# NATIONAL PARK PARTNERS: Status and Trends

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1

INTRODUCTION 5

STUDY PARTICIPANTS 7

METHODOLOGY 8

CATEGORIZING THE FIELD 10

STATUS AND TRENDS 12

DISCUSSION 22

FUTURE RESEARCH QUESTIONS 27

CONCLUSION 28

APPENDICES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 30

ORGANIZATIONS IN PARTNER COHORT 32

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 35

ONLINE SURVEY 39

LITERATURE REVIEW 48

RESOURCES CONSULTED 52

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

The 2016 National Park Service Centennial creates a unique opportunity to assess and refine park partnerships. Recent guidance from the Second Century Commission, the National Park Advisory Board, and National Park Service (NPS) Director Jon Jarvis's 2011 *Call to Action* have created a compelling vision for the future. However, the full potential of park partnerships to support the National Park System is currently unrealized.

An estimated 214 partners work directly with NPS across the country. These organizations are diverse in their size, mission, and scope. While some have been founded to specifically support one park unit, others serve all of the public lands in their local area or promote the legacy of a historic person, place, or theme both within and outside the park.

The National Park Foundation's purpose in commissioning this report is to better understand the state of existing park partners. These findings help to characterize partner contributions to parks, partners' organizational health, and opportunities to strengthen NPS's nonprofit partners. A stronger network of park partners, mobilized in a strategic direction, could drive significant and positive impact for NPS.

Key study objectives:

- To give park partners and their donors a better understanding of the impact that philanthropy has on our national parks and their operations
- To understand and define the structure and scope of the NPS partner community
- To help develop common assessment metrics for partners' outcomes, growth, and sustainability
- To begin to identify opportunities to enhance NPS's and National Park Foundation's engagement with partners

Key study questions:

- How are partners best categorized in terms of annual revenue, expenses, and other key indicators of performance?
- Where are the gaps in resources or tools to support the growth of park philanthropy and park partnership?
- What are the best metrics for assessing the impact of partners' support?
- What is the aggregate impact of the partners?
- What are the emerging trends in partners' business models?

The information in this report was collected using the following methodology:

- Financial analysis with data from IRS Form 990
- Literature review, including previous studies and related publications
- Online survey to solicit qualitative and quantitative information
- Individual interviews and focus groups
- Regular meetings with a working group of partner and NPS leaders to provide guidance

Partners were categorized using the following typology and criteria:

| CATEGORY | ANNUAL REVENUE |
|---|---|
| **Emerging (N=83)** | **< $50,000** |
| **Small (N=92)** | **$50,000-$1,000,000** |
| **Medium (N=25)** | **$1,000,000-$10,000,000** |
| **Large (N=14)** | **>$10,000,000** |

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

## FINANCIAL ANALYSES

- Partners generate an aggregate yearly revenue of more than $349 million.
- In 2013, partners reported providing more than $253 million (reported as cash grants and non cash assistance on tax form 990) in financial support to the parks.
- A significant proportion of the partners support two categories: education and restoration/preservation/maintenance.
- The majority of partners (81%) generate less than $1 million in revenue per year, and nearly 50% have less than $200,000 in revenue per year.
- Emerging partners have fewer diversified revenue sources, with 71% of their annual revenue coming from individual contributions.
- Large partners generate significant income from programs (37% of revenue vs. 10%-17% for other partners).
- For some partners, significant income is derived from retail operations, parking lot fees, conference rentals, and audio tours; these could provide opportunities for revenue diversification for other partners seeking growth.
- Small groups are heavily impacted by administrative expenses (43% of all expenses compared to 17% average across all partners).

## INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP THEMES

- Better shared understanding of NPS culture and nonprofit culture is needed.
- Local partnerships will benefit from national coordination.
- The organizational capacity of individual partner organizations could be stronger.
- There is strong alignment around the importance of partnership.

# DISCUSSION

This discussion is intended to contextualize the opportunities and barriers faced by each category of partner.

## EMERGING TO SMALL

***Partners could invest more in strategies for organizational growth.***

Many emerging and small partners are hesitant to shift their focus from programmatic and volunteer activities to an increased attention to fundraising, staff development, and overall organizational strategy. These partners would greatly

benefit from strong models for the "adjacent possible"—what organizations could accomplish if they advance their operations just one developmental step further. A roadmap for growth that is realistic for an emerging and small partner's size, geographic location, and capacity would be relevant and helpful.

***A stronger community of practice would be beneficial.***

More than 80% of partner organizations operate with less than $1 million in average annual revenue. These emerging and small partners are underrepresented in national discussions and affinity groups, such as the Friends Alliance. Supporting shared learning opportunities and peer networks across similar-sized organizations would contribute greatly to a thriving park partnership community.

***Nonprofit management skills have the potential to increase partner effectiveness.***

Interviewees representing both NPS and partners highlighted the need for a better understanding of nonprofits. As organizations grow, they tend to operate from project to project, while developing key skills in partnership, fundraising, and membership is often considered lower priority in favor of immediate park needs. A nonprofit management curriculum that both park and partner leaders participate in would create a sense of common purpose and alignment between partner and park staff.

## SMALL TO MEDIUM

***Partner and NPS leaders must realign their vision as the partner grows.***

Misalignment between park and partner is a common stumbling block as partners grow, but because many smaller partners feel isolated from a larger community, it is not always understood that this is a relatively common experience. Both park and nonprofit leadership could benefit from a toolkit and training on realigning their vision in order to support growth across the field.

## LARGE

***Coordination could leverage local success.***

A small group of large park partners forms a powerful cohort. These organizations have the potential to leverage their earned revenue, sponsorships, innovations, and experience to the benefit of the whole park partner system. This would require better coordination and communication

with NPS leadership and its national support organizations. Strong alignment among the most visible organizations could also help set the tone for smaller partners by modeling expectations and best practices.

## CONCLUSION

The data and impressions contained in this report have the potential to stimulate dialogue and inspire action in support of the ongoing development of a robust community of practice. The vast majority of organizations within the partner community operate on less than $1 million in annual revenue and are geographically disconnected from their peers. Assessing the differing contexts of emerging and small organizations and identifying models for what is possible would support a customized approach to assisting these partners. Strengthening the network of smaller partners, rather than investing in each individual organization, may be one way to build capacity in a large segment of the partner network.

While smaller partners would benefit from organizational development, greater understanding between partners and park staff about their approaches to operations and organizational culture is vital at all levels. Alignment around shared vision and flexibility in agreements is just as important to establishing and maintaining successful partnerships. The partnership challenges that are unique to this field manifest at every stage of growth. They can be found nationally as well as locally. Providing leaders with training in nonprofit and NPS culture, as well as tools to rebuild partnerships at times of misalignment could be another large lever to increase the effectiveness of the park partner community.

As NPS enters its second century and faces new challenges, the role of partners and their contribution to the NPS mission must strengthen and expand in order to ensure a vibrant, relevant National Park System. The 36 medium and large partner organizations would not be able to do this alone—it would take participation from partners at all levels, in many different forms. A stronger partnership community that provides robust philanthropic and support services would help to engage the public and sustain the idea of national parks into the next century. Increasing park capacity through partners may not necessarily come as the result of more fundraising—at least not immediately. Leveraging and coordinating resources that already exist could generate significant value for NPS. Developing a robust community of practice will require increased collaboration, tailored strategies, and better coordination among philanthropic and non-philanthropic partners.

# INTRODUCTION

The National Park Service (NPS) has a long history of philanthropic support, dating back to the earliest days of its founding. Philanthropists, conservationists, and stewards have historically played a critical role in advocating for the national parks and providing initial and ongoing financial and volunteer support.

Over the years, dedicated individuals began to institutionalize their commitment to the parks. Supporting organizations for individual park units have been founded under many names—friends group, association, conservancy, foundation, and trust. At their founding, these organizations are often led by a small, passionate group of volunteers. Many of these organizations have grown from humble beginnings into robust entities that have significant, positive effects at local, regional, and national levels.
Park philanthropy extends NPS's work outside the boundaries of the park, with friends groups and local partners often serving as the primary interface between the park and the local community. NPS is actively assessing its relevance to an American populace that is increasingly diverse, urban-centric, and less socioeconomically mobile. There is a significant opportunity for park partners and local organizations to help NPS respond to these trends.

Recent guidance from the Second Century Commission, the National Park Advisory Board, and NPS Director Jon Jarvis's 2011 *Call to Action*, combined with the opportunity represented by the 2016 NPS Centennial, have created a compelling vision for the future of the parks and park partnership. However, the full potential of park partnerships to support the National Park System is currently unrealized. A stronger network of park partners, mobilized in a strategic direction, could drive significant and positive change for NPS. This study represents a first step to implement a stronger partnership model to serve NPS's and partners' goals in the next century.

The estimated 214 nonprofit NPS partners are diverse in their size, mission, and scope. While some have been founded to specifically support one park unit, others serve all of the public lands in their local area, or promote the legacy of a historic person, place, or theme both within and outside the park. The purpose of this report is to better understand the state of existing park partners using financial and organizational data. These findings help to characterize partner contributions to parks, partners' organizational health, and opportunities to strengthen NPS's nonprofit partners.

Key study objectives:

- To give park partners and their donors a better understanding of the impact that philanthropy has on our national parks and their operations
- To understand and define the structure and scope of the NPS partner community
- To help develop common assessment metrics for partners' outcomes, growth, and sustainability
- To begin to identify opportunities to enhance NPS's and the National Park Foundation's engagement with partners

Key study questions:

- How are partners best categorized in terms of annual revenue, expenses, and other key indicators of performance?
- Where are the gaps in resources or tools to support the growth of park philanthropy and park partnership?
- What are the best metrics for assessing the impact of partners' support?
- What is the aggregate impact of the partners?
- What are the emerging trends in partners' business models?

# STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The organizations studied in this report include nonprofit philanthropic and programmatic partners to the national parks. These are sometimes categorized as friends groups, cooperating associations, foundations, conservancies, or trusts. For brevity, the study uses the neutral term "partners" to refer to this cohort. It should be noted that partners, in the context of this study, is not intended to include concessionaires, contractors, corporate partners, or other for-profit companies, although these entities are often important partners to the park service.

The study identified 214 organizations that provide direct support to NPS and/or its individual park units. The initial basis of the selection criteria was a list of 226 partners provided by the National Park Foundation (NPF). Of this list, 10 groups were deemed inactive with revoked IRS 501(c)(3) status, and two groups were excluded because they were not considered philanthropic partners. The remaining 214 groups formed the basis for the study cohort (see Appendix B for a full list of partners included in this study).

Financial information was gathered for each of these organizations, and 99 of the organizations completed a survey that provided information on programmatic activity and operations. Personal interviews with 13 partners and NPS staff contributed key insights about the current field of park partnership. Additionally, this report includes data from focus groups that were conducted by Potrero Group on behalf of NPF in July 2014.

This report focused on what are widely considered to be traditional park partners. It is not intended to be an exhaustive assessment of the various community organizations, broader youth and education partners, or other local clubs and interest groups that play an important role in the overall ecosystem of park support. Additionally, the report is intentionally focused on the health and function of the nonprofit partner community, and less on NPS's partnership capacity. Though the importance of the relationship between partners and local NPS leadership is noted throughout, a deep analysis of partnership dynamics between NPS and its partners—while important—falls outside the scope of this study.

# METHODOLOGY

The research methodology included interviews, focus groups, a comprehensive online survey, and a detailed collection and examination of organizational financial information (see Appendix C for a detailed description of the methodological approach used). Partner categorization criteria are based on publicly accessible data.

