

# *A Call to Action*



## *Action 13: Stop Talking and Listen*

A Toolkit for Engaging Communities  
and  
Fostering Relationships



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National Park System Advisory Board Relevancy Committee

Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park

Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad

and

Organizations and the Public who Participated in Conversations

2013

# Creation of the Toolkit

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National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis selected Cuyahoga Valley National Park to pilot *Call to Action #13: Stop Talking and Listen (C2A #13)*. In 2012, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, in coordination with the National Park System Advisory Board Relevancy Committee, and Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park (Conservancy), worked together to engage underserved audiences in community conversations through a variety of meetings held throughout the park, Cleveland, and Akron.

## Purpose of the Toolkit

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This toolkit is intended to aid parks in engaging in community conversations and to share the successes and lessons learned at Cuyahoga Valley National Park. The steps outlined below are meant to guide parks and their partners through the process of establishing long lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with underserved audiences. It is a framework that can be adapted to meet the needs and the challenges of each individual park.

## Goals

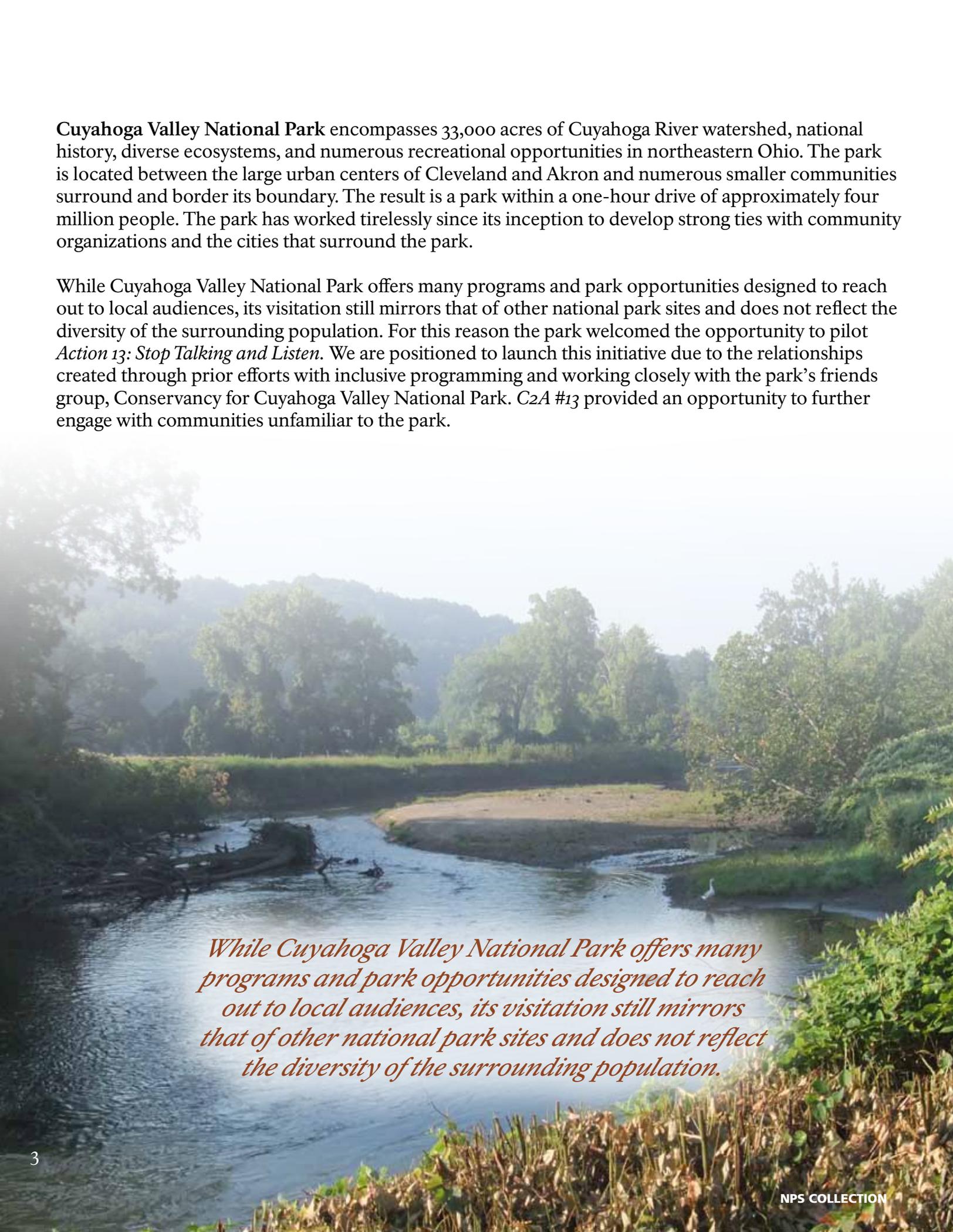
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- Provide a framework for effectively engaging a diverse citizenry in in-depth conversation.
- Create a process for developing long-term relationships and an atmosphere of shared learning.
- Test assumptions and increase understanding about park operations and efforts to meet community needs.
- Establish an open dialogue to learn from the public we are trying to reach.
- Develop work plans with concrete measures to address common and specific themes.
- Share successes and lessons learned with parks throughout the system.



