

Community Conversations Summary Report

Community Engagement for Inclusive Science Communication

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This report was developed by Kearns & West, under contract for the Department of the Interior's Office of Collaborative Action and Dispute Resolution.

March, 2023

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Grounding

The National Park Service (NPS) has a longstanding interest in the intersection of science and parks. In recent years there has been a growing interest in *how* NPS communicates in these spaces. NPS leaders in science and interpretation recognized the need to listen to the voices and experiences of internal staff and surrounding communities to better understand current realities. As social and environmental justice movements have grown, so has the sense of responsibility to people and planet that the NPS aims to steward. In January 2021 a diverse group of park rangers, interpreters, scientists, and administrators came together to co-create plans to assess NPS' science communication culture and improve its practice. A group of 30 people representing a range of parks, ideas, and experiences met over four days to address these plans.

The objectives of these workshops were to:

- 1) Create a consensus definition of science interpretation and engagement in the NPS
- 2) Draft competencies for science interpretation and engagement
- 3) Identify information NPS needs about audiences, practices, and opportunities in parks

The workshops yielded three primary outcomes:

- 1) The formation of the Science Interpretation Community of Practice (SciInterp CoP). This group of NPS public facing staff meets monthly to share practices and resources related to inclusive science communication;
- 2) An extensive list of knowledge, skills, and abilities for guiding and assessing professional development opportunities for science interpretation; and
- 3) A commitment to hosting listening sessions with communities designed to identify interests and attitudes towards science and parks.

A Note from the Facilitation Team - Pueblo and E.A.S.E.L.

When working towards meaningful change, one of the easiest things to do is to dismiss people's intentions and work, especially when you do not have

insight into their journey or have not contributed to their progress. When project leaders Tim Watkins, Sara Melena, and Carol McBryant approached me about this effort I felt an inner conflict, questioning if NPS as an agency was prepared to listen effectively and to believe the truths communities of color would no doubt share. I questioned if such a large organization with as many moving parts could be sincere in their effort to change. Taking on this work would force me to look at my own relationship with both science and national parks as a member of the “community” they were seeking to engage with. I realized that this effort was indeed sincere and that they had not only worked tirelessly to secure the funding, they were open and willing to learn and grow. My background as a community organizer and my ability to facilitate conversations with safe entry points for people to say what needs to be said and for their words, experiences, and realities to not be dismissed was necessary.

My name is Daniel Aguirre and I am the founder of Pueblo. We help organizations change their culture to be inclusive in practice, not in promise, and we facilitate courageous conversations. One of the ways that Pueblo moves through the world is when a door opens for us, we must hold it open for others, but with intentionality front and center. For example, in addition to my own expertise, this NPS effort would require expertise from a person with high social and emotional awareness and the ability to sort through complicated feelings to get to the heart of a given matter. We always want to ensure that we are not allowing our own biases to go unchecked and that we can care for each other along the way. LeKeisha Harding, Founder of E.A.S.E.L. (Elevating All Social Emotional Learners), was instrumental in this project as a check on my biases. Together, we make up the facilitation team. This report was developed by the facilitation team with meaningful contributions by the communities named in the acknowledgment sections as well as Sunshine Menezes from the University of Rhode Island Metcalf Institute and NPS staff. It captures our process, key learnings, and meaningful actions that this facilitation team as well as communities recommend NPS take.

The Approach

There are four communities to keep in mind throughout the report.

- Project Leaders
 - Tim Watkins, NPS
 - Sara Melena, NPS
 - Carol McBryant, NPS

- Science Interpretation Community of Practice (SciInterp CoP)
 - Over 200 members of NPS park staff from across the nation
- National Organizations and Leaders
 - Justice Outside (National)
 - Hispanic Access Foundation (National)
 - Latino Outdoors (National)
 - 540 West Main (National)
 - American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) (National)
 - Dr. Gillian Bowser from the Bowser/Halliwel Lab (Colorado State University)
- Focal Parks with Adjacent Communities
 - Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado
 - Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Ohio
 - Congaree National Park, South Carolina
 - Everglades National Park, Florida

Phase 1: Internal Alignment (Co-creating Project Objectives)

Having internal alignment is a vital step that allows for confidently connecting with communities, knowing that behind the scenes everyone is on the same page. During this phase of work we focused on alignment between the facilitation team and project leaders, beginning with the basic groundwork to understand:

- the scale and culture of the NPS;
- the questions and priorities project leaders were hoping to address;
- current communication pathways; and
- current intersections between existing external relationships, attitudes towards science, the NPS and efforts related to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access, and Accessibility.

With these insights fully present, we were able to form a strategy that followed overlapping actions. Those actions were:

1. Analyze internal NPS documents to determine where inclusive science communication practices currently exist.
2. Bring the SciInterp CoP into the conversation to inform the community engagement process and conversations. .
3. Co-develop a conversation guide for use with national organizations.

4. Identify and engage with external national organizations and leaders who serve at the intersection of inclusion, equity, and justice, public lands, and science (Phase 2).
5. Based on the conversations with national organizations, identify themes and vocabulary that could serve as a foundation for conversations with national parks and their adjacent communities.
6. Re-engage the SciInterp CoP with an invitation for four parks to participate and contribute to the park adjacent community listening sessions (Phase 3).
7. Meet with select park staff to co-develop the conversation guide and language for inviting communities to the dialog.
8. Schedule and execute listening sessions with park adjacent communities.
9. Develop a summary to be reviewed and approved by participants.
10. Schedule unpacking sessions following each park listening session. The purpose of unpacking is to collectively process the conversation points and ensure we are not distorting their comments with any one individual's bias.
11. Bring all communities from this process together for a greater community conversation where we could share our gratitude, findings, as well as next steps.

Phase 2: Tapping into “Movement”

The alignment efforts continued with the SciInterp CoP and brought their priorities to the table and into the process. The facilitation team gained a better understanding of what NPS staff wanted to learn from communities as well as how they navigate the dynamics between science communicators and park interpreters. NPS, particularly public-facing staff, had begun reconsidering and transforming NPS practices regarding science communication. It was necessary for the facilitation team to recognize *that this movement was already underway at NPS*. The facilitation team aimed to build on that movement, demonstrate examples of promising practices and areas for improvement, and accelerate the adoption of more equitable and inclusive practices. "Leadership" refers to those with decision-making power at all levels of the organization.

It is important to note that all conversations were planned to take place virtually, a format that can complicate the ability to earn and build trust. The mindset that drove our efforts was centered on recognizing that in these courageous conversations we are asking people to be open, honest and more importantly, vulnerable. It was imperative that the facilitation team, project

leaders, and park staff embody those principles as well. In every action we aimed to be open, honest and transparent about this process, our timeline and what we intend to do with the information. We also made it clear that participants would have an opportunity to review and edit our reporting.