The research included the following:

- Financial analysis of data from IRS Form 990
- Literature review, including previous studies and related publications
- Online survey to solicit qualitative and quantitative information
- Individual interviews and focus groups
- Regular meetings with a working group of partners and NPS leaders to provide guidance

## DATA COLLECTION

Data was gathered from the following sources:

- GuideStar, Foundation Center, GrantSpace, NonProfitFacts, and web-based research
- IRS Form 990 (2008-2014) (990, 990EZ, 990N, 990PF)
- Annual reports
- Organizations' websites
- Social media
- NPS FY 2015 Greenbook budget file

To address the challenge of making comparisons across groups when year-to-year data often differed greatly, multi-year data was averaged and used as the basis for financial comparisons. This analysis addressed the issue of differing fiscal years, as well as the variability that is inherent in nonprofit accounting.

## ONLINE SURVEY

A 55-question online survey was sent via email to 214 organizations, based on the email list provided by NPF (see Appendix D for survey questions). Ninety-nine organizations responded to the survey request (a 46% response rate). This response rate is similar to previous surveys conducted by NPF.

The following limitations were noted regarding the survey:

- In the last two years of financial reporting, 44% of the cohort did not declare any employees. It is assumed that the responsibility for filling out the survey would fall on the board of directors for these organizations. Given board meeting schedules and diffuse responsibilities, there are inherent limitations for these organizations to respond to a detailed survey.
- Several participants indicated survey fatigue. They noted that this was the third partner-focused survey in five years and questioned the value of going through the process again.

- There is no comprehensive database for partners' contact information. It is likely that a small percentage of the requests were sent to inaccurate email addresses, although the researchers worked to locate all possible contact information.

## INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUPS

Individual interviews with 13 partners and NPS staff contributed key insights about the current field of park partnership. Additionally, this report includes data from focus groups conducted by Potrero Group on behalf of NPF in July 2014. Six phone-based focus groups took place with participants from partners and other local and regional organizations.

## WORKING GROUP

To gain perspective and to validate emerging themes and trends in the data, a working group was assembled from leaders in the field. This comprised eight individuals from partner organizations, the NPS partnership office, NPF representatives, and other content experts. The group met three times over the course of the study via conference call to review research findings and provide suggestions for refinement or further assessment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review of past studies in this area indicated that numerous qualitative and quantitative studies of national park partners have been published over the past 30 years. A few highlights are listed below (see Appendix E for a more detailed presentation of this information).

- NPF conducted four large-scale surveys of national park partners in the past 22 years.
- In 2009, the NPS Midwest Region published *Making Friends: An Introduction to Building National Park Service Friends Groups*. This handbook served as a guide for NPS superintendents and staff, as well as interested community members, who wished to create and/or strengthen friends groups. This was followed up in 2014 with NPS's publication of a 26-page document titled *Introduction to Partnerships: A quick guide to partnering with the National Park Service*.
- The National Parks Conservation Association published *Best Practices in Friends Groups and National Parks* in 2005. This report, compiled from nearly 40 interviews with NPS and friends group staff, highlights seven best practices between NPS and friends group leadership.
- Over the years, there have been numerous other books and reports that have covered the relationships and needs of NPS and the partner community. Among the most recent was *Philanthropy and the National Park Service*, by Jacqueline Vaughn and Hanna J. Cortner (2013). This publication explores the legal and organizational frameworks of park partners and provides a descriptive narrative of the complexity of this landscape.
- The December 2015 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on NPS revenue sources includes a section on philanthropic contributions. The GAO report takes cash contributions into account and does not include non-cash assistance in the analysis.

# CATEGORIZING THE PARK PARTNER FIELD

Park partner organizations vary greatly in size. It is common among park practitioners to distinguish between larger and smaller friends groups, as their needs and perspectives often differ significantly. To aid analysis and discussion throughout this study, partners are categorized by annual revenue (averaged over a five-year period).

There are limitations with this categorization. Organizations may differ more by their mission focus or geographic scope than by their revenue. Thematic criteria, such as civil rights focused parks or urban-based parks, could also be used to create more nuanced categories. In addition, the following criteria could make for more relevant comparisons: leadership tenure, dollars raised per park unit budget, length of service, geographic designations, or projects completed per work plan. It is beyond the scope of this study to take these elements into consideration, but this level of analysis could serve as the basis for further study.

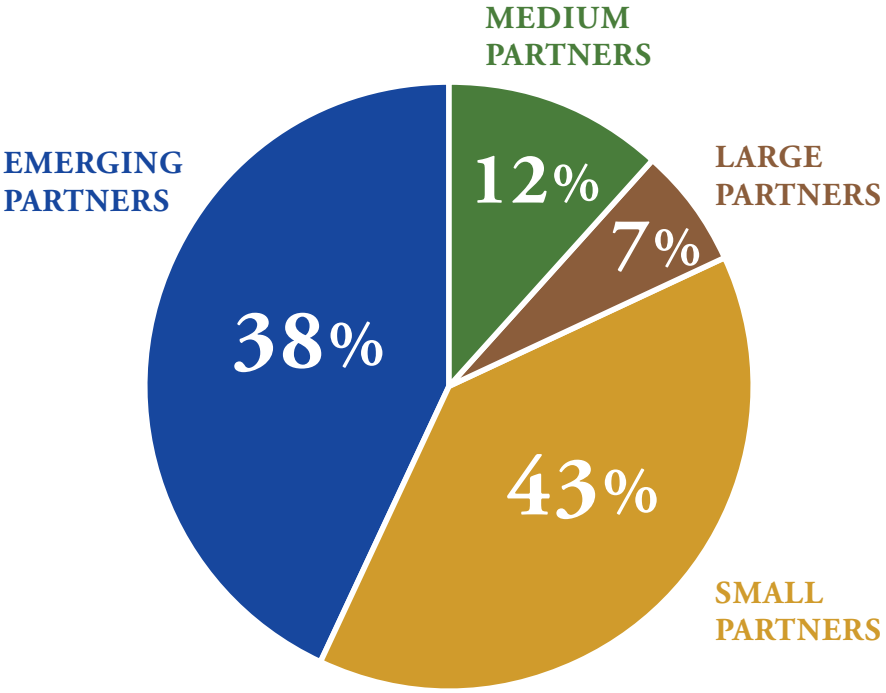
## FRIENDS GROUP VS. COOPERATING ASSOCIATION

**The fundamental differences between friends groups and cooperating associations are the focus of their mission and the source of their income. Friends groups generally focus on providing support for the overall mission of the park. Funds to support their work come from fundraising, membership, special events, and perhaps from earned income generated through online or other off-site sales venues (i.e., not in the park). Cooperating associations have a specific mission focus to provide program and financial support to NPS in the areas of education, interpretation, and research. The income to support these activities is generated in large part from the sale of interpretive and educational items in park visitor center retail operations. Only cooperating associations may operate these facilities.**

**Some nonprofit organizations partner with NPS to take on the function of both a friends group and a cooperating association. Nine organizations operate in a dual role today. Some of the friends groups and cooperating associations at larger parks, including Yosemite and Yellowstone, have merged in recent years or are in the process of merging.**

**Several leaders have questioned the appropriateness of using the typology of "friends groups" and "cooperating associations," given the changes mentioned above and the evolving business models and approaches of nonprofit support organizations. These leaders recommend adopting the name "partner" for all nonprofit organizations that support NPS. This may not provide a clear typology of groups, though it may serve to reduce the confusion between friends groups and cooperating associations.**

# PARK PARTNER CATEGORIES




## EMERGING PARTNERS

Less than $50k* in annual revenue

*83 organizations*

- Little financial data available
- Often volunteer run
- Benefit from organizational development and training
- Better understanding of these groups is needed

## SMALL PARTNERS

$50,000 - $1,000,000 in annual revenue

*92 organizations*

- Can lose sight of national significance of their work
- Need mentorship and stronger community of practice
- Need to develop strong sense of partnership and shared vision with park

## MEDIUM PARTNERS

$1M - $10M in annual revenue

*25 organizations*

- Continuing need for alignment with park leadership
- Growth should be strategic
- Leverage larger funding and collaboration opportunities

## LARGE PARTNERS

More than $10M in annual revenue

*14 organizations*

- Filling multiple roles for park
- Stretching the definition of "friends group"
- Bureaucratic environment is a challenge

* The $50,000 threshold was chosen based on IRS reporting guidelines. Any nonprofit organization with less than $50,000 in revenue is not required to submit IRS Form 990 to provide information on their mission, programs, and finances.

# STATUS AND TRENDS

## SUMMARY: FINANCIAL ANALYSES

- Partners generate an aggregate yearly revenue of more than $349 million.
- In 2013, partners reported providing more than $253 million (reported as cash grants and non cash assistance on tax form 990) in financia support to the parks.
- A significant proportion of the partners support two categories: education and restoration/preservation/maintenance.
- The majority of partners (81%) generate less than $1 million in revenue per year, and nearly 50% have less than $200,000 in revenue per year.
- There appears to be little relationship between partner budget size and park budget size.
- Emerging partners have fewer diversified revenue sources, with 71% of their revenue coming from single revenue streams.
- Large partners generate significant income from programs (37% of revenue vs. 10%-17% for other partners).
- For some partners, significant income is derived from retail operations, parking lot fees, conference rentals, and audio tours; these could provide opportunities for revenue diversification for other partners seeking growth. There are still unresolved questions about whether these activities encroach on acquisition regulations and contracting policies.
- Small groups are heavily impacted by administrative expenses (43% of all expenses compared to 17% average across all partners).

## PARTNER TYPES

Friends groups remain the predominant partnership type in the field (57% of all partners), particularly among emerging organizations (76%). Medium and small organizations are more likely than emerging and large organizations to be cooperating associations (32% and 27% vs. 1% and 6%, respectively).

Hybrids (organizations that are both a friends group and cooperating association) are more common among medium and large partners (16% and 19%, respectively) than emerging and small partners (0% and 2%, respectively). Some industry leaders noted a trend toward consolidation of friends groups and cooperating associations, which could explain why hybrid organizations appear more commonly among the larger groups. Further research on the lifecycle of these organizations is needed to confirm this trend.

## MISSION DIVERSITY

The diversity of mission focus across the cohort of 214 partners is substantial. Some partners

*TABLE 1.* **PARTNERSHIP TYPES BY CATEGORY**

| PARTNER CATEGORY | FRIENDS GROUP | COOPERATING ASSOCIATION | FRIENDS GROUP / COOPERATING ASSOCIATION | OTHER* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Emerging (N=83)** | **76% (63)** | **1% (1)** | **0% (0)** | **23% (19)** |
| **Small (N=92)** | **48% (44)** | **27% (25)** | **2% (2)** | **23% (21)** |
| **Medium (N=25)** | **36% (9)** | **32% (8)** | **16% (4)** | **16% (4)** |
| **Large (N=14)** | **56% (7)** | **6% (1)** | **19% (3)** | **19% (3)** |
| **ALL PARTNERS (N=214)** | **57% (123)** | **16% (35)** | **4% (9)** | **23% (47)** |

* Examples of partners falling into the *Other* category include: friends groups with no formal agreement with the NPS, education partners, trusts, foundations, and land trusts.

champion a theme or historic person associated with an NPS site, or serve multiple public lands in their region and not solely the national parks. For many, involvement with an NPS site is only a small part of their activities.

Examples:

- The First Flight Foundation's mission is to champion the Wright brothers' legacy in North Carolina, sometimes, but not always, serving the Wright Brothers National Memorial. They collaborated with the NPS to raise funds for capital improvements at the Memorial and to hold the First Flight Centennial, but more recently have raised money to donate the 1911 glider to the North Carolina Museum of History—a significant achievement unrelated to NPS.
- Alaska Geographic is involved with almost all of the public lands in Alaska. There are many NPS sites supported by the organization, but its service area includes many national wildlife refuges, national forests, and state parks.
- The Intermountain Natural History Association is involved with two NPS monuments and twelve other Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management sites, serving the public scenic lands in their region.
- The Assateague Coastal Trust serves the entire Atlantic Coastal Bays watershed, which includes the eastern portions of Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. The Assateague Island National Seashore is only a small part of their service area.

