovation influenced the direction of both the engagement process and the strategies for this report. She was calm, wise and a spirited force in the urban agenda building process. We are very grateful for Patty’s expertise, her network of partners, her vision and her friendship.