Following the SciInterp CoP conversation, we turned our focus toward national organizations and leaders who work with the communities we were aiming to earn the trust of. Project leaders developed a list of organizations they had existing relationships with that served the communities we hoped to hear from. The facilitation team reviewed that list and reached out to approximately 30 organizations and individuals, many of which did not want to participate. This was an indication of how much investment in trust-earning would be required for communities to feel safe enough to engage with this process. While the facilitation team had anticipated this challenge, we learned of a few missteps in the language developed for the invitations. For example, compensation was planned to be part of the initial discussion but the intention was not specifically listed in the invitation. Compensation is not always purely financial. Rather than throw out a random number, we planned to discuss what would work best for each person. Though only one community leader called us out for omitting the possibility of compensation in the invitation, we adjusted our language nonetheless. It was not a matter of *if* we were going to compensate people for their time and expertise, but a matter of *how*. We should always be transparent that compensation will be available and discussed.

The following organizations and leaders joined us in one-on-one dialogs:

- Justice Outside (National)
- Hispanic Access Foundation (HAF) (National)
- Latino Outdoors (National)
- 540 West Main (National)
- American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) (National)
- Dr. Gillian Bowser from the Bowser/Halliwell Lab (Colorado State University)

The conversations touched on themes that were raised by the SciInterp CoP and through the co-development of the conversation guide with project leaders. We focused on an overarching theme of relationships, including relationships with land, parks, science, and equity. Our learnings from these conversations helped to shape, inspire, and inform the development of themes for the next phase of listening with local park adjacent communities.

Phase 3: Park-specific Listening Sessions

With general insights from national organizations, we moved forward with an invitation through the SciInterp CoP for four national parks to host facilitated listening sessions with their communities. Selected parks were actively involved in their communities, had strong science programs, capacity to participate, and represented a range of regions and urban and rural settings. We are grateful for the leadership of the staff from Rocky Mountain National Park, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Congaree National Park, and Everglades National Park.

This phase was designed to collectively explore specific themes, priorities, and questions from public facing staff. Below are some of the themes, motivations and priorities that resulted from conversations:

- Develop strong sustainable partnerships between community members and organizations.
- Identify and name barriers that prevent people from accessing the park and engaging with its resources.
- Earn or restore trust between communities towards their national park
- Update the history and stories being shared at each park to be inclusive, truthful, representative, and accurate.
- Better understand actions the National Park Service can take to create more belonging in parks and science.
- Gain insight into the priorities and concerns of local minority communities.
- Use public land as a source of healing.
- Gain tools for restorative, radical, and sustainable relationship-building from the perspective of community groups.
- Examine outdated communication pathways and align with current and preferred methods.

Based on this feedback, we co-developed a conversation guide that included some park-specific questions as well as themes to explore across all the conversations. In these listening sessions it was important to let the conversation be steered by the community, and as such the guide was not meant to be used as a rigid question and answer tool but serve as an anchor. By letting the conversation be directed by the community toward their priorities and unfold organically, many of the questions and themes were addressed without our prompting. Though the topic of science was not used as the primary entry point to the conversation, it was raised as a topic at some point by the community members, but on their terms and how they felt it was relevant.

The facilitation team asked park staff to develop invitation language that was sincere and in their own voice. Park staff extended invitations to communities they already had relationships with, noting community members were welcome to invite those who should have a seat at the table. The listening sessions were guided by the following principles:

- Effective listening requires willingness to completely put one's personal agenda aside in favor of prioritizing the topics of importance to the community participants.
- We cannot listen to understand if we do not understand how to listen.
- Be prepared to believe everyone's truths, even if they don't align with your understanding or experience.
- Start with who you know and then ask who *they* might know who should be present.
- We are going beyond the common concept of "providing a seat at the table." Participants not only have a seat, they also have a microphone that is turned on and turned up.
- Effective listening is not something that only happens in the moment. Unpacking what you heard with your internal team is a vital practice for fully understanding and offers an opportunity to ensure you are not painting what you heard with the brush of your own biases.

The reading of this report should also be guided by these principles. It is the communities' hope these learnings are taken seriously. Keeping these perspectives in mind, the goal of the report is to provide clear answers and momentous solutions.

How to Use This Report

A few critical items to keep in mind from the facilitation team. All statements in the sections that follow are a summary of community perspectives across a year's worth of dialog with the communities listed in the Approach section of this report. Success for us was not quantity: we do not measure the value or worthiness of a conversation by how many people attended. We were looking for meaningful truths. We did not add a value judgment to what people were saying because, in our opinion, one of the easiest things in the world to do is dismiss work that you did not contribute to or to reject someone's experience because it doesn't reflect your own. We did not create unnecessary binaries, meaning that we did not reduce things to good vs. bad, right vs. wrong, or what-about-isms that could cause us to lose sight of all the valuable nuance in between. We invite you to think about every single person involved in this

effort as authors of this story. Each section starts with a grounding statement to focus on what is included in the section and why.

Vocabulary

The purpose of this section is to provide shared context around participants' use, understanding, and feelings of commonly used terms in this project. These terms do not represent "official definitions" that the NPS may be using internally. For instance, the NPS has a clearly articulated definition set by Congress through the Wilderness Act for the word "wilderness." These terms are used as a tool to better understand the possible gaps and opportunities for improved communication when engaging with communities and individuals with unique experiences - lived, educational, and professional. Language evolves, as does our understanding and relationship with a given word. The words we focused on for this exercise were informed through conversations with national organizations. Communities give us the language they prefer as well as the experiences that matter to them. Some conversations highlighted word associations brought forth by participants. Others had diverging or clarifying perspectives, which have been included below. When relevant to characterizing experiences and word choice, conversations have been synthesized to highlight key takeaways.

- **Wilderness:** participants mostly understand wilderness as any type of land and/or water that has been largely untouched by humans in ways that might disrupt any natural occurrence.
 - There was a direct challenge to this understanding, particularly "largely untouched by humans", expressed by Paola Betchart from 540 West Main: one needs to look at manifest destiny and the removal of Native people through violence and the taking of land while ignoring the way people cared for the land and the land cared for people.
 - Word association expressed by participants: Woods, beautiful, animals, far away, scary, exciting, adventure, exploration, unpredictable, rivers, untouched
- **Nature:** participants understand nature as where land, water, and humans coexist. These spaces are assumed to be all around us and highly accessible for enjoyment, solace, and healing.
 - Word association expressed by participants: Green, not concrete, solace, interactions, everywhere, god, peace, us, beauty, healing