## REVENUE

Partners generate an aggregate yearly revenue of $349 million. Large partners dominate these earnings, with the combined revenue of the largest 14 organizations comprising more than the remaining 200 organizations combined.

Over 80% of the partners are emerging or small, with 175 of 214 reporting less than $1 million in annual revenue. Of those organizations, the vast majority are concentrated toward the bottom of the distribution, with more than one-third earning less than $50,000 annually.

There is not a strong relationship between a park's budget and the size of its partner's annual revenue. The relationship between a partner's financial strength and the support it provides for a park unit's operations is an area that would benefit from further research. Smaller partners may make smaller contributions to their partner

park, but this support may play a crucial role in enhancing visitor experience. Assessing the effect of a partner's operational efficiency on a park unit's deferred maintenance backlog or other specific park need would provide insight into the direct impact of these relationships.

## FINANCIAL GOALS

Most partners mentioned that their primary goals were fundraising and financial stability. These comments suggest that partners want to focus on sustainable and diversified revenue sources to decrease the reliance on single source income streams such as grants, public funding, and sales.

Many partners cited meeting or exceeding financial goals among their biggest successes last year. These successes included fundraising, increased sales, partnering with better-funded organizations, and obtaining grants. One survey respondent noted that they had the largest fundraising year in the organization's history. Another said that finding donors who wanted to make major gifts was a significant measure of success for them last year.

## REVENUE SOURCES

For many partners, diversified income sources are an important component of their financial health. Earned revenue, including parking lot fees, successful retail operations, conference rentals, or audio tours, is providing significant stability to a number of partners in this study.

***Individual contributions.*** Contributions (e.g., membership fees, gifts, and donations) make up a large component (71%) of emerging partners' revenue, as compared to revenues of other partner categories (36%–41%). The importance of individual contributions as a revenue source is fairly consistent across small, medium, and large partners. Many groups stated that increasing membership was a primary strategic focus for their organization.

*TABLE 2.* **INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

| PARTNER CATEGORY | TOTAL $ | AVERAGE PER PARTNER | % OF TOTAL REVENUE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Emerging | $1,171,118 | $14,110 | 71% |
| Small | $23,847,782 | $259,215 | 41% |
| Medium | $37,334,899 | $1,493,396 | 41% |
| Large | $71,225,100 | $5,087,507 | 36% |
| ALL PARTNERS | $133,578,899 | | 38% |

***Sales.*** Medium partners generate a greater percentage of their revenue (26%) through retail sales than any other partner (6%–17%).

*TABLE 3.* **RETAIL SALES**

| PARTNER CATEGORY | TOTAL $ | AVERAGE PER PARTNER | % OF TOTAL REVENUE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Emerging | $103,277 | $1,244 | 6% |
| Small | $10,057,529 | $116,948 | 17% |
| Medium | $23,704,552 | $948,182 | 26% |
| Large | $34,004,645 | $2,428,903 | 17% |
| ALL PARTNERS | $67,870,003 | | 19% |

***Government grants.*** Small partners receive a greater proportion of their revenue (20%) through government grants than any other group (4%–13%).

*TABLE 4.* **GOVERNMENT GRANTS**

| PARTNER CATEGORY | TOTAL $ | AVERAGE PER PARTNER | % OF TOTAL REVENUE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Emerging | $74,045 | $1,234 | 4% |
| Small | $11,364,733 | $123,530 | 20% |
| Medium | $12,246,164 | $489,847 | 13% |
| Large | $11,335,729 | $809,695 | 6% |
| ALL PARTNERS | $35,020,671 | | 10% |

***Program income.*** Program income can include revenue from a wide variety of other activities that serve members of the public, such as tours, education programs, and summer camps. Programs are a particularly important revenue source for large partners (37% of total revenue) in comparison to the other partner categories (10%–17%).

*TABLE 5.* **PROGRAM INCOME**

| PARTNER CATEGORY | TOTAL $ | AVERAGE PER PARTNER | % OF TOTAL REVENUE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Emerging | $168,645 | $2,032 | 10% |
| Small | $9,621,904 | $104,586 | 17% |
| Medium | $14,449,933 | $577,997 | 16% |
| Large | $72,010,897 | $5,143,635 | 37% |
| ALL PARTNERS | $96,251,379 | | 28% |

# AID TO PARKS

Aid to parks is often distributed based on an agreement between park unit leadership and the local partner. One partner described this process in the following way: "The National Park Service submits an annual work plan for the year; the budget includes the specific projects that the [partner's] funds will support. The partner organization['s] board then approves projects from the annual work plan and makes funds available to the National Park Service." For others, the process of agreeing on projects and providing aid is more informal, taking place on an as-needed basis.

For the current study, 174 partners reported on the amount and type of financial support that was provided to the park(s) they supported in 2013 (Table 6). This is reported on Form 990 as "program service", an expense for the organization. It can represent a blend of grants given to the park and non-cash assistance (such as staff or equipment) to which a dollar value is assigned.

*TABLE 6.* **AID TO PARKS**

| PARTNER CATEGORY | AVERAGE PER PARTNER | TOTAL $ |
|---|---|---|
| Emerging | $40,578 | $1,866,590 |
| Small | $422,686 | $38,041,722 |
| Medium | $2,791,813 | $67,003,503 |
| Large | $10,447,474 | $146,264,629 |
| ALL PARTNERS | | $253,176,444 |

## DISTRIBUTION OF AID BY ACTIVITY SUPPORTED

The following two tables give an indication of where the partners focus their time, money, and staff. Table 7 shows the percentage of partners that focus on a particular activity in support of the park. Table 8 shows the percentage of partners that emphasize certain operational activities as they pursue their strategic goals.

The majority of partners give financial and staff support for education, and over half contribute to restoration/preservation/maintenance. This distribution is strongly aligned with NPS's dual mission of public engagement and preservation. Additional support is spread fairly evenly across a number of other impact areas.

## *TABLE 7.* PARK ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY PARTNERS

| ACTIVITY | % OF ORGANIZATIONS SURVEYED |
|---|---|
| Education | 60% |
| Restoration/preservation/ maintenance | 52% |
| Youth engagement/school outreach | 33% |
| Tours/interpretation | 31% |
| Visitor experience | 30% |
| Events | 29% |
| Research | 24% |
| Publications | 22% |
| Social media | 21% |
| Environment/conservation/ protection | 21% |
| Diversity and inclusion | 17% |

## *TABLE 8.* PERCENT OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT DESCRIBE THE ACTIVITY AS IMPORTANT

| ACTIVITY | % OF ORGANIZATIONS REPORTING |
|---|---|
| Fundraising | 67% |
| Educational programming | 60% |
| Youth engagement/school outreach | 57% |
| Improvements to visitor experience | 55% |
| Restoration/preservation/maintenance | 52% |
| Diversity and inclusion | 36% |
| Trail installation/maintenance | 32% |
| Events | 32% |
| Tours/interpretation | 31% |
| Publishing, printing, distribution of materials | 31% |
| Retail operations | 26% |
| Increasing plant and/or animal diversity; environmental sustainability | 22% |
| Docent or volunteer training | 11% |
| Research | 9% |

## ADMINISTRATIVE AND FUNDRAISING EXPENSES

Many of the emerging partners are overseen by all-volunteer, working boards (how many organizations do employ staff—if any—is unknown, since these organizations are not required to file a Form 990). As a consequence, reported overhead and administrative expenses for emerging partners remain low. As small groups begin to take on more staff and administration, they are subsequently impacted by these expenses (43% of total expenses compared 5%–16% for the other partner categories). Small organizations may not have reached an economy of scale where salary and other expenses can be shared across programs. The figure may also be skewed by the fact that small partners are accounting for administrative expenses differently than other partners.

### *TABLE 9.* ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES

| PARTNER CATEGORY | TOTAL $ | AVERAGE PER PARTNER | % OF TOTAL EXPENSES |
|---|---|---|---|
| Emerging | $87,091 | $1,452 | 5% |
| Small | $22,555,888 | $245,173 | 43% |
| Medium | $10,810,577 | $432,423 | 13% |
| Large | $30,713,092 | $2,193,792 | 16% |
| ALL PARTNERS | $64,166,648 | | 20% |

Emerging partners appear to spend proportionally less on fundraising efforts compared to the other groups (2% vs. 6%–7%, respectively). Emerging partners often do not have the resources or experience to engage directly in fundraising. They depend more on individual contributions and membership growth, which can be accomplished by volunteering time "friend-raising" in the park and the community or through passive donations boxes located in the park.

While some partners indicated in the survey that they had a successful fundraising year, others indicated that maintaining a stable donor pipeline is a perennial challenge. Several mentioned that developing a donor or fundraising plan is one of their primary goals for this year.

### *TABLE 10.* FUNDRAISING EXPENSES

| PARTNER CATEGORY | TOTAL $ | AVERAGE PER PARTNER | % OF TOTAL EXPENSES |
|---|---|---|---|
| Emerging | $31,474 | $516 | 2% |
| Small | $2,958,758 | $34,404 | 6% |
| Medium | $5,593,828 | $223,753 | 7% |
| Large | $13,848,538 | $989,181 | 7% |
| ALL PARTNERS | $22,432,598 | | 7% |

## WEB PRESENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

A few groups mentioned that improving their web and media presence is an important goal and noted a focus on doing a better job at telling their story and increasing the relevance of the organization for younger audiences. Nearly all partners that responded to the survey item that asked whether or not they had a website indicated that they do (N=88, or 98%).

### *TABLE 11.* INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY EXPENSES

| PARTNER CATEGORY | TOTAL $ | AVERAGE PER PARTNER | % OF TOTAL EXPENSES |
|---|---|---|---|
| Emerging | $2,620 | $44 | 0.1% |
| Small | $283,773 | $3,941 | 1% |
| Medium | $184,518 | $7,381 | 0.2% |
| Large | $2,316,249 | $165,446 | 1% |
| ALL PARTNERS | $2,787,160 | | 1% |

# ORGANIZATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

## FOUNDING YEAR

There is a relationship between partners' founding years and their size. Most emerging and small partners were founded relatively recently, while many of the medium and large partners were founded in earlier years.

### *TABLE 12.* FOUNDING YEAR

| PARTNER CATEGORY | AVERAGE FOUNDING YEAR | RANGE |
|---|---|---|
| Emerging | 1998 | 1966-2014 |
| Small | 1987 | 1944-2011 |
| Medium | 1982 | 1933-2008 |
| Large | 1977 | 1950-2002 |

## EMPLOYEES

The following figures describe only those partners who reported employed staff on the survey and in Form 990. One hundred and twenty-three organizations reported on the number of staff they employed in 2013. Just over half (57%) of these organizations reported 1 to 20 employees, and nearly one-third (33%) noted having 1 to 5 employees. Only a few organizations mentioned that retaining or recruiting staff is an important strategic focus.

### *TABLE 13.* NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES IN 2013

| AVERAGE STAFF SIZE | NUMBER | % |
|---|---|---|
| 1 to 5 employees | 41 | 33% |
| 6 to 20 employees | 35 | 29% |
| 21 to 50 employees | 22 | 18% |
| 51 to 100 employees | 14 | 12% |
| 101 to 500 employees | 8 | 6% |
| 501+ employees | 3 | 2% |

### *TABLE 14.* AVERAGE NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES IN 2013 BY PARTNER CATEGORY

| PARTNER CATEGORY | AVERAGE NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES |
|---|---|
| Emerging | 2 |
| Small | 15 |
| Medium | 58 |
| Large | 224 |

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

While a few partners mentioned that recruiting and retaining board members is a concern for their organization, this was not indicated as a primary area of focus for most. This does not necessarily indicate that partners' boards are strong and stable, only that there are likely to be more compelling priorities for these groups. Table 15 is based on survey data and indicates the number of board members for 2015.