**Cuyahoga Valley National Park** encompasses 33,000 acres of Cuyahoga River watershed, national history, diverse ecosystems, and numerous recreational opportunities in northeastern Ohio. The park is located between the large urban centers of Cleveland and Akron and numerous smaller communities surround and border its boundary. The result is a park within a one-hour drive of approximately four million people. The park has worked tirelessly since its inception to develop strong ties with community organizations and the cities that surround the park.

While Cuyahoga Valley National Park offers many programs and park opportunities designed to reach out to local audiences, its visitation still mirrors that of other national park sites and does not reflect the diversity of the surrounding population. For this reason the park welcomed the opportunity to pilot *Action 13: Stop Talking and Listen*. We are positioned to launch this initiative due to the relationships created through prior efforts with inclusive programming and working closely with the park's friends group, Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park. *C2A #13* provided an opportunity to further engage with communities unfamiliar to the park.



*While Cuyahoga Valley National Park offers many programs and park opportunities designed to reach out to local audiences, its visitation still mirrors that of other national park sites and does not reflect the diversity of the surrounding population.*

# Steps for Engaging Communities and Fostering Relationships

## Step 1: **Planning**

Create a Core Planning Team  
Preliminary Research  
Community Leaders

## Step 2: **Assessment**

Park Staff Survey  
Staff Assessment Meeting  
Community Leader  
Assessment Meeting  
Review

## Step 3: **Community Conversation**

Invitation & Getting  
Word Out  
Community Conversation  
Review

## Step 4: **Continuing Progress**

Processing Information/  
Creating Work Plans  
Continuing the Engagement  
Sharing and Seeking More  
Information



# Step 1: Planning

## What

The park and partners will identify a core planning team who will be responsible for the coordination, logistics, facilitation, and development of work plans for the rest of the process. Available data sources will be used to clarify underserved audiences and identify community leaders who can act as ambassadors. The core planning team engages with community leaders to develop interpersonal relationships and plan an assessment meeting to begin the community conversation.

## How

### Create a Core Planning Team

This team is responsible for carrying out the process. They are the face of the park in all *C2A#13* interactions and have the duty of developing relationships and facilitating community meetings as representatives of the park and its partners.

#### Suggestions:

- Represent multiple disciplines and all levels of the organization.
- Include friends groups, associations, and partner organizations in the process.

### Preliminary Research

#### Review and Research:

- Current demographics of park visitors through a visitor study or best alternative
- Comparable business data in the area such as visitor statistics at local, county, and state parks
- Tourism trends through the local convention and visitor bureaus for their statistical information
- Census information from surrounding cities within the region

#### Identify Resources:

- Utilize potential community partners (i.e. churches, health and wellness organizations, community groups, libraries, etc.).