- **Land:** while discussing the NPS and parks, the participants made a distinction between the park and the land and their distinct relationships with each. To them, the park is represented by the name, borders, staff, and regulations. Land is the natural features that existed before there was a park, such as the trees, rivers, lakes, and wildlife.
- **Conservation:** participants understand conservation as an act of protecting land. There is a perception that most mainstream efforts seem to focus on areas further away from humans with a sense that this will allow large areas of land to thrive without human intervention.
 - Word association expressed by participants: necessary, timeless, preserve, wilderness, hard work, educate, protect, misguided
 - Some participants used the term as a synonym for environmental justice, where the goal is to heal and maintain a healthy relationship between people and the land. There is a common view that scientist-led efforts being used on the land exclude everyday people from contributing not just to the solutions, but to the questions we should be asking.
 - Luis Villa from Latino Outdoors believes social justice and conservation efforts are sister movements with common roots of preserving diversity (in human systems and in natural systems).
- **Conservation Science:** while discussing conservation, participants wanted to articulate and distinguish nuances within the broader concept. As such, they started using the term conservation science. They defined this as decisions being made about what is being conserved, how it's being conserved, and for who, rooted in scientific discoveries and processes. Participants were questioning where human experiences and needs fit into decisions about conservation, as a human perspective can be vastly different than a scientific one.
 - HAF offered that if we are more interested in conservation science (for the sake of science) than the ways conservation science touches people, then it becomes problematic.
 - Key Takeaway: Although the goals of conservation are thought to be for the people, that messaging and impact do not always translate to the people, and as a result people are not aware of the role human experiences play in conservation.
- **Stewardship:** participants discussed stewardship as the act of taking care of the planet. There was recognition and celebration amongst participants that Native people have long lived in balance and harmony with the land, but colonialism and capitalism devolved their relationships with the land into a resource to exploit.

- AISES urged us to not lose sight that Native people are the original stewards of this land. They take great pride and responsibility in educating themselves in order to sustain healthy relationships with the land.
 - Key Takeaway: Although we assume the presence of people on the planet, we do not currently center “us” in stewardship.
- **Environmental Justice:** participants defined this term as a movement to reduce hazards caused by human interactions with the environment and redress the inequitable distribution of these hazards.
 - Word association expressed by participants: Unfair, social justice, inevitable, doing right, unaddressed, exclusive, access and education, needs to be relatable
- **Science:** participants understand science to be important but are concerned about the dominance of Eurocentric or Western concepts of science and the ways those concepts have created hierarchies of power as it relates to the acquisition and application of knowledge.
 - The following disciplines within science were mentioned during the discussions: ecology, biology, environmental science, conservation science. Participants also referred to STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics).
 - In every conversation there was a strong desire for Indigenous ways of knowing to be elevated and for Western science to be decentralized as the sole authority or as the scientist as the only valued expert.
- **STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Math):** participants understand STEM to be the teaching and learning of science technology, engineering and math in the K12 and informal educational settings that takes a cross curricular approach to building tools that solve real world problems.
- **Environmental Science:** participants defined this as the study and understanding of both natural and human caused occurrences in the world around us.
 - One example offered during the conversation with the Everglades community was light pollution.
- **Generational Knowledge:** participants defined this as a suite of valuable practices, beliefs, traditions, and knowledge that was observed and discovered by their ancestors and passed down through

generations. There are multiple ways that generational knowledge has been discounted. In some instances, it's ignored or delegitimized. In others, it's been co-opted or used without credit.

- It is worth noting that participants used terms “generational knowledge”, “Indigenous knowledge”, and “other ways of knowing” interchangeably.
 - AISES said being Indigenous means we have always been scientists and we have always had a connection to the land.
- **Exclusion:** participants described exclusion from science as the intentional removal of Indigenous knowledge from Eurocentric/Western science concepts that dominate the cultural norms of “science” in our society.
 - Discussions mentioned the following forms of exploited knowledge: underfunding in education, intentional exclusion from the workforce or other pathways to science, gaslighting, relegating harm to something from the past that has no basis in our time, and victim blaming.
- **Harm:** participant discussions addressed the emotional and physical harms that keep people from participating in science and on land. Due to hierarchies, violent histories, colonization, and exclusion; communities have developed trauma responses that keep them from engaging with Eurocentric/Western science. For example, science outreach efforts and practices will state that science is based on evidence, but will not interrogate the biases of those interpreting the data. Or, it will designate who qualifies as an expert and in the same breath, label what people do everyday with “look, you’re doing science” which is condescending and perpetuates mistrust.
 - Eboni Goddard Preston offered that the history of lynching in the woods has kept many Black families from going into these spaces. People are afraid of being targeted or faced with having to remember those experiences in parks, as if it was somehow forgotten.
 - Recommendation: There are organizations and individuals whom NPS may want to engage with that work to create spaces and programs that uplift underrepresented people groups in science such as AISES and SACNAS (Society for Advancement of

¹ Though identified by participants, the phrasing “other ways of knowing” historically centers whiteness/Western thinking as the “primary” way of knowing and is othering of Native peoples long standing expertise. We recommend using “Generational knowledge”, which offers a history and body of knowledge that was gained over many decades of practice. This also creates an entry point for stories to play a more impactful way of connecting people to knowledge and expertise.

Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science). They understand the histories and interactions where these communities are made to feel like outsiders. At times it can be as subtle as poor or no translation or as deep as the traumatic histories that have limited full inclusion in science.

- Recommendation: It is important to move away from literally translating messages and signage and lean all the way into writing the message in the desired language. One example was a sign at a park asking dog owners to pick up after their pets. When this message was translated into Spanish it read along the lines of “pick up your dogshit” – vulgar language that was not present in the original Spanish.
- **Social Justice:** participants defined this as a movement that works towards balancing the scales of power that keep certain people and groups marginalized. The roots of injustice include exertions of power and hierarchies that include certain groups of people and exclude others in decision making and social systems.
 - Key Takeaway: When tying this to land, participants saw responsive action taken when an invasive species directly impacts an ecosystem. We do not see the same sense of urgency when the harm is human-caused, which can appear to shift responsibility from humans to the land. One example where humans did act with urgency was the Cuyahoga River catching fire due to humans polluting the water. This harm mobilized many communities to come together to make sure that this was not the end of the story.
- **Representation:** participants defined representation as the intentional presence of any person, history, story, and/or object that reflects a people group, community, or cultural tradition.
 - Key Takeaway: Lack of diverse representation among NPS staff negatively affects the experiences participants have with parks.
 - Key Takeaway: Visual representations of histories, relationships with nature, and the range of park visitors affect how participants view, feel, hear, or experience parks.
 - Key Takeaway: Mostly white, Western, Eurocentric knowledge and ways of knowing are discussed and credited within parks.

Key Takeaways

Takeaways have been worded by the facilitation team based on the conversations they actively listened to and unpacked with each community. “We” is used to represent the community of authors and not the facilitator's perspective.

Theme 1: Distinct Relationships Between People, Public Land and the NPS

Throughout our discussions, participants made a key distinction between their relationship with the land, their relationship with their local national park, and their relationship with the NPS as an entity. Some participants view the NPS as a barrier to their experience with land, while others see the NPS as one of many access points to it. In some cases, the NPS may develop national policies that are not tailored to the unique experiences of a specific park, its staff, or its neighbors. The policies have a direct effect on field staff and members of the public who policy-makers do not know. Key themes that emerged during the conversations include the desire for greater inclusion in the decision-making process by NPS, imbalance of power dynamics, challenging assumptions about who uses the land and how, the importance of storytelling, and recognition that harm isn't always in the past. Below, key sub-themes from the conversations have been identified and synthesized, with recommendations included as needed.