### *TABLE 15.* AVERAGE NUMBER OF BOARD MEMBERS IN 2015 BY PARTNER CATEGORY

| PARTNER CATEGORY | AVERAGE NUMBER OF BOARD MEMBERS |
|---|---|
| Emerging | 10 |
| Small | 15 |
| Medium | 17 |
| Large | 27 |

## EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TENURE

Based on survey data, the median tenure of executive leaders (executive directors, CEOs, and presidents) is 4.5 years, which is consistent with the tenure of nonprofit leaders in general. In a context where relationships, trust, and partnership are vital to the success of shared work and long-term goals, the fact that 59% of executive leaders in the field have a tenure of fewer than five years is a significant limitation. NPS leadership also experiences consistent turnover

at both the park unit and national level. Taken together, these factors pose ongoing challenges to park partnership. Inconsistency in leadership may cause partners to focus on rebuilding trust and momentum during frequent leadership transitions.

### *TABLE 16.* TENURE OF EXECUTIVE LEADERS

| TENURE | % OF ORGANIZATIONS |
|---|---|
| < 1 year | 10% |
| 1 - 5 years | 49% |
| 5 - 10 years | 17% |
| 10 years or more | 24% |

### *TABLE 17.* TENURE OF EXECUTIVE LEADERS BY PARTNER CATEGORY

| PARTNER CATEGORY | MEDIAN YEARS OF EXECUTIVE LEADERS | MEAN YEARS OF EXECUTIVE LEADERS |
|---|---|---|
| Emerging | 3.0 | 4.7 |
| Small | 5.0 | 7.7 |
| Medium | 4.7 | 7.4 |
| Large | 10.0 | 7.0 |
| ALL PARTNERS | 4.5 | 6.7 |

## INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP THEMES

Over the course of this project, Potrero Group interviewed individuals from both the NPS and the partner community. The themes that emerged from these conversations reflected input from the many individuals in the broader community that Potrero Group interviewed or worked closely with over the last four years.

***Better shared understanding of NPS culture and nonprofit culture is needed.***

The relationship between NPS and its partners was a consistent theme in the interviews and focus groups. Partners are seen as valuable ambassadors to local communities and can be flexible in the ways they support and enhance park services. Partners voiced concern that NPS does not always provide enough guidance or direction to support the efforts of partners, and that there are often unclear lines of responsibility between NPS and its partners.

Lack of awareness about each other's needs can contribute to challenges on both sides of the partnership. There is consensus that leaders at all levels and in all groups could improve their awareness and understanding of the organizational cultures and practices of their partners. Interview participants suggested that NPS staff often have limited experience working within nonprofit culture and fundraising environments. Likewise, survey respondents noted the need for a better understanding of the limitations, constraints, and realities of decision making within a federal agency. To increase common understanding, interviewees recommended more opportunities for training where both park management and nonprofit leaders participate side by side. With increased awareness, training, and communication, partners and NPS staff would be better able to work together to meet common goals.

Coordinated fundraising efforts between partners and NPS staff can demonstrate strong alignment to funders and can substantially increase interest in supporting the park. Engaged park staff have the potential to be important fundraising champions. NPS staff outside the superintendent role can have difficulty seeing the importance of investing time and energy into a partnership, being somewhat removed from the relationship. Several interviewees mentioned that direct contributions to park operations, such as equipment or services, help NPS staff see the importance and impact of partnership and fundraising.

***Local partnerships would benefit from national coordination.***

Partners expressed a concern that the network of park partners is not performing at its full potential. One individual stated it this way: "The fact that everyone is out for themselves is a symptom of the decentralized nature of the system." Every individual interviewed spoke extensively about the need to form stronger partnerships and to develop consistent communication from the national groups to the individual park units and local partners. As one individual stated, "NPS is a good partner, but spread thin, so [it is] sometimes less willing to be involved in [partner] engagement." There is a clear consensus that stronger, more aligned relationships between the NPS national offices and NPF, as well as a stronger emphasis on partnership at all levels between park units and their partners, is crucial for tapping into the potential impact of the combined efforts of NPS and its partners.

In focus groups, many leaders from smaller organizations reported a strong desire to communicate and collaborate with other partners in their regions and states. They expressed wanting to hear about what other organizations are doing and to share best practices and lessons learned. For many, the focus groups presented a first opportunity to communicate in this way, and many participants remarked on how grateful they felt towards NPF for providing this experience.

***Organizational capacity of individual partner organizations could be stronger.***

Below are some observations of interviewees:

> *"The landscape runs the extreme from poor performing or not performing at full capacity all the way up to those really high performing."*

> *"Many groups are small, dispersed, and geographically isolated; this yields smaller impact."*

> *"There are some large, well organized and developed friends groups; most are middling, well-meaning but not as well organized; some are very small and struggling."*

> *"There needs to be a SWAT-team assistance for struggling groups."*

The financial analysis confirms that the majority of park partners (81%) are organizations with less than $1 million in annual revenue, with 104 organizations (nearly 50% of all partners) falling under $200,000.

Many mentioned that there is a significant opportunity to create a system to share best practices and help smaller organizations see their place in a larger field of practice. Several individuals noted that NPF's Park Partners Project had provided excellent capacity-building resources to emerging and small partners over the last few years.

A number of the small to medium partners commented on the value of NPF's coaching role in helping them develop their organizational capabilities. NPF's direct, hands-on support was important and helpful for organizations that are operating with skeletal staff and are stretched to maintain current activities. NPF's ability to target suggested actions and troubleshoot problems was noted as significant and appreciated.

***There is strong alignment around the importance of partnership.***

Respondents noted that a current climate of collegiality and alignment exists that is stronger than it has ever been. Individuals across the network see unprecedented potential for collaboration, growth, and increased impact. Several NPS staff recognized the importance of the partners' relationships with local communities. One individual said, "We'd be looked at differently in different parts of the country if we didn't have these friends groups out there. They help us

have a pretty good reputation across the board, because even in the places where folks aren't fond of the federal government, there are these ambassadors." Many noted the additive value that takes place when communication between NPS and its partners is open, frequent, and aligned.

***Topics that were notably missing.***

The researchers were expecting certain themes to be discussed, but the following topics were rarely referenced in either the interviews or the survey:

- Preparing for or leveraging the NPS Centennial was not mentioned as a goal, challenge, or priority.
- Few mentioned NPS leadership transitions associated with retirement or with the 2016 election.
- There was little discussion of corporate fundraising, though some identified the need for coordination between NPF and large partners.
- No interviewees mentioned the challenges of addressing relevancy, diversity, and inclusion for both staff (NPS and partners) and visitors.

# DISCUSSION

The following observations draw on interviews and focus groups, as well as Potrero Group's years of experience working within park partnerships. This discussion is intended to provide context to the opportunities and barriers that partners face, with particular focus on small and emerging partners, which form over 80% of the partner cohort. Each of the NPS regional partnership directors and partner leaders who were interviewed mentioned that smaller groups are key to supporting most parks and would benefit from increased support.

## EMERGING
## THERE IS LITTLE DATA ON A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF PARTNERS.

Nearly 40% of park partners (83 organizations) operate with less than $50,000 in annual revenue. There is little publicly available information for these partners because they are not required to file IRS Form 990. The opportunity represented by this substantial segment of the park partner community remains unclear. There is little available information to describe the aid these partners provide to their parks or the benefits that community members derive from their presence. Some of these partners may be on the edge of dissolving, while others may be thriving with volunteers, having served the park for decades. Many are likely just beginning to serve NPS and any process to support and orient these newer partners as they grow varies from park to park and region to region.

## EMERGING TO SMALL
## PARTNERS COULD INVEST MORE IN STRATEGIES FOR ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH.

Many emerging and small partners are hesitant to sacrifice programmatic and volunteer activities for increased attention to fundraising, staff development, and overall organizational strategy. Partners with all-volunteer boards and shoestring budgets do not typically have the capacity to develop a comprehensive plan for increasing their impact on parks. As a result, these organizations do not prioritize strategic growth or seek out resources to develop their organization or their nonprofit skills. Observations from Potrero Group's past studies (the Centennial Project in 2014 and the Park Partner Project in 2015) indicate that there is a lack of understanding among emerging partners of what capacity building can do to further their organization's mission.

Many documents created to inspire park partners highlight the successes of large conservancies. However, not every partner sees itself as the next Yosemite Conservancy or Friends of Acadia—nor should they. What emerging organizations lack are strong models for the "adjacent possible"—what they can accomplish if they advance their operations just one developmental step further. A roadmap for growth that is realistic for an emerging partner's size, geographic location, and capacity would be more relevant and ultimately better embraced.

## EMERGING TO SMALL
## A STRONGER COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE WOULD BE BENEFICIAL.

More than 80% of partner organizations operate with an average annual revenue of less than $1 million. These organizations are currently underrepresented in most conversations about park philanthropy, partnership, and best practice in the field. Supporting shared learning opportunities and peer networks across similarly-sized organizations would contribute greatly to a thriving park partnership sector.

A thriving community of small and medium-sized partners would inspire emerging partners to take steps to professionalize. The sharing of best practices for growth would help emerging partners align their strategies with NPS's needs and interests. Emerging partners may be more likely to participate in events like the annual Friends Alliance meeting and other industry strengthening activities where they are likely to see peers in the community that have needs and aspirations similar to their own.

## EMERGING TO SMALL
## NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT SKILLS INCREASE EFFECTIVENESS.

Smaller partners' founding board members are often enthusiastic and passionate individuals from the local community. However, a process where friends recruit friends does not usually result in boards with a breadth of skills and experience needed to operate a nonprofit. As the organizations grow, they tend to operate from project to project, while the development of key skills in partnership, fundraising, and membership are often considered lower priority in favor of immediate park needs. Cooperating associations in particular have a hard time transitioning to a fundraising or friends group role because this is a significant shift in their business model. Leaders of these organizations bring great knowledge of park operations and federal agencies, but tend to lack fundamental background and skills in the area of nonprofit strategy and management.

Few NPS employees have deep experience running nonprofits and thus do not fully understand the challenges of nonprofit planning and fundraising. This may contribute to a lack of understanding of and alignment with partners. As one NPS interviewee mentioned, "The Park Service begins each fiscal year with a bucket it needs to empty; the nonprofit starts each year with a bucket it needs to fill." The way that funds are sourced is just one example of how partners' operational challenges fundamentally differ.

Challenges with understanding nonprofit management are also prevalent in the smaller partner organizations. Emerging and small partners may effectively develop and carry out programs year to year, but they often lack a strategic plan to add long-term value or to grow the overall capacity of the parks that they support. Interviewees representing both NPS and its partners raised the need for a better understanding of nonprofits generally. A nonprofit management curriculum, particularly targeting the 104 organizations with under $200,000 in annual revenue, would greatly benefit these organizations and the parks they serve. Participating in the program together would create a sense of common purpose and alignment between partner and park staff, as well as help build internal awareness and knowledge about the nonprofit field throughout NPS.

## SMALL TO MEDIUM
## PARTNER AND NPS LEADERS MUST REALIGN THEIR VISION AS THE PARTNER GROWS.

As partners grow from small to medium organizations, the momentum of past successes supports their ability to fundraise. Sometimes, however, the appetite of the partner organizations to pursue increasingly larger projects falls out of alignment with the vision held by park superintendents. Misalignment is also common in environments where there is more than one primary partner, such as a friends group as well as a cooperating association. Because many smaller partners feel isolated from a larger community, it is not always understood that disagreement between parks and their partners on strategy and direction is a relatively common experience.

When parks and their partners lose sight of their common purpose, the impact of their partnership is diminished. Both park and nonprofit leadership could benefit from a toolkit and training on how to bring their organizations back into alignment. With a shared vision and clear roles, it is easier for partners to build agreements around projects, programs, and strategies. During the 2015 Park Partner Project, Potrero Group utilized a "ladder of agreements" tool to guide partner conversations and help leaders get back on the same page.

