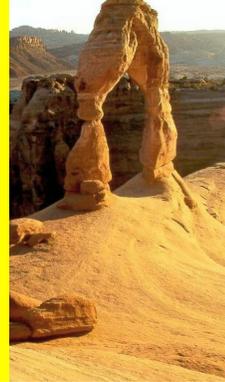


“I hope the day will come when everyone on this planet has the opportunity to experience the universal value of their own lives.

Parks are places, ideas where that can happen.”

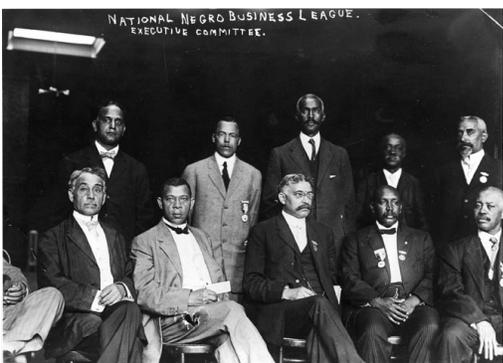


NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION, PROGRAM PLANNING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During 2001, the National Park Foundation undertook a process of self-examination and strategic planning which resulted in a new mission statement and organizational focus. To coincide with the new mission, the grants and programs department proposed and the NPF Board approved four program areas as the primary emphasis for grant making by the department: volunteerism, visitor experience, education, and outreach. In order to more fully understand the substance, logic, theory, and philosophy of each of the new program areas, evaluation and program development experts were brought in to direct an extensive needs assessment of these areas in the National Park Service. The nine-month long needs assessment resulted in a more clarified and agreed upon understanding of the four areas and a measure of whether the program areas made sense and were valid to various stakeholders.

The process involved more than 200 experts internal and external to the National Park Service, representing non-profits and foundations, academic institutions, government agencies, and other organizations representative of and knowledgeable about the four program areas. Under the guidance of an NPF/NPS Advisory Panel, extensive qualitative data was collected from eight focused panels which were conducted over one-day and one-and-a-half day sessions. Data from these panels were transcribed, analyzed, and placed into logic models. Data was also collected from additional NPF and NPS leadership. In addition, the project team researched and amassed resource lists of related organizations, websites, and literature.



Findings suggested the following:

- The “Outreach” program area should be redesigned to focus solely on engaging communities, new audiences, underserved audiences, and new and unlikely partners. The proposed focus on programming outside park boundaries such as websites, traveling trunks, marketing, and distance learning should be eliminated from this program area and instead incorporated into each of the other three programs.
- The program area “Outreach” should be renamed “Community Engagement” to better represent the nature of the redefined program area.
- The data were examined for overarching trends and similarities and five areas of interest were identified: “Create a Welcoming Environment,” “Conduct and Provide Access to Research,” “Integrate Evaluation,” “Create Likely and Unlikely Partnerships,” and “Enrich and Expand the Stories.” These five areas should be of special focus when developing RFPs, working with grantees, managing programs, and evaluating programs.
- While basic program structures were identified and important for developing and implementing programs in all four areas, focusing on the five areas of interest is imperative when trying to expand a program’s audience base by adding underserved and/or minority audiences to traditional participants.
- NPF can serve an important role in the foundation community as a leader in program development and program evaluation by sharing its process of needs assessment and how the findings were utilized for program strategy development, program evaluation framework development, and program RFP development.