1.1: NPS decisions should be informed by the people who will be impacted by them.

In the national conversations, Dr. Bowser offered that oftentimes park staff have no idea what is on the land in terms of plants, animals, and features, or the ways that different people and groups engage with them. The lack of a clear understanding of all the ways a park is utilized and engaged with [by visitors? By community members? Both?] creates a risk of decisions that exclude, or worse, harm local communities. Practices or policies may then be imposed that affect the land relationship without communities' permission, consent, or consideration. This insight provides park staff with an opportunity to bring communities into the decision making process and helps to identify new paths for distributing information.

People have a relationship with the land and sometimes changes, decisions, and policies aren't communicated effectively, which directly impacts how people receive the information. Transparency is more than just making the

information public; the ways decisions are made and communicated can contribute to a lack of transparency. An example of this came from Everglades National Park, where a new policy about fishing restrictions was passed. The policy affected people who had been fishing on the land for generations; they not only didn't know about the new restrictions, but had no seat at the decision making table.

1.2: Power dynamics of existing relationships need to be renegotiated

Some organizations with direct connections to the NPS mission choose not to work with NPS because of inconsistencies in responsiveness and how NPS staff treat the urgency of external vs. internal priorities. They found the NPS moves slowly or with less urgency as a large and complex agency than some grassroots organizations that are more responsive to current issues. Often, by the time NPS staff have vetted a decision through all their required channels, their partner organizations have moved on to other projects. However, when the NPS makes a request to external organizations, the agency creates tight deadlines and constraints that they expect other communities to adhere to. This power dynamic highlighted by participants' experiences is not equitable or sustainable.

Another constant, inequitable dynamic participants experienced is the expectation that communities come to the NPS (even virtually) instead of the NPS coming to communities. Communities want reciprocity and for the NPS to meet them where they are, with clear and honest intentions. Communities also do not want the NPS to approach them only when it needs something. Rather, participants would appreciate being initially approached without a clear benefit to or advancement of the NPS agenda.

Park staff are building relationships with adjacent communities, but this is often seen as an additional task outside of their work responsibilities. Staff are willing to make this investment as they recognize the benefit of having these relationships. The opportunity for renegotiating the power dynamic mentioned above requires focusing a critical eye on the scope of responsibilities of staff, re-aligning them with community expectations, and giving value to this work.

1.3: Examine assumptions about who is using the land, how, how often, and why

Participants noted solace, healing, learning, and just being as some of their motivations for being outside. They would like to see NPS narratives that accept and honor these motivations. This includes NPS' creation of spaces where healing, joy, and learning can occur in concert.

1.4: Stories matter; history matters

The community members who participated in the Congaree conversation came prepared to lift up and celebrate their history with this land. Communities give us the language they prefer as well as the experiences that matter to them. There is a 125-year history surrounding Congaree that has untold amounts of context and connections for the many ways that Black folks, in particular, have cared for the land and how the land has cared for them. The community offered the history of the Maroons: enslaved people, some from the Caribbean, who ran away and settled in the Congaree area as they leveraged the swamps' complexity for their own safety and survival. One participant recognized that there are park rangers in the Congaree who do a great job of sharing this history with respect and accuracy.

While parks hold so much beauty, they also have ugly histories. Some people have the privilege of being able to go on the land without considering the people who had it taken from them or those who have been murdered on it. At the same time, it is imperative that communities are not asked to relive that trauma. Others' stories should not be told without them or without their permission, but we also shouldn't burden them with the constant retelling. NPS should consider whose responsibility it is to acknowledge history and repair the harm. Building trusting relationships with those who've borne these traumas can lead to more transparent, authentic, and respectful park narratives about painful histories.

One participant, named Eboni, courageously shared that her grandmother fears for her safety when visiting public lands due to the many lynchings that were inflicted upon their people. Eboni offered that generational trauma is just as present as healing for her when engaging with the land.

1.5: People are still recovering from the previous administration

One participant from a national organization shared their experience: during the Trump administration, they received notice that they could not use inclusive language and that diversity, equity, and inclusion training activities needed to stop. When addressing national parks staff during an event where she was invited to speak, she was given a list of which terms were acceptable and which should be avoided. For example, instead of tackling diversity head on, she was asked to consider biodiversity as an alternative way to approach the discussion as “the environment is a good entry point for everybody”. Though the staff recognized the harm that resulted from putting limits on an external community partner and use of inclusive language, they had to adhere to official NPS policies that were being imposed.

“It does not feel good to ask, in lieu of racial equity, what would you like me to say? It was a weary feeling and did not feel authentic. It is heartbreaking to realize that we were having a micro-experience in a larger system because there was no transparency - we are excited that you are doing the work, but it was like the underground railroad, just don't get caught.”

The participant experienced the policy change as harmful and insensitive. There was no care for the duress the presenter, a Black woman talking about racial equity, had to navigate and endure. This example highlights the harm that can be caused by policies that disregard or discount the language and issues of justice. These policies can put staff into difficult positions when working with potential partners or communities, potentially damaging relationships with communities around the parks.

Theme 2: Relationships Between People and Science

During our discussions, various perspectives emerged regarding relationships with science and a powerful question was posed: “Under whose terms are we experiencing science?” Participants recognize the need for social justice movements within science because of historical harm to people and the planet, intentional exclusion from STEM spaces, intentional exploitation of ideas and resources, unconscious bias, and the use of science to maintain hierarchies of power and “truth.” Key themes that emerged in the conversations include: science can be used to advance social justice, Indigenous and generational knowledge are valid and should be valued, early

science/STEM education pathways and opportunities should be inclusive of young people of color, put inclusion into practice to advance towards belonging, “science is important, it's just not the star,” and there needs to be a renegotiation of who gets to ask the questions.

2.1: Science is not the only, or even the primary, motivation, reason, entry point or inspiration for going to a national park. Consuming scientific content is also not an expectation shared by all park visitors.

Across all conversations, the point was made that science is not the only entry point for visiting national parks. Approaching visitors with the intention of having them engage with science can push people away from wanting to be in that space or engaging with staff during a future visit. There are many equally valid reasons for being in a park, including solace, healing, or joy. It is imperative that the NPS understands peoples' motivations for visiting parks and incorporate science in a way that meets their interests and aligns with their motivations.

2.2: As is beginning to happen in scientific communities worldwide, we need a reckoning with who gets to ask the questions, whose expertise counts, who gets to decide on the methods for data capture, and whose biases influence interpretation of the findings.

Participants recognize that some Western and Eurocentric definitions and approaches to science have historically been exclusive and caused harm. Scientific establishments designate who counts as an expert and in doing so, redistribute power to those whom the establishment values. Because some scientists and scientific institutions have sown distrust among many communities of color, communities are pushing back and asking complicated questions that must be grappled with.

