

## **Overcoming Barriers to Enjoying Our Parks: How to Make Parks More Accessible**

- Interagency – public/private youth programs that are structured in tiers of increasing complexity
- Need to connect with middle class families of color
- The transportation access problem requires interagency, regional planning
- Parks need to be seen as a community priority as important as health, education & public safety

# Overcoming Barriers to Enjoying Our Parks: How to Make Parks More Accessible

## Background notes from discussion sessions:

### The problem as we see it:

- Lack of transportation and connection to mass transportation
- Use issues
  - Resistance to increasing people participating in active recreation
  - The people who live near open spaces don't want more people in 'their' areas
  - The new users and traditional users have different objectives for use of these lands
  - Over crowding at existing parks (a mix of busy, crowded and solitude options)
  - Heavily used parks feel 'maxed out' but how do you disperse crowds to more remote areas?
  - There is even a barrier in inner city parks – locals are 'territorial,' asking 'who invited these people?'
- Lack of information
  - Accessible info – language and use of the right modes to communicate
- Traditional funding sources have been for capital outlay; not for staff, maintenance, people, programs, and the things that touch people. \$ is not available for food at events.
- Diversity in recreation and in planning process
  - People don't see workers and visitors 'like themselves'
  - Getting diverse people involved in the planning process
- We (the Roundtable) are missing a key partner – the private sector. It is harder for business to focus on long term needs, they are short term oriented
- Attitude of recreation providers and the public
  - The home environment feels safe and secure; outdoors may not feel as safe. What is safe is different to different cultures and communities
  - As you reach out to new communities, how do you not lose existing communities? If your hands are full with the old, how do you expand beyond traditional?

- We heard from youth that they feel they are challenged by staff saying they don't belong there!
- Personnel issues
  - High staff turnover
  - Tension between volunteers and professional staff. It is extra work to take care of volunteers. Staff doesn't have skill or knowledge to work with volunteers
  - Interagency communication does not exist or is poor

### **Why the problem still exists:**

- Organizations
  - Organizations don't structure or strategize around this issue (we don't structure around partnerships, access, etc.)
  - High staff turn over
  - Public service exam process is not understood or the exams themselves are not passable by diverse workers
  - You are hired 'only because you are a minority' (does this still exist?)
- Demographics are changing rapidly
  - Different generations have different values
  - How we try to communicate with youth doesn't work
  - Need to identify the target market
- Constantly changing funding
  - Recreation and parks are seen as a luxury
  - There are only short term funds, funding is not steady
  - Dealing with the boom and bust cycle
- Political power in state is unbalanced
  - Target populations don't have political power
  - Shifting priorities
  - i.e. why are So. CA legislators not on board? They do support social welfare issues, need to make link to parks

### **Actions that need to be taken:**

- These are social science (people) issues, not just ecology issues
- Funding
  - If it is a high enough priority, shouldn't have to depend on grants, should be part of steady priorities. Need steady appropriations (LWCF)

- Programming
  - Involve private sector on one level and later ratchet it up
  - Tool kit - lessons learned and case studies [university park programs]
  - Family programs work!
  - Make info available and use innovative contact points
  - Recreation elements should be part of general plan – required element for cities, counties
  
- Staffing
  - Employee training
  - More diverse staff – outreach and recruitment. Add outreach and recruitment to all kid programs.
  - More diverse volunteers
    - i.e. lifeguard recruitment – start early with swimming lessons at local parks
  - Change law for public service exam
  - More internship programs (preparing for exams)
  - Need more interagency programs that ‘grow’ the kids to someday employment (each agency may cover a step or fill the niche they do well). K>HS>College>employment
  - Better use and understanding of Student Career Employment Program (SCEP)
  - Need to continue to challenge the ‘you’re hired because you are minority’ attitude
  - Training – cross exposure. Long term vision > color blind
  - Do recruitment and event contacts with diverse employees
  
- Community connections and outreach
  - We haven’t connected with growing middle and upper class diverse communities. How do we connect here?
  - Do this through existing community events, Spanish radio, etc.
  - Go to established community events instead of expecting communities to come to the park
  - Bring hands-on equipment to community events (kayaks, etc.)
  - Use food to bring people together. Partner with a business to provide food.

**Possible Partnerships:**

- Partners to connect with:
  - Law enforcement
  - Equipment – example of track bikes at community events. Bring equipment to communities as partnership
  - Need a name recognition person as spokesperson

- Community agency parks and larger outdoor lands agencies Get agencies together on a regular basis to create interagency action (i.e. Roundtable)
- Churches (church functions in parks)
- PTAs in schools
- Utilize health campaign marketers to promote parks
- Staffing and future employment
  - For State Parks, public service exams are barriers. Need to partner with universities to prep for exams (or get rid of exam!).
  - 'Community service learning.' Partner with universities
- Look for partners in non-traditional places
  - Annenberg Foundation
  - Gas & oil companies
  - Video game company
  - Tobacco company or tobacco funds
  - Sugar industry
  - Soft drinks
  - Medical profession
  - Pharmaceutical company
- Private entity partners
  - Be specific. Bring in low level and then ratchet it up
  - Something that can bring in immediate results first
  - Move from 'right thing to do' to more private sector marketing - can we think the same way? Need a common goal that will pay off for both public/private and that will lead to partnerships.

### **Key Partnerships for Action:**

- Transportation – really could use a true interagency effort on this. Perhaps through a tax assessment?
- Park link event on July 1, 2005. Public transportation = park transportation
- Take Amtrak to parks – website. \$2.00/kid
- Coastal Conservancy – using Conservation Corps (CCC) for coastal trail. Wants to increase this partnership.
- Trust for Public Lands is partnering with health based organizations – and will increase this partnership
- Educational – integrate with every program (PTA)
- Educate legislators – move away from capital outlay focus – interagency effort on this? (heard a bit of anti-government bias )
- Engaging Your Community is a big part of the answer
- From 'Lawsuits to Strategy' – partner with public interest law groups.