### The Cuyahoga Experience:

The core planning team included park and partner staff from the Superintendent's office, Chief of Interpretation, several interpretive staff, trail planner, maintenance program assistant, and IT specialist. The Conservancy staff included the CEO, PR & Marketing Director, Education Director, and a board member from Akron who facilitated many of the meetings (internal and external).

## How continued

### Community Leaders

Identify innovators, visionaries, and leaders in the community from the underserved audiences identified in your research. Express the vision behind the project and the park's intention to develop mutually beneficial relationships.

#### Suggestions:

- Be inclusive in your selection including representation from all areas.
- Capitalize on existing relationships (board members; volunteers; current program partners, etc.).
- Identify potential facilitators; it is important to have local facilitators for the community meeting(s) outlined in Step 3.

## Result

The park should come away from the planning step with:

- A park and partner team in place to carry out the remainder of the process
- A list of underserved audiences for potential outreach
- A group of community leaders committed to taking part in the process

### The Cuyahoga Experience:

A visitor use study conducted in 2005 showed that the park's visitation patterns were reflective of the national park service: 97% Caucasian; 52% were in the 36 – 60 age group; 52% were male; 63% have Bachelor's degrees or higher and 91% were from Ohio. In 2011, there were 2.2 million visits.

### The Cuyahoga Experience:

Partners are key! The partnership with the Conservancy was invaluable to the success of the C2A #13. The friends group assisted with the planning and engagement of the community leaders. Additionally, they assisted with supplies, incentives, and hospitality for the various meetings.





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## Step 2: Assessment

### What

The park conducts an assessment of park staff and community leaders to learn about the opinions and perceptions of the park's engagement with surrounding communities.

### How

#### Park Staff Survey

The park conducts an anonymous survey with select park staff to share and discuss results at a staff assessment meeting.

#### Suggestions:

- Utilize a third party survey organization.
- A copy of the survey is available at [www.nps.gov/cuva/parkmgmt/upload/C2A-13-Park-Staff-Survey.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/cuva/parkmgmt/upload/C2A-13-Park-Staff-Survey.pdf)

#### Staff Assessment Meeting

This meeting provides an opportunity to discuss and expand upon the results of the survey, which include issues and concerns raised by park staff. Identify and discuss the similarities and discrepancies in the perceptions held by the park staff with those expressed by community leaders.

#### Suggestions:

- Identify discrepancies in the staff's perception.
- Discuss survey questions that presented varied responses.
- Create an atmosphere comfortable for staff to express views and opinions.

#### The Cuyahoga Experience:

The initial assessment meetings occurred in late January in a park facility with a sampling of park staff who took the survey. This included the following: budget staff, maintenance workers, IT specialist, biologist, botanist, and landscape architect along with the core planning team.

Concerns and issues expressed by park staff:

- The park could benefit from reverse mentoring from younger generations.
- Do we currently possess the skills we need?
- Can the park support increased visitation and demand on resources?
- Are we currently engaging visitors to learn what is relevant to them?
- Park programs could increasingly reflect the diversity of the people and their distinct needs.
- Do we clearly understand the mission of the park?

# How continued

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## Community Leader Assessment Meeting

This meeting develops specific plans for how best to facilitate meetings with local communities and engage them in conversation. The park and partner staff and invited guests participate in open conversation with the community leaders regarding the communities' perceptions and impressions of the park. The park identifies the common themes expressed in this conversation.

### Suggestions:

- Determine an appropriate ratio of park staff to community leaders; limit the number of uniformed staff to preserve a comfortable atmosphere.
- Utilize the results of the internal staff survey and assessment meeting.
- Identify community leaders who would make appropriate facilitators for Step 3.
- Sample questions and facilitator guidelines can be seen at [www.nps.gov/cuva/parkmgmt/upload/C2A-13-Guidelines-and-Questions.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/cuva/parkmgmt/upload/C2A-13-Guidelines-and-Questions.pdf)

## Review

The purpose of this review is to digest the information learned throughout Step 2, clarify what the next steps will be, develop a plan to effectively accomplish those steps, and delegate responsibilities for the community meeting(s).