Science is conducted by humans, which includes their biases. Individual scientists ask the questions they find worthy of investigating and decide the methods of capturing or extracting data. Funded by taxpayer dollars, scientists then have the power to interpret those data, potentially at the expense of people who had no power in the process. While science has mechanisms like peer review to reduce bias, they are not infallible. Furthermore, biases are rarely checked by people outside the peer review process. Scientists receive the recognition and the acknowledgement of achievements, not the people who may have participated in the research. Though this sentiment was most present during the Rocky Mountain conversation, all conversations highlighted power imbalance in some way.

2.3: Indigenous people have always been scientists.

Throughout many conversations, the way that science and knowledge acquisition were discussed created a binary of science knowledge and “other ways of knowing.” Indigenous knowledge was put in the latter bucket, which created an automatic othering and devaluing of that knowledge. It is clear from every conversation that there is high reverence for Indigenous people, their contributions to science, methods for gaining knowledge, their tools and practices, and the process for distributing knowledge through storytelling. Those many contributions have continued to the present day.

Throughout the conversations, participants emphasized the importance of uplifting, believing, and valuing Indigenous Knowledge just as much as Western/Eurocentric science. Those practicing Western science should also acknowledge when they use the concepts of Indigenous Knowledge without the original language or voice. Participants shared that science communication or interpretation often preach about presenting scientific information in ways that are easy to understand, but we should not sacrifice representing Indigenous knowledge with accuracy, credit, and respect.

2.4: Two things can be true at the same time; scientists can be extractive and they can provide real solutions to the challenges of our lifetime. Science has a role to play, it just doesn't have to be the star.

Participants in one conversation shared the famous story of when the Cuyahoga River caught fire because of waste produced in the name of scientific advancement. They shared that even though science also provided the solution, the core of the story wasn't the fire itself, but how people came together to clean up and restore the river. They felt that telling this story from a science lens is incomplete, as it is also a story of environmental justice. It is important to interrogate which contributions of knowledge and participation are left out of our science stories.

There is also an opportunity to leverage science and STEM experiences, both at parks and/or curated by parks, for distribution in collaboration with partners in-school and out-of-school setting partners. A lot of these programs already exist within the NPS and with agency partners, but require funding, access to the park, and even access to diverse student groups. A few parks have great examples of how they are approaching this type of engagement. Other parks have the programs, but lack student engagement and, often, relevancy.

As one participant described it, “Science is both a social justice issue and a social justice solution.” In the Cuyahoga Valley conversation, participants offered the following: content, curriculum or program offerings centered around science are well and good, but without relevance to youth and communities’ interests or lives what would their motivation be to engage? This disconnect creates barriers and obstacles before they even engage in nature or at the park. Creating more and sustained pathways for young people of color to play a meaningful role in addressing and ideating the solutions to the challenges their generation is faced with, from an early age, can help them to be more invested in science as a calling and a career.

Theme 3: The NPS: Policies, Decisions, Communications

The National Park Service has many entry points for developing and sustaining deep, lasting, and meaningful relationships with local communities. Participants felt that oftentimes the priorities of large organizations don’t align with the expressed needs and interests of the people they intend to serve. Moreover, there have been instances where NPS staff view the “community” as people who are external to their operations staff without realizing that their staff may represent the very audiences whose trust they seek to earn. Throughout this process it was clear that the staff who engage the public every day are invested in leading the change to be more inclusive and to build relationships. The NPS supports this work by consistently listening to challenges faced by staff, and redirecting resources and shifting priorities to remove barriers that prevent that work from flourishing.

3.1: Individual parks are doing the work of building relationships with their neighbors. The NPS should evaluate how to support staff and communities in doing so.

The discussions about science that are happening at parks include projects, people involved, processes, and purposes, but the discussions are siloed and are not being communicated between the scientists and the interpreters. For example, natural resource staff and researchers who use parks for data capture don’t wear uniforms, don’t have an obligation to share their findings with interpretation staff, and don’t necessarily ask permission to use the land, making them invisible to visitors and community members.

There is an opportunity to open dialog between these roles and collaborate in an effort to sustain inclusive science communications with public audiences. Some observations that came from the SciInterp CoP are:

- There is a separation of interpreters and researchers;
- NPS needs systems and policies that ensure strong relationships between scientists and interpreters; and
- Researchers should be visible in some way.

3.2: Encourage more investments in relationship building.

There are park staff who advocate for and actively practice leaving the park and going into adjacent communities in order to nurture the relationships they have developed. Leadership should encourage this practice and regularly allocate resources to support relationship building. As one participant noted, “Just because leadership doesn't understand the need or investment required for relationship building, doesn't mean they should make decisions that prohibit or limit park staff from building those relationships.”

3.3: Parks have an opportunity to build bridges between the interests and expressed needs of their neighbors and science. They can also be a nexus for similar programs, partners, and efforts where connections currently do not exist.

Communities are ready and willing to explore sustained connections between their programs and a given park. The park has an opportunity to build bridges or to be a bridge while others are being built. The NPS has many processes in place that prevent building mutually beneficial partnerships. For instance, one organization does not prioritize their relationship with the NPS because by the time a project is approved by NPS, the window of opportunity has closed and the organization has moved forward with more responsive partners. Slow response to opportunities has the power to undo the trust that has been established.

There are communities, organizations, and individuals who desire a stronger relationship with their park but feel the NPS is not taking advantage of the knowledge, human capital, resources, or pipelines that currently exist. The NPS is also not communicating consistently or through varied pathways with diverse public audiences. For instance, AISES, Latino Outdoors, HAF, and the NPS have spaces on their websites for resource sharing and job announcements. The participants felt like much of the information about NPS opportunities is not directly communicated and it is not time-efficient to

search for it on the NPS website. Establishing open lines of communication will allow organizations and the NPS to tap into each others' networks.

3.4: Examine the nature of existing relationships and whether they are potentially harmful, as this can erode trust for relationships you are hoping to build.

Relationships with potentially harmful organizations can undo any trust that has been established.

From one participant's perspective, it appears that a few powerful NGOs in Florida act like they are the saviors of the Everglades. When communities see NPS management being cozy with those groups it can appear and feel like they are more interested or aligned with those organizations than with the community. Sometimes you have to take a critical eye to the existing relationships that you have with local organizations and whether there is value alignment. Organizations can hold power over people through their decisions and the way they wield money and influence.

Communities may paint you with the same brush simply by your association with these organizations. This is also true of the individuals NPS may engage with or permit to use a park. One participant shared:

One-third of Point Reyes National Seashore in the Bay Area is being used by ranchers. The land was stolen from Indigenous people by ranchers within living memory, and there is still land theft happening on park land. Peoples' grandparents were kicked out by force, yet the ranches are showcased as a great aspect of the history of parks.

3.5: We need to be looking beyond inclusion.