### LADDER OF AGREEMENTS TOOL

**We agree to *trust* our partners' good intentions and competent execution.**

**We agree to *collaborate* to bolster our partners' efforts wherever possible.**

**We agree on the broad *strategies* that each partner will bring to its role.**

**We agree on the *roles* that each of our organizations will play in realizing this vision.**

**We agree on a *compelling vision* for the future of the park.**

**We agree that *all of our work is done in service of the park.***

Disagreement and misunderstanding are an inevitable aspect of partnership, but they need not halt or destroy progress altogether. Tools and training for both park and partner staff that build cross-organizational understanding and better alignment would help to address common stumbling blocks.

## LARGE
## COORDINATION COULD LEVERAGE LOCAL SUCCESS.

Large organizations have enormous impact on the quality and visitor experience of their partner parks. Large organizations tend to blend the roles of friends groups and cooperating associations, pairing program and other earned revenue with significant fundraising capacity. They are well positioned to seek funding and sponsorships from national organizations since many of the large partners are located in or near affluent urban centers. Increasingly, these organizations are using their scale and flexibility to engage in novel partnerships. They have begun to play active roles in national movements promoting health, climate change education, environmental justice, and social equity.

The reach and influence of these larger partners can be confusing to a system that is more accustomed to discrete hierarchies and structured roles. However, this small cohort of powerful partners can leverage their earned revenue, sponsorships, innovation, and experience to the benefit of the whole system, rather than compete with national efforts. These organizations have overcome many of the stumbling blocks that partners face as they grow, which can provide critical institutional

knowledge and perspective to the field. Their contributions as strategic experts and problem solvers further underscore their importance to the system of park partners.

The entire system can benefit from better coordination and communication between the large partners, NPS leadership, and national support organizations. Additionally, strong alignment among the most visible organizations can help set the tone for smaller, local partners by modeling expectations and best practices.

## NON-PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERS

Examples below describe four key areas of support that augment the contributions of NPS's direct partners. Non-philanthropic partners have unique relationships to NPS, and their business models do not fit into the traditional partner framework. Because they do not typically provide direct aid to the parks, they have been excluded from the financial and survey analyses in this report. However, partnerships with these organizations greatly leverage park resources and deserve recognition.

The organizations mentioned are meant to serve as exemplars and do not represent an exhaustive list of the active partners in each category. Further analysis in the field of park partnership could include a better understanding of these organizations' contributions, both nationally and at the park unit level. Until the full ecosystem of park partnership is mapped in detail, it will be unclear how these partners can best fill critical needs and service gaps.

### SERVICE

Service organizations provide technical assistance across multiple federal agencies. These partners

include the Student Conservation Association, Groundwork USA, and the many state and local conservation corps throughout the country. NPS and other agencies fund these organizations to accomplish service-oriented projects, such as trail maintenance. In turn, these organizations provide additional youth development opportunities, pathways for employment in the sector, and channels that engage underserved audiences. While their fee-for-service relationship to public lands sets them apart from philanthropic organizations, the ability of service groups to leverage park resources makes them important contributing partners.

## EDUCATION

Education organizations such as NatureBridge and North Cascades Institute help to expand the reach of NPS. In some places, local YMCAs and Boys & Girls Clubs have developed close partnerships with park units as well. While these organizations typically do not make direct financial contributions to NPS, they do leverage philanthropic investments in education and youth development. This type of strategic partnership helps to create profound relationships with the next generation of park supporters and contributes greatly to NPS's mission to educate the public.

## CONSERVATION

Organizations such as the Conservation Fund, the Nature Conservancy, and land trusts contribute immensely to the natural resource protection mission of NPS. Landscape planning, land acquisition, technical expertise, and research by such organizations have helped lay the groundwork for NPS, the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and others to protect and manage natural resources across multiple jurisdictions. Conservation organizations will continue to be important partners in conservation planning long into the future.

## ADVOCACY

Organizations such as the Sierra Club, the National Parks Conservation Association, and the National Wildlife Federation play important advocacy roles in support of resource protection. These organizations provide avenues for citizens concerned about natural and cultural resources to get involved politically, taking positions on legislation and policy that are not appropriate for NPS leadership and staff to assume. At an organizational level, the Association of Partners for Public Lands (APPL) acts as the advocacy voice for the nonprofit and partner community itself. APPL also provides development and training for nonprofit leaders supporting our public lands.

# FUTURE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions did not fall within the scope of this study, but could provide deeper insights to improve the field of park partnership, philanthropy, and the broader network of park support.

- What is the life cycle of partner organizations? Why and how do partner organizations evolve, dissolve, and/or merge?
- In addition to traditional partners, what is the full set of partners supporting each park unit?
- How many emerging and small partners are new and growing, stable and well established, or at risk of closing their doors?
- What are the mechanisms and tools that would best support cross-organizational collaboration?
- What system of mentorship could help a community of practice to take hold?
- What are the successful business models that partners are utilizing to stabilize their finances, and how can these be replicated?
- What are the best ways to categorize resource- or context-specific partners (e.g., urban parks, battlefield parks, historical sites, internment camps)?
- What are the unique opportunities and needs of partners in each category, and do they warrant their own communities of practice?
- What opportunities exist for increased engagement with non-philanthropic partners?

# CONCLUSION

The vast majority of organizations within the partner community operate on less than $1 million in annual revenue and are geographically disconnected from their peers. Supporting a network of smaller partners to learn from each other and share best practices, rather than investing in each individual organization, may be one way to build capacity in a large segment of the network. One interviewee suggested that the administration of the smaller partners be centralized, allowing them to focus more of their time providing local value and building membership. Regardless of the intervention, it should be more widely understood that the partner community is not an even mix of emerging, small, medium, and large organizations. A program that helps to systematically move emerging organizations above the $50,000 revenue threshold, or that helps small organizations move through growth benchmarks in order to reach $1 million in annual revenue, would help to fundamentally change the park partner landscape.

A central challenge for NPF and NPS highlighted in this report is how to better engage partners at all levels. Partners serving large, urban parks may be fundamentally different than partners comprised of volunteers supporting small, rural parks. Assessing the differing contexts of emerging and small organizations and identifying models that share similarities will support a customized approach to developing these partners. The life cycle of partner organizations—the conditions that lead them to form, grow, merge, or dissolve—has also never been fully mapped. Using case studies to examine why and how partners develop and change would be incredibly instructive. This information could provide partners at different stages with a roadmap and specific tools to develop their organizational capacity.

While smaller partners are in need of organizational development, greater understanding between nonprofit partners and park service culture is also vital. Alignment around shared vision and flexibility in agreements is just as important to setting these partners up for success. The partnership challenges that are unique to this field manifest at every stage of growth, and can be found nationally as well as locally. Providing leaders with training in organizational cultures and tools to rebuild the partnership at times of misalignment could be another large lever to increase the effectiveness of the park partner system as a whole.

As NPS enters its second century and faces new challenges, the role of partners and their contributions to NPS's mission must strengthen and expand in order to ensure a vibrant, relevant National Park System. The 39 medium and large partner organizations will not be able to do this alone—it will take participation from partners at all levels, in many different forms. Although it may be easiest to describe park

partnership in terms of financial contributions raised for the parks, a less transactional view of partnership seems to be on the rise. Expanding the definition of partnership value to include programs, personnel, volunteerism, and community relationships better describes the current network supporting the national park community and provides a more solid foundation on which to support NPS in the future. A shift in the partnership culture from dollars to value could provide smaller partners with more tangible and realistic goals. It would also create a platform to attract new and non-philanthropic partners to assist NPS in its next century of service.

A stronger community of practice that provides robust philanthropic and support services would help to engage the public and sustain national parks into the next century. Increasing park capacity through partners may not necessarily come as the result of more fundraising—at least not immediately. Leveraging and coordinating resources that already exist could generate huge value for NPS. This will require more focused investment, tailored strategies, better coordination, and more open collaboration among philanthropic and non-philanthropic partners.

# APPENDIX A: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

***Potrero Group thanks the following individuals and organizations for their time and expertise in support of this project.***

**NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION**

Will Shafroth, President and CEO
Susan Newton, SVP Grants and Programs
Mark DeSantis, Program Manager, Community Partnerships

**ADVISORY WORKING GROUP MEMBERS**

Deb Yandala, Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park; National Park Friends Alliance
Jeff Reinbold, Office of Partnerships and Civic Engagement, NPS
Joanne Hanley, Gettysburg Foundation
Joette Langianese, Friends of Arches and Canyonlands Parks
Katie Nyberg, Mississippi Park Connection
Milton Chen, NPS National Advisory Board
Reginald Chapple, Office of Partnerships and Philanthropy, NPS
Susan Newton, National Park Foundation

**INTERVIEWEES AND REVIEWERS**

Chris Abbett, Southeast Region, NPS
Dan Puskar, Association of Partners for Public Lands
Deb Yandala, Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park and National Park Friends Alliance
Derrick Crandall, American Recreation Coalition
Diane Keith, Midwest Region, NPS
Fran Dean, Yosemite Conservancy
Jackie Dostourian, Office of Partnerships and Philanthropy, NPS
Jeff Reinbold, Office of Partnerships and Civic Engagement, NPS
Joette Langianese, Friends of Arches and Canyonlands Parks
Jonathon Jarvis, Director, NPS
Katie Nyberg, Mississippi Park Connection
Kevin Kilcullen, National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Krista Muddle, Intermountain Region, NPS
Mark Wenzler, National Parks Conservation Association
Paul DePrey, Salem Maritime Historic Sites, NPS
Peggy O'Dell, Deputy Director, NPS
Ray Murray, Pacific West Region, NPS
Reginald Chapple, Office of Partnerships and Philanthropy, NPS
Susan Sherman, Shenandoah National Park Trust
Woody Smeck, Sequoia and Kings Canyon, NPS

## FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Amanda Jorgenson, Dumbarton Oaks Park Conservancy

Arvind Manocha, Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts

Bonnie O'Donnell, Grand Canyon Association

Caroline Cunningham, Trust for the National Mall

Carolyn Ward, Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation

Catherine Patterson, Rural Plains Foundation

Charley Money, Rocky Mountain Nature Association

Christina Hausman, Voyageurs National Park Association

Courtney Lyons-Garcia, Friends of Big Bend National Park

David Grove, Jefferson National Parks Association

David MacDonald, Friends of Acadia

Deb Yandala, Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park

Diana McDaniel, Friends of Port Chicago National Memorial

Don Finefrock, South Florida National Parks Trust

Ed Deaton, Guilford Battleground Company

Elisabeth "Betsy" Lanjuin, Friends of Minuteman National Park

Elizabeth Fien, Friends of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park

Greg Moore, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy

Holly Rotondi, Friends of the National WWII Memorial

James Cook, Western National Parks Association

Jason Morris, NatureBridge

Jim Hart, Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Joanne Hanley, Gettysburg Foundation

Joe Kessler, Friends of Virgin Islands National Park

Joette Langianese, Friends of Arches and Canyonlands Parks

Karen Kress, Yellowstone Park Foundation

Katie Nyberg, Mississippi River Fund

Kim Mills, Grand Teton National Park Foundation

Laurie Ward, Washington's National Park Fund

Leonard Zax, Hamilton Partnership for Paterson

Lyman Hafen, Zion National Park Foundation

Mark Preiss, Glacier National Park Conservancy

Mason Williams, Friends of Cape Lookout National Seashore

Matt Fleischer, Rock Creek Conservancy

Meredith Forster, Glen Echo Park Partnership for Arts and Culture, Inc.

