



Collaboration as a Core Value

How Golden Gate NRA Uses Intrapark Collaboration To Meet the Challenges of a Large, Diverse Urban Park

Golden Gate National Recreation Area (NRA) has a long tradition of working collaboratively with a wide network of external partners and internally across divisions and work units. This practice is part of the legacy of former superintendent Brian O'Neill, who led the park from 1986 to 2009 and who understood that parks need to build relationships with surrounding communities. O'Neill's [21 Partnership Factors](#) for external collaboration still serve as a set of best practices for community engagement.

Collaboration still is the *modus operandi* for operations at Golden Gate NRA and the two units, Muir Woods National Monument (NM) and Fort Point National Historic Site (NHS), it jointly manages. Collaboration is so much a part of the park's DNA that collaborative principles are included in the parks' Foundation Documents, Strategic Plan, and General Management Plan.

This case study explores a few of the ways that Golden Gate NRA leverages collaborative approaches internally among park divisions and branches to more effectively meet the NPS mission and create an environment that promotes sharing, optimizes the additive strengths of teams, and inspires creativity.

Complex Challenges

As a large park in an urban area, Golden Gate NRA experiences some unique challenges in addition to the nearly ubiquitous budget and staffing shortages that parks experience.

Golden Gate NRA consists of park lands spread throughout much of the greater San Francisco Bay Area, one of the largest and most diverse metropolitan areas in the United States with more than 9 million residents. The park is equally an international destination and a neighborhood park



Fort Point and the Golden Gate Bridge. Lands managed by Golden Gate NRA are set within a unique mix of urban, suburban, and protected open spaces. The park contains a wealth of diverse natural and cultural resources. Park staff use collaborative techniques to meet management objectives and serve the public and park constituents.

where local community members gather and recreate.

Established in 1972, Golden Gate is a relatively young park. It is also highly complex, with diverse natural, cultural, and recreational resources. The park has undertaken restoration projects that have rehabilitated natural features and landscapes and transformed Crissy Field from a paved lot to a tidal lagoon. The park contains more than 1,400 historic structures, and many buildings are leased or occupied by nonprofit partners, or are used for community art or educational programs.

Many of Golden Gate NRA's challenges are interdisciplinary in nature requiring a range of expertise and roles to address. Staff at Golden Gate NRA use a variety of collaborative strategies including standing up interdivisional teams that allow them to effectively address complex interdisciplinary issues.

"We're our strongest when we're working together—protecting resources and sharing this amazing place with visitors and communities. A side benefit of collaboration is that it makes our work lives so much better. Working in concert with each other boosts morale and everyone has a better experience at work."



Alison Forrestel
Chief, Natural Resources & Science

Collaborative Teams

Golden Gate NRA utilizes both permanent and situational interdisciplinary teams to achieve management goals, including:

- » Employees of the Visitor and Resource Protection and Natural Resources and Science divisions who work together for **Natural Resource Preservation**. Collaborative projects have included sea cave inventories, managing habituated wildlife, and addressing boundary incursions.
- » The interdisciplinary **Social Media Team** is led by the Division of Interpretation's Media Branch. It builds park stewardship and shares resource issue messages by developing content for posts on the park's social media platforms.
- » The Planning and Environmental Programs Division reviews and oversees compliance on approximately 1,000 projects per year. The **Project Review Team** is an interdisciplinary team that comprehensively reviews projects comprehensively evaluate the potential impacts of any proposed project. The regular meetings and the formal structure provided by this review process enables problem-solving, consensus-building, and buy-in.
- » **Geographic Leadership Teams** help the park manage remote complex sites such as Muir Woods, Alcatraz, and Stinson Beach. The Geo Team concept is based on the premise that there should be cross-divisional communication and that field level staff also have important expertise and can contribute in substantial ways to addressing management challenges.

Read the full [case study](#) and [oral history](#) available from the [NPS Data Store](#) to learn more about this collaboration.

The NPS Collaboration Network

The NPS Collaboration Network is a group of dedicated employees who recognize the value of collaboration. To learn more, visit the [Collaborative Leadership](#) pages on the NPS Common Learning Portal or contact [Terri Hogan](mailto:Terri.Hogan@nps.gov), terri_hogan@nps.gov or [Golden Gate NRA](mailto:GoldenGateNRA@nps.gov), goga_info@nps.gov.

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The big take-home message for me is to establish and maintain relationships. Engage each other early. It's always easier to talk about issues ahead of time than to try to try to clean it up afterwards.

David Schifsky, Deputy Superintendent



Muir Woods NM preserves old-growth redwood forest for public inspiration and scientific values. More than one million people visit the 558-acre site each year. Members of the Muir Woods Geo Team provide on-the-ground expertise to headquarters staff, and help manage multiple on-going projects to protect and restore park resources and enhance visitor experience.

Lessons Learned

- » Good communication is at the heart of successful collaboration. Communication can take place via in-person meetings, virtual meetings, phone calls, email, Microsoft Teams, and shared documents. Adapt communication methods to changing circumstances as needed.
- » Relationships are an essential element in all collaborative efforts. Nurture relationships on a regular basis so that collaboration team members are used to working together when challenging situations or incidents occur.
- » Build a culture of collaboration so that working across divisions is an expected part of park operations.
- » Put results and tasks ahead of process in collaborative efforts. Don't go through the motions of having collaborative meetings just for the sake of getting together. Be aware that team members are busy with other responsibilities.
- » A willingness to take risks and engage in the collaborative process is essential. Collaboration also requires that team members are humble enough to work with others to develop new solutions.
- » Using interdivisional teams made up of staff stationed in a district or specific site in a large park is an effective management tool. It ensures good communication at the site between staff members in different divisions and improves communication between headquarters and field staff.
- » Aim to develop a culture where ownership of projects or initiatives is park-based as opposed to that of individual staff members. Fostering an environment where projects belong to the park versus a person intrinsically builds teamwork and fosters additional collaboration, as well as avoids issues related to frequent staff turnover.