[During the conversations the facilitation team offered the following perspective on inclusion:] It is important to understand what we are working towards when we say inclusion. Inclusion is a lifelong journey of practice that helps us advance towards equity; the practice of inclusion brings the opportunity to create true belonging.

One participant said "belonging" is the key. Across the conversations, participants shared that historically, because of conditioning and a lack of representation, kids of color have questioned the "expertise" of a person of their community. If NPS had consistent and authentic representation in their paid workforce at all levels, kids may see their community as experts and themselves as belonging in those spaces.

Participants shared that at times it feels like parks are trying to convince people of color (POC) and POC-serving organizations to visit parks instead of inviting them to work together, explore collaborations, and even help inform decisions.

3.6: Mutual trust and responsiveness are necessary for meaningful engagement.

The community members who showed up to listening sessions are open to a relationship with the park. This community interest highlights how the NPS needs to invest in earning trust and maintaining engagement. For example, Rut Miller from EVICS is willing to take charge in organizing a listening session in Spanish with her community.

Participants felt that NPS makes decisions and then quickly implements them. From their experience, it appears this is done without consultation or insight from the people who use the park. The participants explained that they are then expected to conform immediately if an activity is no longer allowed or there are new expectations. This leads to eroding trust, as it can make people feel like conditions are imposed on them.

3.7: Avoid checking boxes, especially when it comes to inclusion, equity, and opportunities for people of color

One participant said DEI efforts and partnerships can feel transactional or like a check box system and that it does not feel genuine. Another participant hoped to grow the relationship with Cuyahoga Valley not as visitors, but as a partner. She wonders how her park will prepare to listen as they build and sustain new community relationships? This is a sentiment that was expressed in every conversation.

Communities also expressed a lack of strong culture around equitable compensation or knowledge of available funding sources coming from the NPS. In addition, there is still a reliance on volunteers, which may not be an option for people who are otherwise very eager to engage with a park. Instead, there needs to be a commitment to inclusion of people of color in paid workforce development efforts. HAF and AISES offered that they have a roster of qualified Latin and Indigenous people that they have shared with the NPS, but they believe has gone unused.

3.8: Signage, names, and imagery needs a massive overhaul.

Participants called out names, imagery, and signage as perpetuating white supremacy and colonialism. As often as possible, the NPS should strive for

first-hand accounts and diverse representation in its signage, interpretation, and other communications. Giving credit, and showing value for different types of voices and experiences, will help to better engage diverse groups of visitors.

One participant shared an experience of visiting a park and being met with a mural of a traditional white family enjoying themselves. Images are powerful and visually send a message, in this case of who NPS expects at the park. During this conversation an existing collaborative partner whose organization has a focus on art spoke up about continuing to miss opportunities for deeper and nuanced projects.

“The park could easily commission a local artist to create a new mural that better captures the community.”

3.9: More diverse storytelling is needed.

Communities spoke to local stories and experts who have the historical knowledge and are open to sharing their insights. Parks can do more to include, incorporate and uplift their local stories about the land.

3.10: Learn from the success of existing collaborations.

The Hispanic Access Fund currently has agreements with NPS for a nationwide fellowship program. They currently work with these parks to build workforce pipelines and bring people into parks through programs. They shared that some parks do better than others in regards to accessibility and workforce development. Some examples mentioned were Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park, the National Park of Boston, and Harpers Ferry Media Center in West Virginia.

Dr. Bowser offered an example of something small but impactful that parks can do, which is to ask visitors to take pictures of a specific species of animal and upload those photos into a common app. This allows the public to be involved in and support parks in collecting data about species.

3.11: Science communication is not as important as supporting local communities with the challenges they are facing.

The Rocky Mountain community shared that air quality surrounding the park is a major challenge. During the conversation they asked if the park has data, researchers, staff, and/or science they can contribute to tackling this challenge. Every conversation had a community member who raised a challenge that the park could play a role in addressing.

3.12: More transparency and collaboration is needed from NPS about its decision-making process, the decisions being considered, how they are implemented, the values that guide decisions, and the process for collaboration.

AISES reminded us that, “Native people are the original stewards of this land and take great pride in educating themselves in order to keep healthy relationships with the land going.” Communities shared that generational customs are impacted by changes made by NPS to land access without any meaningful input from the people that will be most affected. In many cases the changes are communicated through signage and not through conversation and engagement with the people. This approach sends communities a message of, “Here is our decision, now abide by it or else.”

Next Steps and Opportunities for the NPS

One of the biggest and most consistent concerns we heard from participants throughout was that these conversations would not lead to any meaningful action or change and that their experiences and insights would be minimized or outright dismissed. The request was clear: Do not bury our contributions. Below is a collection of actions, requests, and opportunities as expressed by participants. The bullets include the facilitators’ recommendations, linking themes heard across conversations, including the facilitators expertise and experiences.

Recommendations

Look at the words, names, history, stories, and imagery through various lenses, as these items can represent NPS values.

Entering a park is not just about the scenery, or even the park staff. All the aspects of a park, e.g the signage, murals, placards, and even park names, are a part of the narrative and the experience. It is important that these elements are in alignment and represent the values the NPS and a park hold. It is important to evaluate these items in collaboration with the community and align the experience in a way that better represents them.

- Every park should be focusing a critical eye on their signage and materials, examining the stories they tell and looking for opportunities

to include the appropriate community as narrators of their own experiences.

- There is authority and power that a person wearing a uniform enters a space with. It's important to be mindful of the message being conveyed without speaking a single word.
- Every park can examine the ways they may be de-centering humans by favoring corporate interests and the ways they extract from the land.
- One recommendation for sharing stories in a more compelling way is to develop closer partnerships with religious leaders and in particular Black church leaders. They are storytellers who understand how to engage their congregations in deep and meaningful ways. This also presents an opportunity to have more presence and reach with communities that may not visit parks.
- A person of color or people with marginalized identities may enter a park and be met with a mural that depicts a traditional, white family enjoying the park. Images are powerful and send a message. Every park should be revisiting their art and striving to better capture the communities they host and hope to host. This can be an opportunity to partner with local artists who can be commissioned to update a park's visual art.
- Lift up the stories that are tied to the land, and focus on the people who have historically occupied the land. Intentionally consider who should be telling specific stories and who should be listening. This must be done with care and truth, thoughtfulness, and honesty. More specifically, some Indigenous, Black, and/or communities of color may not want to be met with a retelling of how their people were harmed, removed or exploited on the land. However, there are communities who hold the privilege to not know or have experienced those realities and the park can offer them a path for learning and growth.

Consider all entry points and connections between science, science communication, and NPS.

Science and science communication can be valuable entry points for the NPS, parks, and nature. However, these aren't the only entry points or connections and are held at a different priority level for each person. Instead of leading with science, it is more impactful to learn about communities and their priorities, and then fit science into their experiences.

- Cultural relevance should play a much more central role in attempts to connect science, the land, and humans. For example, in the Congaree, fishing serves as a valued entry point for exploring generational knowledge and science.