Mike Tollefson, Yosemite Conservancy

Philip Griffiths, Boston Harbor Island Alliance

Rebecca Trafton, Dumbarton Oaks Park Conservancy

Robert Newtson, Friends of Saguaro National Park

Sue Cochrane, Appomattox 1865 Foundation

Sue Densmore, Friends of the Oregon Caves and Chateau

Susan Schroeder, Grand Canyon Association

# APPENDIX B: ORGANIZATIONS IN PARTNER COHORT

Alaska Geographic
Alice Ferguson Foundation
Alliance to Preserve the Civil War Defenses of Washington
Anza Trail Coalition of Arizona
Anza Trail Foundation
Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Appomattox 1865 Foundation
Assateague Coastal Trust
Assateague Island Alliance
Association of Partners for Public Lands
Atomic Heritage Foundation
Aviation Heritage Foundation
Badlands Natural History Association
Beatrix Farrand Garden Association
Big Thicket Association
Black Hills Parks and Forest Association
Blue Ridge Parkway Association
Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation
Boston Harbor Island Alliance
Bryce Canyon Natural History Association
Buffalo National River Partners
C&O Canal Trust
Cabrillo National Monument Conservancy
Cabrillo National Monument Foundation
California Parks and Recreation Society
Canyonlands Natural History Association
Carlsbad Caverns Guadalupe Mountains Association
Chattahoochee Parks Conservancy
Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Association
Chesapeake Conservancy
Colorado National Monument Association
Conservancy of Cuyahoga Valley National Park
Craters of the Moon Natural History Association
Death Valley Natural History Association
Denali Education Center
Discover Your Northwest
Dumbarton Oaks Park Conservancy
Dunes National Park Association
Eastern National
Edison Innovation Foundation
Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill
Essex National Heritage Commission
Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society
First Flight Foundation
Ford's Theatre Society
Fort Laramie Historical Association
Fort Larned Old Guard
Fort Mason Center
Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie Historic Trust
Fort Vancouver National Trust
Friends of Acadia
Friends of Andersonville
Friends of Arches and the Canyonlands Parks: The Bates Wilson Legacy Fund
Friends of Big Bend National Park
Friends of Booker T. Washington National Monument
Friends of Canaveral National Seashore
Friends of Cape Lookout National Seashore
Friends of Carl Sandburg at Connemara
Friends of Casa Grande Ruins
Friends of Chevy Chase Circle
Friends of Claude Moore Colonial Farm at Turkey Run
Friends of Congaree Swamp
Friends of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, Inc.
Friends of Delaware Water Gap Recreation Area
Friends of Dyke Marsh
Friends of Fairsted
Friends of Flight 93 National Memorial
Friends of Fordyce
Friends of Fort Davis National Historic Site
Friends of Fort McHenry
Friends of Green Spring

Friends of Haleakala National Park
Friends of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park
Friends of Historic Great Falls Tavern
Friends of Homestead National Monument of America
Friends of Horseshoe Bend
Friends of Hubbell Trading Post NHS
Friends of Independence National Historical Park
Friends of James A. Garfield NHS
Friends of Johnstown Flood National Memorial
Friends of Katmai National Park and Preserve
Friends of Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens
Friends of Kennicott, Inc.
Friends of Lake Meredith and Alibates
Friends of Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park
Friends of Minidoka
Friends of Minute Man National Park
Friends of Moccasin Bend National Park
Friends of Pecos National Historical Park
Friends of Peirce Mill
Friends of Port Chicago National Memorial
Friends of Portsmouth Island
Friends of Saguaro National Park
Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes
Friends of Still Creek
Friends of Stones River National Battlefield
Friends of the Blue Ridge Parkway
Friends of the Cape Cod National Seashore
Friends of the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park
Friends of the Dunes
Friends of the Florissant Fossil Beds
Friends of the Little Bighorn Battlefield
Friends of the National Arboretum
Friends of the National World War II Memorial
Friends of the Oregon Caves and Chateau
Friends of the Smokies
Friends of the Vicksburg National Military Park and Campaign
Friends of the Wekiva River
Friends of Valley Forge Park
Friends of Virgin Islands National Park
Friends of Wilderness Battlefield
Friends of Wind Cave
Friends of Yellow Barn Studio at Glen Echo Park
Friendship Hill Association
Georgetown Heritage
Gettysburg Foundation
Glacier National Park Conservancy
Glen Canyon Natural History Association
Glen Echo Park Partnership for Arts and Culture
Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy
Grand Canyon Association
Grand Teton Association
Grand Teton National Park Foundation
Grant-Kohrs Ranch Foundation
Great Smoky Mountains Association
Groundwork Anacostia
Hamilton Partnership for Paterson
Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation
Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Association
Historic Hampton
Historic Philadelphia
Ice Age Trail Alliance
Intermountain Natural History Association
Isle Royale and Keweenaw Parks Association
Isle Royale Moose and Wolf Study
Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i
Jefferson National Parks Association
John Muir Memorial Association
Joshua Tree National Park Association
Lackawanna Heritage Valley Association
Lassen Park Foundation
Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation
Living Classrooms Foundation
Los Compadres de San Antonio Missions National Historical Park
Manassas Battlefield Trust
Manitou Island Memorial Society
Manzanar History Association
Mesa Verde Foundation
Mesa Verde Museum Association
Mississippi River Fund (now Mississippi Park Connection)
Mojave National Preserve Conservancy
Mount Rushmore National Memorial Society
Muir Heritage Land Trust
Natchez Trace Tourism Compact
National Parks of Lake Superior Foundation
National Parks of New York Harbor Conservancy
National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance
Nature Fund for National Parks
NatureBridge
North Cascades Institute
North Country Trail Association
Oklahoma City Memorial and Museum
Outside Las Vegas Foundation

Overmountain Victory Trail Association
Pacific Historic Parks
Pea Ridge National Military Park Foundation
Petrified Forest Museum Association
Pinnacles Partnership
Point Reyes National Seashore Association
Potomac Appalachian Trail Club
Potomac Conservancy
Preserve Historic Sleeping Bear
Redwood Parks Association
Rock Creek Conservancy
Rocky Mountain Conservancy
Rosie the Riveter Trust
Rural Plains Foundation
Sandy Hook Foundation
Santa Fe Trail Association
Santa Monica Mountains Fund
Save Ellis Island
Save Historic Arlington House
Schoodic Institute (formerly Acadia Partners for Science and Learning)
Sequoia Natural History Association
Shenandoah National Park Trust
South Florida National Parks Trust
St. Croix River Association
St. Croix Valley Foundation
St. Thomas Historical Trust
Statue of Liberty - Ellis Island Foundation
The Association of American Cultures
The Friends of the Klondike Corridor
The White House Historical Association
Theodore Roosevelt Nature and History Association
Timucuan Trail Park Foundation
Trail of Tears Association
Trust for the National Mall
Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund
Voyageurs National Park Association
Washington Parks & People
Washington's National Park Fund
Western Maryland Interpretive Association
Western National Parks Association
Whaling Park Alliance
Wilson's Creek National Battlefield Foundation
Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts
Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation
Yellowstone Association
Yellowstone Park Foundation
Yosemite Conservancy
Zion National Park Foundation

# APPENDIX C: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Starting with the list of 226 groups from the NPF, an attempt was made to find each organization on GuideStar.

2. Each organization was given a unique number so that the row of data could always be referenced and matched up when other team members were working on different aspects of the list.

3. If the organization was found:
   a. Downloaded the most recent Form 990 if it existed.
   b. Downloaded the "View as PDF" file if it existed.
   c. Downloaded the list of Board of Directors file if it existed.
   d. Downloaded the Balance Sheet file if it existed.
   e. Downloaded the Revenue and Expense file if it existed.
   f. Downloaded the Financials file if it existed.

4. If the organization was not found at first, a reference was made and the next organization was searched for on GuideStar. These organizations were re-evaluated later after the first pass-through was completed.

5. Each of the financials files (Excel/CSV) contained one row of data representing GuideStar's most recent year of 990 financial data (GuideStar does not always collect 990EZ data).

6. Each of the financials files' data was copied into the appropriate row for each organization.
   a. If a GuideStar organization was added to "My Saved Orgs," then a single file download containing all "Saved" organizations was possible, with each organization on its own row.
   b. The financials file contained information such as the mailing address, EIN, phone number, fiscal year (20 total possible fields), and financial statistics such as total revenue, total expenses, total assets, total liabilities, and many others (30 total possible financial stats).
   c. Not all fields were filled by GuideStar.

7. Each 990 and "View as PDF" file was then opened, and more data was collected for each organization. Some examples are year founded, ruling year, number of officers, activities, officer compensation, amounts spent on activities the group works for, and others.

8. For organizations not found on GuideStar or that did not have 990 or 990EZ forms available, similar data was collected from websites and other nonprofit database sites.

9. The largest single data collection effort by far was analyzing the "990 4a, b, and c" data. This data represents each organization's report to the IRS (and public), what the past year's efforts have accomplished, and the dollar amount that was spent on those efforts.
   a. In some cases, the data was entered verbatim.
   b. In many cases, the data was condensed into a more manageable length.
   c. Some organizations included additional attachments that ran into tens of pages of text.
   d. Some organizations wrote nothing.
   e. An effort was then made to pull data from these text fields and organize it into data about education programs, specific aid to the parks, and retail products or publications.
   f. Another metric collected at this time was the "Total Program Services" amount spent for the year.

10. Using the "FY 2015 Greenbook" budget file, an attempt was made to link the organization to the budget(s) of the park or parks the organization supported. The actual budget amount for year 2013 was arbitrarily chosen as the metric.

11. The financial data from Step 7 was copied to a new file and the organizations with no data were removed. Descriptive summary statistics were created for a number of the most interesting financial values.

12. To try to account for the loss of information, a second set of statistical information was collected and analyzed.
   a. GuideStar attempts to provide 5-6 years of financial data in the balance sheet and revenue and expense files. These files have the same issues with 990 vs. 990EZ data as the financial files. Further, these files are in a format that is not conducive to Excel statistical analysis. This resulted in two separate data files for each organization.
   b. A Windows program was written that merged the contents of the two separate files into a third file. The program further highlighted when data was missing or misreported in the original files.
   c. As each file was created by the program, if data was missing and GuideStar contained the missing 990 or 990EZ forms, the data was manually entered to create a 5-year history of financial data for each organization.
   d. The data was merged into a single file.
   e. The new file was then pivoted so each organization contained one row of data.

## COMMENTS

- The GuideStar search process is very strict by default. There were issues at first finding the organizations. The most striking example was trying to find "Friends of Homestead National Monument of America." Many variations of the name were tried with empty results until the word "Friends" was dropped. GuideStar has the group stored as "FRIENDS OF HOMESTEA NATIONAL MONUMENT OF AMERICA" (note there is no "D").
- The EIN, if found, is a very reliable way to find an organization.
- Other methods included using the advanced search and providing the state and/or zip and/or city when the information could be found on a website first.
- GuideStar does not collect financial data from 990EZ filings even though the majority of the data is equivalent to the 990 form. A "mapping" of 990-990EZ data was created and used to fill in missing data. Much of the financial data that would seem to be of most interest is contained on the 990EZ (total revenue, total expenses, total program expenses, etc.).
- It was found that GuideStar publishes the last year's data from a 990 as the most recent data even if it is years old. For example, if an organization filed a 990 in 2009 and then filed 990EZ forms for 2010-2014, GuideStar publishes the 2009 financial data as if it is the most recent. To collect accurate financial data, a row-by-row 990/990EZ form comparison was conducted. When differing data was found, the correct data for the most recent year was entered and the form year, form type, and whether the data was manually entered was noted.
- Form 990 financial data was confusing at first because GuideStar manipulates some of the data by adding or subtracting certain values in or from the reported aggregate values on the first two pages of the form.
- The GuideStar "View as PDF" file has limitations. GuideStar attempts to summarize a lot of disparate data from the 990 files. However, this summarization suffers from the same issues as the financial data, as it uses the last 990 (not 990EZ) that is on file. Some of the summary data was almost a decade old but was still presented as if it was recent. Caution should be used when looking at these files.
- On GuideStar's first display page of an organization ("Organizational Structure"), there is a clue about how recent the 990 data is. If the section states, "This organization is required to file a Form 990N," the user will immediately know there is no recent 990 or 990EZ data on file.
- 990N filings are for groups that report annual gross receipts of less than $50,000 for the filing year.
- For 990N filings, the IRS website's Exempt Organizations Select Check was used. This site is also useful for determining defunct organizations.
- The information in a 990N filing is limited. There is no financial information, but there is contact information and a contact name. No email address is listed, and only rarely a web address.

