

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

Best known for Motown and motorcars, Detroit, Michigan is rich in American history and culture, diverse in its residents, and is consistently on the frontier of innovation. Historical and cultural resources are abundant in the city, and vary from the interpretation of complex issues like race and industrialization, to the more famous stories of Diana Ross and Marvin Gaye. For instance, the city served as one of the last stops on the Underground Railroad for a quarter of all Freedom Seekers, maintains the oldest car factory in the world, and oddly enough, is home to the world's first floating post office.

With the diverse tapestry of peoples and stories to tell it would seem natural that the National Park Service is a community player and stakeholder in the cultural and natural resources in Detroit. This is true, but not in the way one would expect. Detroit was selected as a model city because it has no traditional park unit in the city; the closest of these is the River Raisin National Battlefield Park in Monroe, approximately a 45-minute drive from downtown. That does not, however, imply that the Park Service is absent from the preservation and conservation efforts in Detroit.

David Goldstein, Detroit's Urban Fellow, asserted that the Park Service has had a presence in the city for at least 40 years through programs like the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives and National Heritage Areas. The city is the largest user in the U.S. of Historic Preservation Tax Incentives—nearly every building downtown is using federal money or

subsidies for renovations, upkeep, signage and interpretation that maintain the cultural and historical value of these properties. Motor Cities National Heritage Area focuses on interpreting and preserving Southeastern Michigan's auto heritage and is based in Detroit. The Heritage Area is managed by with assistance from the Park Service. Other community assistance programs like the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Network to Freedom program



have provided funding and technical assistance for the preservation and interpretation of Detroit resources for decades.

The established presence of NPS community assistance programs, coupled with the lack of a traditional park unit presented interesting challenges for Goldstein, but also made Detroit a useful model for other urban areas with similar

conditions. Despite the challenges, successful deployment of the Urban Agenda proved that you don't need a national park to effectively implement National Park Service programs and initiatives.



With a substantial majority demographic of Black or African American (89.4% of 700,000) Detroiters, Goldstein and NPS focused much of the pilot's work on increasing visibility of NPS with and better connecting recreation and preservation work to the needs of Black or African American communities. Detroit was particularly ripe for this kind of work particularly through the Every Kid in a Park (EKIP) program, which with support from the National Park Foundation, NPS was able to successfully deploy EKIP in Detroit three years in a row for over 3,000 fourth-graders each year.

"One of the benefits of the Urban Fellow position was the freedom and flexibility it provided to work beyond traditional organizational boundaries that normally have constrained interagency collaboration," Goldstein noted. By using EKIP as a bridge, NPS helped link local recreation entities across Detroit. Prior to EKIP, the NPS, USFWS, US Army Corps of Engineers, and USFS were all acting independently in Detroit with very little interaction. All have volunteer and outdoor education programs. EKIP helped unite these agencies, which now meet collaboratively on a regular basis to work

together to create a career development programs based on the needs they saw for local neighborhoods and for young diverse Detroiters to be hired into these agencies.

In addition to enhancing recreational and professional opportunities for diverse youth in the area, NPS recognized 16 Underground Railroad sites, with another 10 eligible for consideration, which would benefit from linkages in interpretation and education, better reflecting their national affiliation with the NPS Network to Freedom Program. Taking cue from this NPS program, and programs of Detroit's Canadian neighbors, NPS brought in an NGO with expertise in afterschool programming to help stakeholders identify and recognize the remaining sites not yet recognized and worked with the Detroit Public School system and other educators to develop a third- and eighth-grade curriculum tied to the Underground Railroad. Multiple Park Service programs, as well as the Midwest Regional Office, came together to advance this work. There is a hope that the group will develop an African American Heritage Trail for Detroit.

LESSONS LEARNED

Partner with the City Government

Goldstein set his office up in City Hall, giving him the opportunity to build rapport with local officials, and promote the work of

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the Park Service through the City Government Planning Commission. “As useful as it was to work with the city, I had to learn to respect organizational capacity of the government. As efforts to rehabilitate the city continue, officials’ capacity grows, but flexibility is key in maintaining a good working relationship with the city,” Goldstein remarked. While the relationship between NPS and the City of Detroit continued to grow, NPS was able to offer additional federal assistance to help offset capacity barriers at the city and state levels.

Share Asset Maps with Partners and Stakeholders

Asset mapping was a key step in identifying and inventorying NPS programs and partners in Detroit. By connecting this data to a digital platform and offering access to local partners and stakeholders, Goldstein and NPS staff was able to take an internal tool and use it to showcase One NPS while increasing visibility of and knowledge about active NPS efforts in Detroit. Asset mapping also led Goldstein to realize the gaps associated with preservation of sites along the Underground Railroad.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NPS

Goldstein had one major recommendation to continue implementing the Urban Agenda principles. “We should talk about NPS community assistance programs! We should present two modes of work: resource protection and facilitation of public assistance as equal and use one to inform the other.” While successful campaigns like *Find Your Park* have increased visitation to national parks, they understate the presence and visibility of the community assistance programs, which for cities like Detroit are the main avenues in which NPS connects to the urban population. Presenting both modes of work also showcases a single network of resources, rather than a series of parks and programs that could end up competing for resources. Additionally, it puts the priority on maintaining strong and resilient partnerships which are a critical resource that NPS manages nationwide. Goldstein saw this concept reflected in one symbol of the National Park Service - the bison. “Think of our work paralleling the nomadic lifestyle of a bison herd. NPS is one large resource that moves around from park to park and it moves more fluidly when everyone is in sync.”