### Suggestions:

- Start immediately reaching out to the additional contacts provided by the community leaders.
- Consider what encourages and enables communities to participate (transportation, incentives, special ranger programs, recreational opportunities, time of day, etc.).

# Result

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Following this step the park should have:

- An understanding of the perceptions held by park staff and community leaders
- A list of potential themes to be explored during the community meeting(s)
- A comprehensive plan for carrying out the community conversation

*“We need to engage with those “gatekeepers” to the communities that may not be in official capacity. They are the change-makers and influencers in the community.”*

*- Michael Byun, Executive Director, Asia Services in Action  
Member of the Community Engagement Council*

# The Cuyahoga Experience

The following organizations participated in the planning meeting: Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland Clinic, University of Akron, United Way of Summit County and Minority Health Roundtable, Slavic Village Development, Cleveland Metroparks, and the Ohio & Erie Canalway. The meeting focused on how to reach community leaders connected with underserved audiences. The park had limited time to invite community leaders and would benefit with more time to plan and engage with new underrepresented communities. The outcomes of the meeting included the following:

## Groups to invite to community meetings:

- 18 and younger
- Immigrant populations
- Political representatives (mayors, council, etc.)
- Faith-based community leaders
- Senior groups
- All levels of educators (K – College teachers, informal educators, etc.)

## Areas of concern:

- Park's inability to advertise
- Public lack of interest
- More connection to the metro parks compared to national park since it's in their neighborhood
- Lack of existing relationships with underserved audiences
- Make sure that this effort does not get "shelved" and fizzle out

## Needs and concerns of the local communities:

- Health
- Safety
- Life skills
- Education
- Transportation
- Job creation
- Social values
- Conservation awareness



*“We young people need to learn about parks and what they can do for you. It won't be around for our kids if we don't appreciate parks. A world without parks? Where would we be?”*

*- Alexis Jerels, 19, mother of a young toddler, West Akron. Ms. Jerels participated in the Community Conversation at the Boys & Girls Club in Akron.*



## Step 3: Community Conversation

### What

The park and community leaders invite the public to a community conversation. The community conversation is an opportunity to listen to and learn. This will build the foundation on which a mutually beneficial relationship may be fostered. The core planning team and community leaders will facilitate the conversations listening for common themes, challenges, and concerns expressed by attendees. An after action review will allow for processing of information gathered and planning ways to build upon the relationships made.

### How

#### Invitation & Getting the Word Out

Utilize the information gathered from the assessment meetings and collaborate with the respective community leaders to create an appropriate invitation for the public or organization you are trying to reach. The community leaders can also identify the method of distribution for the invitations.

Sample invitations can be seen at [www.nps.gov/cuva/parkmgmt/upload/C2A-Sample-Invitations.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/cuva/parkmgmt/upload/C2A-Sample-Invitations.pdf)

#### The Cuyahoga Experience:

Host organizations and community leaders are best positioned to provide guidance on how to reach the audiences in their communities. They can provide guidance on style, timing; and structure for the meetings.

For example, the host organization suggested that invitations for the Boys & Girls Club be placed in book bags and mailed to neighborhood housing development residents, whereas in Slavic Village the invitations were hand-delivered.

Additionally, host organizations suggested an incentive to encourage attendance at the meetings. The partners offered gift cards to local food outlets and gas stations. This was included on the invitation.



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## How continued

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### Community Conversation

This is an opportunity for the park to hear from the communities: what are their needs, values, and barriers to visiting the park. Identify and gather contact information for meeting attendees who would like to take an active role in working with the park and partners.

### Review

All facilitators and park/partner attendees can share observations, identify common themes, and develop definitive steps for continuing the building process.

#### Suggestions:

- Find and discuss the common themes that were expressed, as well as themes that were specific to respective communities.
- Identify what worked and what could be improved for future meetings.
- Develop potential ways to address each theme and to build upon the idea.