- Think more locally. Communities expressed that local challenges are opportunities to introduce science, research, and tools to directly address the issues that may be causing harm to people or the planet. “Local thinking” also presents opportunities to support and join local efforts that may already be underway, elevate the visibility of the issue itself, and make the park a more invested and active partner.
- Consider who has the power and privilege of setting language and defining terminology. Especially when it comes to scientific descriptions of phenomena or experiences. As a basic example, can a bird just be a bird, or do we need the exact name of the bird to appreciate it? Do I have to say I’m going to a national park or can I say I’m going to the woods? How much value are you placing on visitors getting scientific terminology “correct”?

Invest in partnerships and relationship building with neighboring communities.

Communities are valuable assets to parks, but in order to avoid a transactional relationship it is necessary to earn, build upon, and sustain trust. In order for relationships to be equitable, it is important to celebrate and vocalize the value of those relationships, while demonstrating that value with funding, resources, and reciprocity. Building reciprocal relationships should make partners feel like insiders, where they are invited to participate in conversations and decision making.

- It isn’t always necessary to find new resources or funding in order to partner with communities. You can renegotiate and redirect where existing efforts are not aligned with community priorities.
- Examine what a seat at your table looks like in reality at this moment and ask your communities if this is in line with how they hope to be included.
- Commit to building upon these conversations and make a bigger table.
- Be intentional about connecting with the very people you intended to reach through these conversations in informing future policies, their development, and implementation.
- Examine all existing pathways for disseminating information and align with local partners’ preferred methods. This can help make information and opportunities more accessible.
- When developing programs, think more about what is in it for the recipient and include similar leaders of similar programs in the design of content.

- Most organizations that serve marginalized people are thinking about what their volunteers, program participants, online community, and staff are interested in more than what they want with or from the NPS or any other organization, for that matter. For example, if NPS wants a relationship with Latino Outdoors, NPS leadership needs to do things that resonate with the volunteers and staff.. They are the drivers of the programs and create the experiences; if they feel heard, respected and valued by the NPS they are going to decide that they want to do an outing at a national park.
- Keep a calendar of local and national cultural events that NPS can amplify and support. For example, Latino Conservation Week takes place in July. Start making a plan to stand in solidarity, actively participate and help get the word out.
- Increase connections with school districts and with educators of color, especially in traditionally excluded communities. They are ready and willing to collaborate. Educators expressed that they would love to have a public forest school program which signals to black and brown students that they belong here.
- Is it enough for communities of color to be in the park simply for joy, healing and peace? Come to terms with that question as an agency.

Move beyond the goal of attracting visitors to parks and equally value local people.

It is important to bring visitors into the parks, and communities for the most part are aware of how it stimulates the economy. It is still important to understand the broader human ecosystem the park resides in and invest equally in the people who are connected to the park by proximity.

- Think about all the inquiries coming in over the last six months. Beyond the questions that people ask, was there a relationship established? Limiting those interactions to simply answering questions is a missed opportunity for relationship building. Follow up the answer by expressing a desire to support their efforts or asking the reason behind their question(s).
- Connect with businesses that surround the park; chances are that they are fielding questions about the park. This is an opportunity to build relationships with people who may be indirectly representing the park or who have deep knowledge of the curiosities of locals and visitors. It is important to recognize the distinction between existing relationships

that have been overlooked or underserved (and therefore likely weak or poor) and potential relationships.

- Community ambassadors already exist. There are people who are approached daily for information about the Congaree. Felicia Robinson who works at the local QuikStop answers questions and sifts through requests (such as maps) every single day. She is representing the park without recognition, compensation, or resources. How many other businesses are having this experience? How could these connections have a direct line to a human at the park in terms of training, resources, etc.?²

Turn inclusion into practice.

Inclusion is not a destination, it is a lifelong journey of practice. It can be easy to be cynical about inclusion, but when we view it as a practice we begin to recognize that the most difficult aspect is recognizing the opportunities TO practice. We also realize, then, that there is no final destination for this practice, allowing a comprehensive picture of commitment to come into focus.

- Evolve NPS communication in a way that centers community input and makes information accessible. This could include more languages, visual and auditory aids, as well as platforms.
- The enemy of inclusion is speed. Slow down to share with communities about decisions being considered and invite their input on the decision itself, as well as the implementation process and pathways for communication.
- An area the parks should be exploring is how they currently approach professional development for teachers: do it in collaboration with teachers who understand how to navigate the realities and constraints of the classroom.
- Interrogate what “access” means to a given community and all the different entry points for relationship building and collaboration. In all conversations with community partners, asking about access challenges can help you understand the range of definitions and experiences that are unique for your partners. Then actively work to remove the barriers to address the lack of access they are experiencing.
- Ensure that conversations turn into action. Communities are tired and skeptical of what will come of these conversations. There is fear that conversations will be just that, more talk. There is an expectation that “I

² Since this was illuminated, the park has responded and are working closely with Felicia and the staff at the Quik Stop.

have given you my time and insight and I expect to hear about progress- and invite you to collaborate with us.”

- Community organizations want more information about NPS-led national conferences and they want their members represented there. Additionally, NPS needs to actively attend community organizations’ conferences and gatherings as supporters without agenda. This includes attending webinars, local events and meetings.
- If one doesn't already exist, establish a community coalition or local advisory board. This step can help with transparency, dissemination of information and evolution of programmatic context and modalities. Be sure to discuss what compensation can look like at the beginning. Not everyone is motivated by money.
- Respect is a two-way street. If communities are expected to respect the policies and the land, they will expect to receive respect from the NPS staff in return.
- Communities are paying attention to where NPS spends their money and view those choices as a signal of where the priorities and values are aimed.
- Develop a task force that designs a space where you can have retreats and celebrations that are managed by communities with marginalized identities. This should also include more collaboration with people with disabilities.
- There is a growing sentiment that NPS and parks should be doing a lot more to partner with Native tribes and provide space for ceremony and healing. It is important to recognize that ignoring tribal rights reinforces a system that uplifts colonizers and dismisses original keepers and ancestors of this land.
- An important reminder is that restitution of a right to belong in your own land is not healing. It can be a start, though.
- As part of the process of personal and collective growth, those who have benefited from oppression and the colonizer ideology also need healing. Support and establish opportunities for facilitated discussion and healing about these topics.

Be flexible and willing to put your agenda to the side.

Everyone has an agenda and the most meaningful thing you can do to create change is be willing to put your agenda to the side--not forever, just long enough to balance the scales of power. Communities have their own

aspirations, priorities, and concerns and by listening to them you may identify overlap with your own and take steps to align towards deep and meaningful change. We have heard the many reasons why “we *can’t*” make these changes; it could be helpful to reframe the thinking and lean into all the reasons why you *can* and should, then create an action plan.