# DATA COLLECTED

## GENERAL INFORMATION

- EIN
- Contact information
- Current fiscal year start/end
- NTEE Code
- Partner type (e.g., friends group, etc.)
- Ruling year
- Founding year
- Number of national parks group is associated with
- Total acreage
- Total trail miles

## STAFF/VOLUNTEERS/BOARD

- Number of employees (2009-2014)
- Number of independent contractors
- Number of officers, directors, trustees, and key employees
- Number of volunteers
- Volunteer hours
- Volunteer activities
- Number of board members
- Executive director compensation
- Admin director compensation
- Compensation of independent contractors

## 990 FORM FINANCIAL DATA

- 2008-2014

## ACTIVITIES

Types of activities that the organization is carrying out (usually within the past year), collected in these categories:

- Special events
- Park preservation/restoration/improvements
- Trail installation/maintenance
- Tours and interpretation
- Docent or volunteer training
- Visitor experience
- Increasing plant and/or animal diversity; environmental sustainability
- Education
- Youth engagement/school outreach
- Diversity and inclusion
- Fundraising
- Publishing, printing, distribution of materials
- Research/inventory
- Retail operations
- Internships
- Social media
- Establishing NPS site
- Arts in the Park

# APPENDIX D: ONLINE SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey for the National Park Foundation's National Park Philanthropy and Support: Status and Trends project. The project seeks to build a broad understanding of the status of park philanthropic support and the trends and practices of organizations nationwide. The information gathered from this survey will help to establish a baseline understanding of park philanthropy and support NPF's efforts to coordinate, collaborate, improve outcomes, and share best practices among the large community involved in supporting our national parks. NPF will share the results of the project with all participants and the larger friends group community.

We expect the survey will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. It requests information on organizational activities and operations, financial and park support status, public engagement, and media. It will be helpful to have a copy of recent 990 Forms, annual reports, and organizational financial information on hand as you complete the survey.

Your candid responses are appreciated. You may wish to consult colleagues within your organization on questions for which additional input is needed. All organizational information will be kept in confidence and aggregated anonymously. Please answer as many questions as you can and skip or return to questions that you are not able to answer initially.

NOTE: You may leave and return to the survey at any time before October 2nd. Please make sure that you click the "Save and Continue Later" button at the bottom the page before signing out.

*Thanks again for your time and support of NPF and the national park community.*

1. **What were your organization's biggest successes over the past year?**

2. **What were your organization's biggest challenges over the past year?**

3. **What were your organization's top three goals over the past year?**

4. **How does your organization track/measure its goals?**

5. **How would you rate your organization's success with regard to achieving its goals over the past year?** (Poor, Fair, Good, Very good, Excellent)

**6. What are your organization's key plans for the future?**

**7. Please rank the following areas of focus as they relate to your organization. A score of "1" indicates no interest or resources and a score of "5" indicates a high priority area of focus.**

a) Special events
b) Park preservation/restoration/improvements
c) Trail installation/maintenance
d) Tours and Interpretation
e) Docent or volunteer training
f) Improvements to visitor experience
g) Increasing plant and/or animal diversity; Environmental sustainability
h) Educational programming
i) Youth engagement/school outreach
j) Diversity and inclusion
k) Fundraising
l) Publishing, printing, distribution of materials
m) Research
n) Retail operations
o) Other

**8. If you answered "Other", please describe:**

**9. In what year was your organization founded?**

The following items ask about your organization's current staff and board members. Please answer as accurately as you can, consult with colleagues if needed, and skip any items that you are not able to answer. Please enter '0' to represent 'none' for the answer, if/where appropriate.

**10. How many paid staff members are currently employed by your organization?**
(Full-time, Part-time)

**11. How many staff members does your organization have that are primarily focused on fundraising?**

**12. How many board members does your organization currently have?**

**13. How many years/months has your organization's current CEO/executive director or equivalent been in that position?**

The following items ask about your organization's connection with the National Park Service and your organization's support of national parks and other areas. Please answer as accurately as you can, consult with colleagues if needed, and skip any items that you are not able to answer.

14. **Does your organization have a current agreement with the National Park Service?**
    Yes - Fundraising
    Yes - Cooperative
    Yes - Friends Agreement
    No, but currently working on an agreement
    No, but we have in the past
    No, and we never have
    Not sure
    Other

15. **Is your organization an official nonprofit partner of the National Park Service?**
    Yes
    No
    Not sure

Considering all of the national parks and other areas that your organization supports, please answer the following:

16. **Number of units/areas supported (National Parks, Other Areas)**

17. **Names of units/ areas supported (National Parks, Other Areas)**

18. **Total acreage (National Parks, Other Areas)**

19. **Total miles of trails (National Parks, Other Areas)**

20. **Does your organization track visitation to the national parks and other areas that it supports?**
    Yes
    No
    Not sure

How many people visited the national parks and other areas that your organization supports in the following years?

21. **2014** (National Parks, Other Areas)
22. **2013** (National Parks, Other Areas)
23. **2012** (National Parks, Other Areas)
24. **2011** (National Parks, Other Areas)
25. **2010** (National Parks, Other Areas)

The following items ask about your organization's financial information. Please answer as accurately as you can, consult with colleagues if needed, and skip any items that you are not able to answer.

**Please report the following financials for your organization:**

**26. 2013**

a) Direct funds given to NPS for their projects
b) Funds raised for park projects
c) Total Assets
d) Total Liabilities
e) Unrestricted Net Assets
f) Net Assets

**27. 2012**

a) Direct funds given to NPS for their projects
b) Funds raised for park projects
c) Total Assets
d) Total Liabilities
e) Unrestricted Net Assets
f) Net Assets

**28. 2011**

a) Direct funds given to NPS for their projects
b) Funds raised for park projects
c) Total Assets
d) Total Liabilities
e) Unrestricted Net Assets
f) Net Assets

**29. 2010**

a) Direct funds given to NPS for their projects
b) Funds raised for park projects
c) Total Assets
d) Total Liabilities
e) Unrestricted Net Assets
f) Net Assets

**Please report the following types of REVENUE for your organization:**

**30. 2013**

a) Contributions
b) Government Grants
c) Program Services
d) Investments
e) Special Events
f) Sales
g) Other

**31. 2012**

a) Contributions
b) Government Grants
c) Program Services
d) Investments
e) Special Events
f) Sales
g) Other

**32. 2011**

a) Contributions
b) Government Grants
c) Program Services
d) Investments
e) Special Events
f) Sales
g) Other

**33. 2010**

a) Contributions
b) Government Grants
c) Program Services
d) Investments
e) Special Events
f) Sales
g) Other

**Please report the following types of EXPENSES for your organization:**

**34. 2013**

a) Program Services
b) Administration
c) Fundraising
d) Other
e) Total Expenses

**35. 2012**

a) Program Services
b) Administration
c) Fundraising
d) Other
e) Total Expenses

**36. 2011**

a) Program Services
b) Administration
c) Fundraising
d) Other
e) Total Expenses

**37. 2010**

a) Program Services
b) Administration
c) Fundraising
d) Other
e) Total Expenses

**Please report the following types of FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES for your organization:**

**38. 2013**

a) Advertising and Promotion
b) Professional Fundraising
c) Fundraising
d) Printing, Publication, Postage and Shipping
e) Professional Fees and Payments to Contractors

**39. 2012**

a) Advertising and Promotion
b) Professional Fundraising
c) Fundraising
d) Printing, Publication, Postage and Shipping
e) Professional Fees and Payments to Contractors

**40. 2011**

a) Advertising and Promotion
b) Professional Fundraising
c) Fundraising
d) Printing, Publication, Postage and Shipping
e) Professional Fees and Payments to Contractors

**41. 2010**

a) Advertising and Promotion
b) Professional Fundraising
c) Fundraising
d) Printing, Publication, Postage and Shipping
e) Professional Fees and Payments to Contractors

The following items ask about your organization's volunteers. Please answer as accurately as you can, consult with colleagues if needed, and skip any items that you are not able to answer. Please enter '0' to represent 'none' for the answer, if/where appropriate.

**42. Does your organization distinguish between your own volunteers and National Park Service volunteers?**

Yes
No
Not sure

**43. How many volunteers (not including board members) are currently involved with your organization?**

**44. Which, if any, of the following does your organization track?** (Check all that apply)

Volunteer hours (IF CHECKED, ASK #45)
Number of volunteer projects (IF CHECKED, ASK #46)
Not sure
None of the above

**45. How many hours did volunteers provide for your organization over the past year?**

**46. How many volunteer projects have been carried out over the past year?**

**47. Which of the following activities have volunteers been involved in over the past year?**
(Check all that apply)
Docent/guide activities
Steward or on-the-ground environmental work (e.g., trash clean-ups, invasive removal, etc.)
Administrative
Education programming
Retail support
None of the above
Other

**48. Which, if any, of the following types of local institutions has your organization worked with to create volunteer groups/activities?** (Check all that apply)
Schools
For profit companies
Non-profit organizations
Friends Groups
Faith-based groups
Government agencies
None of the above
Other

The following items ask about your organization's involvement in projects, events, and partnerships/collaborations. Please answer as accurately as you can, consult with colleagues if needed, and skip any items that you are not able to answer. Please enter '0' to represent 'none' for the answer, if/where appropriate.

**49. How many ongoing programs did your organization carry out last year?** Examples of "ongoing programs" include: education programs, seminars and lectures, science and monitoring programs, or recurring/regular volunteer programs.

**50. How many discrete projects or activities did your organization carry out last year?** Examples of "discrete projects" include those with a beginning and end, such as a specific trail improvement, signage installation, or a volunteer or public event focused on a single project, celebration, or park improvement.

**51. If your organization has held any public events over the past year, how many people attended these events (in total)?**

**52. Which, if any, of the following has your organization partnered/collaborated with over the past year?** (Check all that apply)
Other friends groups
Local or regional non-profit organizations
For profit companies
Universities
National Park Service
Other government agencies
None of the above
Other

The following items ask about your organization's website. Please answer as accurately as you can, consult with colleagues if needed, and skip any items that you are not able to answer.

**53. Does your organization have a website?**
Yes (IF CHECKED, ASK #54 AND #55)
No

**54. How many unique visits does your website get per month and per year?**

**55. What are the most visited sections of your organization's website?** (Check the top 3)
Event calendar
Donation page
Program descriptions
Volunteer page
Organizational information page (About Us)
Contact page
Store/retail page
Other

**56. Which, if any, of the following social media platforms does your organization use**?
Facebook
Twitter
LinkedIn
Instagram
None of the above
Other

**57. For those platforms that you checked above, please list the number of followers that your organization have on each** (if known):

# APPENDIX E: LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous qualitative and quantitative studies of the partners of the national park friends groups have been published over the past 30 years. Because the park partners community is quite diverse, it is difficult to take one simplified approach to understanding it. Hence, most prior studies illuminate different aspects of the community. Below is a summary of the key studies (published over the past 30 years), with a primary focus on illuminating the roles of partners and the results of their relationships with the NPS.

The NPF has conducted four large-scale surveys of national park partners in the past 22 years. Throughout, the intention appears to be an effort to understand the concerns of the partners and how the NPF can most effectively support them.