## Outcome

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The park will have the following outcomes to assist them in moving forward:

- A list of common themes and potential ideas on how to address them by multiple communities
- A list of issues/challenges/concerns for specific communities

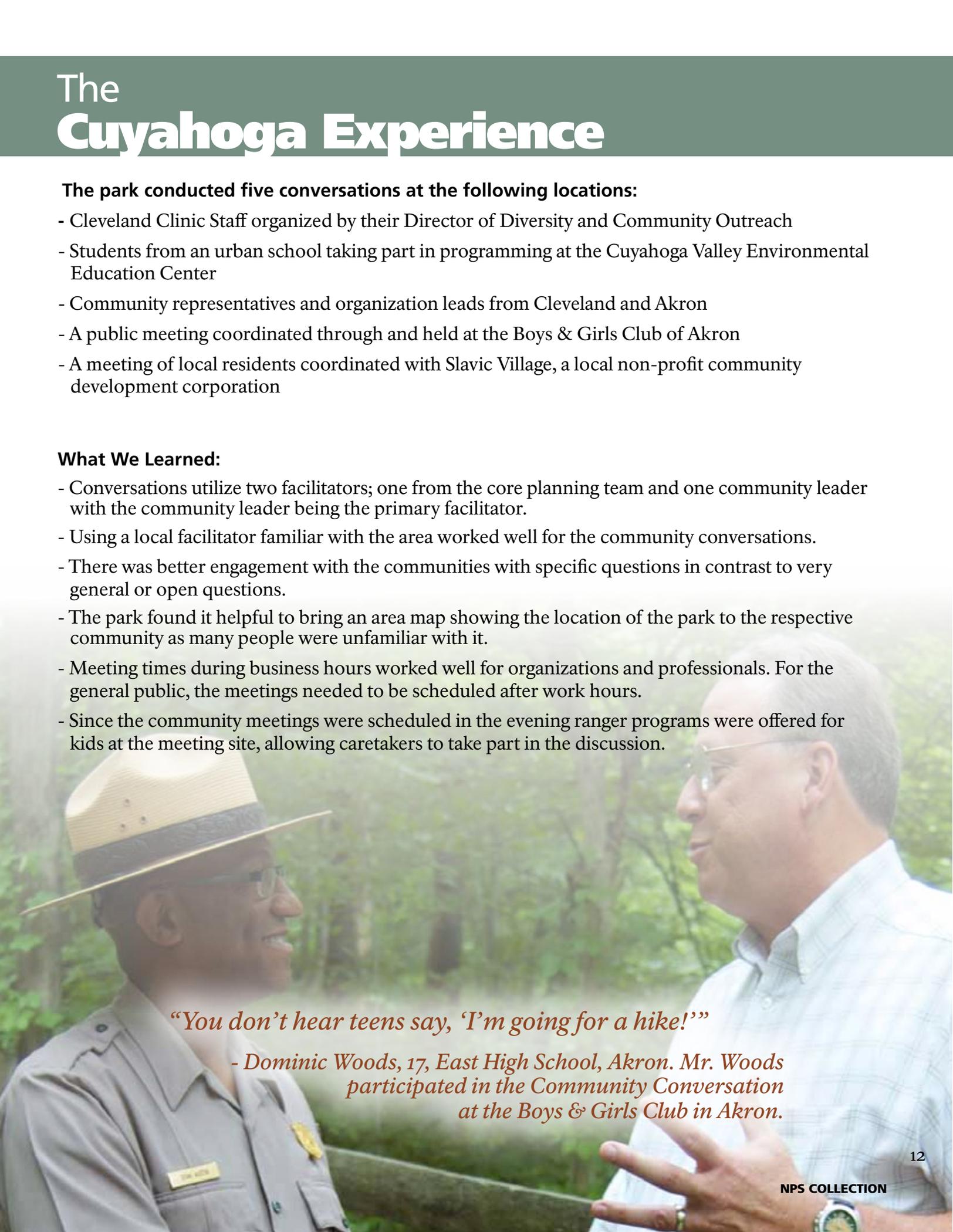
# The Cuyahoga Experience

## The park conducted five conversations at the following locations:

- Cleveland Clinic Staff organized by their Director of Diversity and Community Outreach
- Students from an urban school taking part in programming at the Cuyahoga Valley Environmental Education Center
- Community representatives and organization leads from Cleveland and Akron
- A public meeting coordinated through and held at the Boys & Girls Club of Akron
- A meeting of local residents coordinated with Slavic Village, a local non-profit community development corporation