- As parks build relationships with tribes, it is important to have a better understanding of the rituals they practice and value. Public-facing staff may already have these insights, but some people may not see the value of the insights or believe they have a role to play. That failure to see would be a mistake—one with the potential to undo their own staff's hard work. In one careless gesture, months of earning and building trust can be demolished. An example that comes to mind is meeting with a tribal elder for the first time. This is a clear moment of trust being extended, and park staff should include the elder of their own “tribe” in the conversation. This is about respect and NPS needs to be led with a level of cultural fluency in order to navigate the overall relationship and individual interactions with care and intention. This work is not one person's job. Ivan Bermejo from the Everglades is a great resource for park leadership to tap into, though without over burdening him.
- There are numerous community conversations taking place around parks, and NPS could be plugging into these discussions without agenda. Leave the safety of the park and meet communities where they are.
- Exploring the communities’ conservation priorities can be an entry point for collaboration. It can be as simple as asking, “what are the challenges you are dealing with or need to deal with? And, what role would you like the park to play in supporting you?”

Take a deep dive into culture change at the NPS at the top levels of the organization

It is valuable to have outside experts do training for staff, and to examine policies and practices through that external, neutral lens. Having said that, culture change needs to be prioritized and supported from the top. Change can’t only come from staff willing to do so, it requires policies that embed these values into the very culture of the NPS. Staff have insights and experiences that need to be listened to and given value. Organizations like Justice Outside are ready and willing to support NPS’ equity journey.

- Examine the onboarding process for all new hires, volunteers and interns. There may be a disconnect or direct conflict between what

happens on a park level and requirements imposed from NPS headquarters. Additionally, what role can historical context and storytelling play in the onboarding process?

- Develop an awareness training for NPS staff and volunteers around the histories of the land, the people who have historically intersected/interacted/cared for the land, and human atrocities that took place.
- Demonstrate a true commitment from the top to lean into advancing racial equity. This is not a two-hour webinar, but something deeper that includes budgeting, hiring, and professional development with milestones that hold everyone, at every level, accountable. If DEIA efforts land on only one person's shoulders, those efforts are doomed to fail.
- Prioritize active connections with the communities that have been excluded.
- Parks should build capacity and work to restructure systems that make community listening and aligning a priority and not something that is “in addition to” regular duties.
- Staff can't do all the work of making sites into anti-racist spaces. They don't have sufficient clout, energy, or influence within the agency to carry that burden.
- It is an important exercise to critically consider NPS' responses to the concerns and ideas that communities have stated over and over again. How many more times do you need to hear those things before you decide to act? How long before they give up on you? Are you ok with that?

Create a diverse workforce with representation across staff and decision makers.

The NPS workforce needs to be representative of the communities they wish to serve and partner with. Equitable professional opportunities and transparent pathways to employment are essential. Look to current staff, particularly those representing various community voices, and make sure they are being heard and, more importantly, believed. Representation isn't just about visitors seeing diverse park staff, but about those staff having an active place in decision making.

- Organizations like AISES and HAF have the largest groups of Indigenous and Latino/a/x students in the nation. They want to see these students gain employment with the NPS, acting as

representatives of their nations and communities. However, it is critical to note that unpaid internships are inequitable and a burden on those trying to break into the agency.

- Provide clear and consistent pathways from internships to professional opportunities.
- Communities want to hear from park staff of color as directly as possible and with consistency. The opportunity to hear from a park professional in local meetings, classrooms and events is needed and welcomed.
- More listening can be done internally. There are people who are representing community voices, experiences, and perspectives within park staff, but are they believed and listened to?
- Help people understand how to work the NPS systems of hiring and collaboration.
- Lived experience can and should be valued equally with traditional classroom learning. Excluding people without a degree from opportunities is discriminatory and devalues their expertise and worth.
- Know that staff of color are experiencing discriminatory behaviors as well as microaggressions coming from other staff and visitors. The responsibility of reporting is placed on the receiver of the aggression; often there isn't a process in place to support their healing following an incident.
- Examine the way a park and the agency amplify Indigenous STEM knowledge and staff. If there is no such process in place, then recognize this as an opportunity for agency growth.

Acknowledgements

We would share our gratitude and acknowledge the people who contributed these conversations.

Ryan Valdez	Mexican and Irish ancestry, 1st gen university student, parents immigrants, born abroad, Scientist, Latino, park lover.
Ashlyn King Barnett	Indigenous connections with CU Boulder, she/her
Eboni Preston Goddard	Black, hiker, CrossFit enthusiast, conservation advocate
Tracy Coppola	advocate, trail and tree lover, dog mom, vegan, Puerto Rican, Italian, daughter, wife, forever-learner.
Andrea Machado	
Raquel Sapp	Latina, Transcultural Chilean-adoptee, Mother of Twins, Educator, Medical Professional, Business Owner
Martha Cardona	
Dianne Umpierre	she/her, Seminal Chino....grew up in Puerto Rico and ID with Latino community, stargazer, fireflyer, mommy, dog lover, proud Boricua
Reverend Houston R Cypress	from the Otter Clan....Miccosukee Nation tribe
Natalie Lewis	Black, female, creative, advocate, gardener, sustainability enthusiast, scholar, educator, musician
Thomas Guerra	Conquering recovery, father, advocate
Jeanette	
Esther Gaines	
Jesus	
Amy Roskilly	
Carlos Laboy	

The Summative

Erika Hood	she/her, Educator, agitator, blackity black, mom, mentor, visionary, justice seeker, advocate, engagement specialist
Ellie Reagan	
Ebony Hood	Agitator, stolen from Africa, change-maker
Bryan Sigger	
Kairsten Nitsch	
Judy Varn	
V Rena Suber	
Craig Wood	
Gary Holliday	he/him/they, artist, science communicator, enthusiast, and educator, trying to be a better human
John Allen	Reverend, African American, husband, father, brother, son, Minister of the Gospel, historian, researcher, genealogist, and construction worker.
Cynthia E Green	
Sister Sheila Green-Kimble	Disciple of Christ, Negro, Female, Disabled USAF Veteran. My family has been residents of the Congaree River area since at least 1911.
Felicia Robinson	
Diana Prestigiacomo	
Robert Reese	grant writer for the Town; both parents were reared in Eastover, and I grew up in Hopkins, SC
Alexandira Williams	-chem and bio major, pricipal, native to Bluff Road
Lilian Jones	
Rose	
Paul Grant	
Alix A Pedraza	
Dr. Gillian Bowser	AA Female, NPS veteran of 29 years, artist, scientists, lover of butterflies, Brooklyn

The Summative

Kim Moore Bailey	AA Female
Luis Villa	hetero cis Latino male who has been given the opportunity to learn so much, a member of gen X, and a son of immigrants.
Shanna Edberg	she/her, protector of wildlife, novel reader
Nina Marti	second-generation immigrant born into a Salvadoran and Cuban home, Artist, educator, and lover of the outdoors
Alicia Mitchell	a citizen of Cherokee Nation
Lisa Paz	Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma and Comanche, she/her
Paola Betchar	she/they