The first NPF survey report was authored by Gary Machlis and Nancy Medlin, titled *Friends of the National Parks* and published in 1993. This study only surveyed partners defined as "a nonprofit organization that was established specifically to support the activities of a particular unit of the national park system." The 33-item survey covered a wide range of topics. It was mailed to 163 organizations and received 121 responses (74% response rate).

The second survey report, *National Park Friends Groups: A Statistical Analysis*, was published in 1996 by Crystal Fortwrangler. This survey went to a slightly broader group, including those from the Machlis and Medlin study as well as other organizations identified by the NPS. This 14-item mailed survey had a 79% response rate (N=127 out of the 160 contacted).

In 2009, the NPS Midwest Region published *Making Friends: An Introduction to Building National Park Service Friends Groups*. This handbook was meant to be a guide for NPS superintendents and staff, as well as interested community members, who wished to create and/or strengthen friends groups. The 126-page document covers everything from understanding the structure of the NPS, choosing a name, applying as a (501)(c)(3), creating a formal arrangement with the NPS, recruiting a board, growing membership, and fundraising.

A third survey report was published in 2010 by Dan Puskar, Siobhan O'Riordan, and Kate Truesdell, entitled *Friends of the National Parks 2010*. For this survey, the definition of partners was expanded markedly and included "any nonprofit organization that considered philanthropy essential to their mission—regardless of longevity, tax exemption status, or formal affiliation with NPS." The 43-item survey was made available online and as a PDF, and leaders of the organizations were contacted by email or phone. A larger number of organizations were contacted (256), and 111 responses were returned (45% response rate). Results from this study indicated significant growth in the number of friends groups—26% of the groups had been established over the prior 10 years. Most partners

remained small, with 71% reporting fewer than 500 members. Growing these numbers was identified as a target area for future support of the groups.

Sixty-five percent of respondents rated interpretation and education as one of their "top" activities, revealing a shift from 1996, when the more important activities reported were publicity and advocacy. Most partners identified fundraising as another primary activity, with smaller organizations depending upon individual donors and memberships to fund their activities. Seventy-five percent of the groups felt they needed help with their fundraising efforts. Other interesting findings related to relationships with the national parks.

Most of the organizations (85%) were unaware of the online resources available on the NPS partnership website, and many (62%) had not taken part in any NPS training. Results from this study guided the NPF in its efforts in the following years. For example, the Park Partners Project was launched: "a year-long, competitive in-depth capacity building project and webinar series focusing on issues identified in the report" (National Park Foundation, 2012, p. 33). The online resources offered by the Foundation were updated to improve accessibility and networking. In addition, greater efforts went into providing training opportunities.

Two years later, *Friends of the National Parks 2012* was prepared and published by repeat authors Dan Puskar and Siobhan O'Riordan. This was a follow-up to the 2010 report and was originally intended to ask the same questions. However, it ultimately included more detail, resulting in a 63-item survey. The same broad definition of partner was utilized, emails were sent, and 99 of 217 surveys were returned (46% return rate). The report notes that due to the lower response rate and potential lack of overlap in respondents across the two surveys, it is not clear that the survey can be used to measure true changes over time in the larger population of partners.

A large majority of the responding groups (94%) were incorporated as 501(c)(3), which makes sense because they often act as the fundraising arm of the parks. Most boards (70%) had six to 20 members. Staffing, as an indicator of organizational development, showed the maturation of the friends groups. One-third of respondents had no paid staff members, a decrease from 40% in 2010, and 18% had between half and one full-time employee (down from 26% in 2010). Conversely, more groups reported larger staffs: 15% reported between five and 20 staff (up from 11% in 2010), and 11% of respondents had over 20 employees (8% in 2010).

The findings of this survey also revealed an increase in the number of partners who had a strategic plan—nearly two-thirds (61%) compared to 44% in the prior survey. Fundraising presented the greatest identified challenge to partners (61%), followed by strategic planning (33%). From a programming perspective, the top three priorities identified were youth programs and education (63%), historical and cultural preservation (51%), and community engagement (51%). The top two activities reported were fundraising (57%) and major events (52%), followed by program management (36%) and managing the partnership with NPS (34%). Responding partners reported their annual revenue, which ranged from $0 to over $1M. The breakdown was as follows: 35% reported less than $50k, 23% between $50k and $249k, 18% between $250k and $999k, and the remaining 24% over $1M. Individual donors and memberships provided the greatest share of revenue.

In terms of marketing and communications, there was an increase (from 2010) in the number

of friends groups using Facebook (65% versus 43%) and Twitter (32% versus 12%). The groups responding noted that the top three challenges facing the parks were budget cuts (86%), facilities (51%), and the local economy (35%). When queried about what types of training they most desired, partners requested fundraising (52%), membership (32%), communications and marketing (31%), and board development (29%). The results offered the NPF guidance regarding how to best support friends groups moving forward.

On a more qualitative front, the National Parks Conservation Association's Center for Park Management published *Best Practices in Friends Groups and National Parks* in 2005. This report compiled nearly 40 interviews with NPS and friends group staff, and highlights seven best practices between the NPS and friends group leadership:

1. Parks and friends must have a shared mission and similar goals for long-term collaboration to work.

2. Mutual trust, necessary for the completion of large-scale projects, is earned over time.

3. Both partners must contribute equally to the relationship and be aware of park priorities and nonprofit needs.

4. Clear and constant communication between parks and friends, both in meetings and informal lunches, leads to understanding.

5. Both partners should commit to the relationship for the long term and work towards institutionalizing the partnership so that it is sustained beyond staff changes on both sides.

6. Create a culture of sharing and collaboration amongst park and friends staff members to create staff "buy-in."

7. Mutual respect between the park superintendents and the friends' executive director facilitates success.

The NPS itself has created several publications on the topic of partnership, including the recent *Introduction to Partnerships: A Quick Guide to Partnering within the National Park Service* that was created in spring 2014. This publication was intended to be a quick guide for NPS staff, existing partners, prospective partners, and new board members. It covered the history and mission of the NPS, offering significant historical perspective and highlighting milestones in partnerships and philanthropy. It detailed different types of partnerships with the NPS, touched on the ethics of such, and thoroughly described various types of partnership arrangements and agreements. The topics of donor recognition, fundraising, and friendraising were also discussed. Each national park in the greater Washington DC area was described with a short summary. This 26-page document is much shorter than its 126-page 2009 counterpart created by the Midwest Region, and appears to be targeted more at newcomers.

Over the years, there have been numerous "external" books and reports that have covered the relationships and needs of NPS and its partners. A detailed review of all of this literature is beyond the scope of this report. However, among the most recent was the 2013 *Philanthropy and the National Park Service*, written by Jacqueline Vaughn and Hanna J. Cortner. This qualitative and narrative academic analysis of the partner community was based upon 58 interviews (30 with partner organizations, 16 with park superintendents, and 12 with other NPS staff or park partners). The authors used a geographically convenient "opportunity sample" of parks and organizations which their own personal lives touched. In other words, there was no unified method to their selection of parks or friends

groups; therefore, their findings cannot necessarily be extrapolated to describe the entire nationwide population of friends groups.

The publication begins with a historic perspective of the parks and park philanthropy. The authors dedicate a chapter to the complicated legislation affecting national parks and partners. Subsequently, they delve into narratives about the friends groups and parks in their sample. They classify the groups into categories of perceived success, illuminating possible pitfalls of even the most apparently successful partner-park relationships (e.g., the "rich and thriving" groups). They describe some groups that carry on despite bumps in the road and having moderate success (the "middle of the roaders"), and they describe partners "on life support" as well as those that have separated from their park. Included are stories of groups that sometimes oppose the decisions of their national park partners, though these are the outliers. The classifications make intuitive sense, but specific and detailed inclusion criteria are not noted. The book offers descriptive narrative, intimate details, and thorough critique of the collaboration between parks and their partners as well as the complexity of this landscape.

# APPENDIX F: RESOURCES CONSULTED

## ASSESSMENTS AND REPORTS

Fortwrangler, C. (1996). *National Parks Friends Groups: A Statistical Analysis*.

Machlis, G. & Medlin, N. (1993). *Friends of the National Parks.* National Park Foundation: Washington, DC.

McCollough, R. (July 2006). *Considering Building and Maintaining Collaborative Relationships to Support the National Park Service Mission: A Partnerships Guidebook.* National Park Service Partnership Office Southeast Region: Washington DC.

McConnell, K. (May 2006). *Nonprofit Partnerships in the Northeast Region: Assessing the Need for Strategic Support Report Highlights.* National Park Service Northeast Region: Washington DC.

Puskar, D. & O'Riordan, S. (2012). *Friends of the National Parks 2012.* National Park Foundation: Washington DC. Retrieved from 2012 Friends of the Parks Report.

Puskar, D., O'Riordan, S., & Truesdell, K. (2010). *Friends of the National Parks 2010.* National Park Foundation: Washington DC. Retrieved from Friends of the National Parks 2010.

Sterkel, M., Hanson, M., & Knowlton, R. (2009). *Making Friends: An Introduction to Building National Park Service Friends Groups.* National Park Service Midwest Region: Omaha NE. Retrieved from Making Friends Handbook.

United States Government Accountability Office. (December 2015). GAO-16-166 National Park Service

Vaughn, J. & Cortner, H.J. (2013). *Philanthropy and the National Park Service.* Palgrave Macmillan: New York.

## PARK PARTNERSHIP TOOLS

B*est Practices in Friends Groups and National Parks.* (September 2005). Center for Park Management, National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). Retrieved from Best Practices Report.

*Brian O'Neill's 21 Partnership Success Factors.* (n.d.) National Park Service.

*Introduction to Partnerships: A Quick Guide to Partnering within the National Park Service.* (Spring 2014). NER-NCR Training Session. Retrieved from Quick Guide to Partnerships NCR Spring 2014.

## GROWTH AND FUNDING DEVELOPMENT

Foster, W., Dixon, B., & Hochstetler, M. (March 21, 2007). *"In Search of Sustainable Funding: Is Diversity of Sources Really the Answer?"*

Foster, W., Dixon, B., & Hochstetler, M. (September 2003). *"Funding: Patterns and Guideposts in the Nonprofit Sector."*

Goggins-Gregory, A. & Howard, D. (August 24, 2009). *The Nonprofit Starvation Cycle*.

Kim, P., Tollerud, S., & Perreault, G. (May 8, 2012). *From Small to Scale: Three Trade-offs for Smaller Nonprofits Trying to Get Big*.

The National Park Foundation, in partnership with the National Park Service, enriches America's national parks and programs through private support, safeguarding our heritage, and inspiring generations of national park enthusiasts. Chartered by Congress in 1967, the National Park Foundation is founded on a legacy that began more than a century ago, when private citizens from all walks of life took action to establish and protect our national parks. The National Park Foundation carries on that tradition as the only national charitable nonprofit whose sole mission is to directly support the National Park Service. The National Park Foundation pursues three distinct, yet interdependent, areas of focus: PROTECTING American's national parks through critical conservation and preservation efforts; CONNECTING all Americans with its incomparable natural landscapes, vibrant culture, rich history, and the transformative community work of the National Park Service; and INSPIRING lifelong engagement with the next generation of park stewards.

More information: www.nationalparks.org

Potrero Group is a management consulting firm specializing in business planning for social sector clients. We work closely with organizational leaders who want to develop successful ventures that are financially sustainable and responsive to market contexts. Our team members have worked closely with federal agencies, regional governmental agencies, local and national nonprofits, and hospitals. We have partnered with a wide range of organizations including: Local Government Commission, the National Park Service, the National Park Foundation, Center for Ecoliteracy, Marin Clean Energy, Sonoma Land Trust, East Bay Environmental Network, the Center for Volunteer & Nonprofit Leadership, and the National Wildlife Federation.

More information: www.potrerogroup.com

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

National Park Foundation™

POTRERO GROUP