## What We Learned:

- Conversations utilize two facilitators; one from the core planning team and one community leader with the community leader being the primary facilitator.
- Using a local facilitator familiar with the area worked well for the community conversations.
- There was better engagement with the communities with specific questions in contrast to very general or open questions.
- The park found it helpful to bring an area map showing the location of the park to the respective community as many people were unfamiliar with it.
- Meeting times during business hours worked well for organizations and professionals. For the general public, the meetings needed to be scheduled after work hours.
- Since the community meetings were scheduled in the evening ranger programs were offered for kids at the meeting site, allowing caretakers to take part in the discussion.



*“You don’t hear teens say, ‘I’m going for a hike!’”*

*- Dominic Woods, 17, East High School, Akron. Mr. Woods participated in the Community Conversation at the Boys & Girls Club in Akron.*

# Step 4: Continuing Progress

## What

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This is where the information gathered moves toward action and is the first step in the process of building rapport and fostering the relationships that have begun. The core planning team creates work plans with concrete steps to address common and specific themes. The park and partner team develop ways to continue the conversation, seek more information, and share successes.

## How

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### Processing Information/Creating Work Plans

The core planning team develops work plans with defined timelines and concrete measures to address both the common and specific themes. The park and partner staff continues engagement with community leaders and ambassadors. These efforts may affect all levels of park operations from publications and programs to resource management and administrative practices.

### Continuing the Engagement

Continue the conversation with communities by finding ways for them to be engaged with the park that meets their community needs and abilities.

#### Suggestions:

- Invite the community into the park through joint programming or partnering.
- Create opportunities for the park to take an active role in the underserved communities by attending community events, health fairs, festivals etc.

## How continued

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### Sharing and Seeking More Information

Meeting the challenge of *C2A#13: Stop Talking and Listen* will be an on-going process for the National Park Service. Parks are encouraged to share their successes and lessons learned.

Resources for sharing and additional information can be found at [www.nps.gov/cuva/parkmgmt/2016.htm](http://www.nps.gov/cuva/parkmgmt/2016.htm)

## Result

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At the end of this step the following outcomes are desired:

- Development of work plans that focus on concrete measures to address specific and common themes
- Creation of a group of community representatives to consult with on a regular basis
- Development of mutually beneficial relationships with underserved audiences
- Increasing the relevancy of the park to underserved communities

### The Cuyahoga Experience:

The park and the partner valued the community leader meetings so they developed the Community Engagement Council. The council consists of local representatives who serve as ambassadors to a variety of community groups. Each meeting is held in a different venue within the park to help acquaint participants with a variety of park resources. The key to the success of the meetings has been to have a deep discussion on issues related to awareness of the park, programming, and ways the park can be more responsive to community needs. Proposed goals defined at the meetings include changing the demographics in the next visitor study, improvement of diversity in staff, and creating new programs both in the park and through outreach.



# The Cuyahoga Experience

## Ongoing Community Engagement Efforts

Cuyahoga Valley National Park and its partners have a long history of being involved in outreach activities. Some of these programs have been strengthened by the C2A#13 efforts:

### Launch of a Walk with a Doc and a Ranger

Superintendent Stan Austin formed a relationship with the Cleveland Clinic, one of Cleveland's largest employers, to launch a pilot program *Walk with a Doc and a Ranger* at Cuyahoga Valley National Park. This series was created in response to the C2A#6: *Take a Hike and Call Me in the Morning* but occurred due to the relationships formed with the community engagement with C2A#13 *Stop Talking and Listen*. A monthly morning hike is offered with Richard Kratche, M.D., medical director of Cleveland Clinic Twinsburg Family Health and Surgery Center, and a park ranger for a casual three-to-five mile walk where participants are able to learn more about health issues, improve fitness, and enjoy their national park.

For more information on this program please visit <http://www.nps.gov/cuva/parkmgmt/2016.htm>

### Expansion of *Get Up, Get Out, and Go!* in Cleveland

*Get Up, Get Out & Go!* a long-standing summer urban youth engagement program was expanded to offer recreational and educational programs into Cleveland in 2012. The free and interactive programs are geared to youth ages 11 – 14 years old and their families.

For more information on this program please visit [www.nps.gov/cuva/get-up-get-out-and-go.htm](http://www.nps.gov/cuva/get-up-get-out-and-go.htm)

### Health & Wellness Pilot in Akron

In 2011, the park participated in the Modern Day Mather Hike and learned from health and wellness professionals to connect underserved communities by promoting the health benefits of the park. In the summer of 2012, the park launched a pilot of Healthy Parks Healthy People in Akron. This pilot program provided a park ranger presence at health and wellness, faith-based, and community events in the Akron area in order to bring awareness of the national park as a place for healthy experiences.

For more info on this program please visit [www.nps.gov/cuva/parkmgmt/health-and-wellness.htm](http://www.nps.gov/cuva/parkmgmt/health-and-wellness.htm)

### Urban Youth Volunteer Engagement

The park engaged in an urban youth volunteer engagement initiative in 2011 with the creation of Service-Learning Coordinator position. The program engaged age groups (middle to college age youth) that were underserved by other park programs. The students were engaged in learning and stewardship through invasive plant removal of invasive plants, creating butterfly gardens, building a hoop house, and planting trees. To date this program has engaged with 1547 students and 344 adults in service-learning volunteer projects in the park.

For more information on this program please visit <http://www.nps.gov/cuva/parkmgmt/2016.htm>

# Commitment to Community Engagement

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The park gained insights from the community conversations on outstanding issues related to park operations, programming, and marketing. The park has renewed efforts toward previously identified issues.

## Improve Access to the Park

The lack of public transportation to the park has been a long-standing barrier for members of the local community who rely on mass transit. At this time, the park has renewed discussions with the local mass transit in inner-city Cleveland to bring bus service into the national park.

## Improve Information Materials

One common theme identified at the community conversations was that park publications did not meet the needs of a first-time visitor to a national park. This reinforced feedback the park had received from previous outreach efforts like the Modern Day Mather Hike conducted in 2011. Many felt that a newsletter geared to the first-time visitors with a focus on health and wellness would be an effective outreach tool. With this in mind, park management is moving to develop a park newspaper that will meet the needs of first-time visitors with a health and wellness focus.

## Dispel Perception of Park Being Unsafe

The perception that the national park is not safe was a common theme in the community conversations. Members of the community expressed that they felt safe in their local city and county parks, but commented that lack of familiarity with the national park and its location to their community influenced their perception. The park is taking action by revising marketing materials, creating a first-time visitor newspaper, and having a presence at health events, fairs, and festivals. These efforts are designed to create awareness of the park as well as provide opportunities to identify experiences for the first-time visitor that will meet their needs and abilities.

The park and partner team will work with the community engagement council to resolve additional barriers identified in the community meetings. The issues include: signage, employee diversity, and increasing educational and culturally diverse programming. At the time of the community meetings the park was working on installing wayfinding signs in the park but became aware that additional signage is needed specifically in communities surrounding the park. A committee is currently developing a new wayfinding plan. The park is seeking collaborative partnerships with underserved community organizations, many who participated in the meetings, to develop educational and culturally diverse programming to attract underserved audiences. Additionally, the park will post their vacancy announcements in non-traditional news outlets such as African American and American Indian newspapers and on social media sites to attract under-represented communities.

The park and partner team are committed to continuing the *Action 13: Stop Talking and Listen* through the work of the community engagement council. Through a high level of commitment and follow through, the team is optimistic that Cuyahoga Valley National Park will truly be relevant to a greater diversity of people in the coming years.