

ABSTRACT

Elizabeth O'Casey for the degree of Master of Public Policy presented on June 3rd, 2014

Title: The Role of the *Urban Matters* Community of Practice within the National Park Service

Abstract Approved:

Edward Weber

There is a growing movement in the U.S., and throughout the world, involving top down government bureaucracies or government agencies within the natural resources field, to develop new and innovative processes and structures for integrating societal viewpoints into agency decision-making. This study examines *Urban Matters*, a community of practice within the National Park Service (NPS) that fits within the larger trend of collaborative processes. This community of practice receives broad support, has a large number of professionals consistently involved, and aligns with the National Park Service's attempt to strengthen connections with stakeholders outside of the Park Service who are important in the implementation of many NPS policies.

The *Urban Matters* community of practice was analyzed in an effort to better understand why communities of practice emerge, how they are maintained, and what impact they have on the National Park Service. The data informing this study came from interviews with 12 community of practice leaders, 17 community of practice meeting transcripts, and from planning documents used by the *Urban Matters* community leaders. The results from this analysis are intended to inform and guide the NPS as it continues to initiate and facilitate collaborative practices like *Urban Matters*.

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Master of Public Policy thesis of Elizabeth O'Casey presented on June 3rd, 2014

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Introduction

THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

The National Park Service (NPS) is a federal land management agency that oversees national parks, monuments, and other cultural and historical units across the country. Founded in 1916, the agency has more than 21,000 employees. The NPS manages 84 million acres, with 401 NPS units in all 50 states. Each year, 280 million people visit these NPS units (NPSAB, 2012; Wallace Stegner Center, 2014). More than one-third of the 401 sites are in metropolitan areas. Of the 50 largest urban areas in the country, more than 40 have a national park either within the city or immediately surrounding it (NPS, 2013).

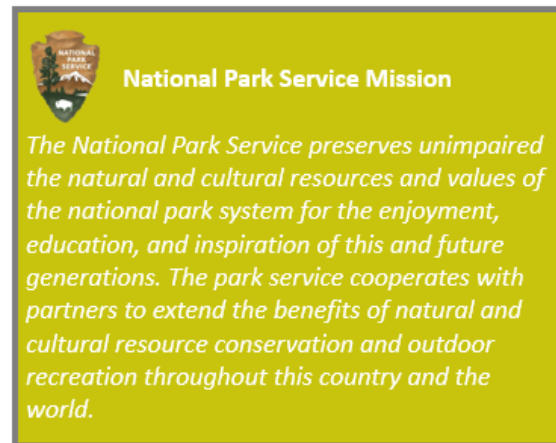


Figure 1: Mission of the National Park Service

AN INSTITUTIONAL PROBLEM

In recent years, the NPS acknowledged an institutional problem within the agency. They found the problem to be a lack of strategic sharing, collaboration, and innovation in the NPS. In 2008, the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) formed an independent commission that would go on to develop a 21st century vision for the NPS. The National Parks Second Century Commission, as it came to be called, was composed of more than 30 national leaders. They worked cooperatively to publish a recommendations report in 2009. This report summarized some of the key institutional problems occurring within the agency and offered ways to solve these issues.

[The NPS] typically fails to capture, assess, and diffuse knowledge of these field based innovations, weakening its ability to promote wider applications, and limiting its capacity to grow from its own strengths. In a rapidly changing environment, where

organizations need to acquire and act on new information constantly, the rapid sharing of knowledge and good ideas ranks as a key management asset. Despite the ferment of creativity bubbling among park personnel and their partners, the NPS bureaucracy can display a tendency to retreat, retrench, and continue business as usual [...] (The National Parks Second Century Commission; 2009).

One way the NPS addressed this ‘tendency to retreat’, and the lack of strategic sharing, collaboration, and innovation was to create communities of practice. A *community of practice* is a collection of individuals who come together around a topic area or set of problems to share knowledge and expertise, build networks with one another, and engage in collective problem solving (Wenger et al, 2002; Lesser and Storck, 2001; Goldstein et al, 2010).

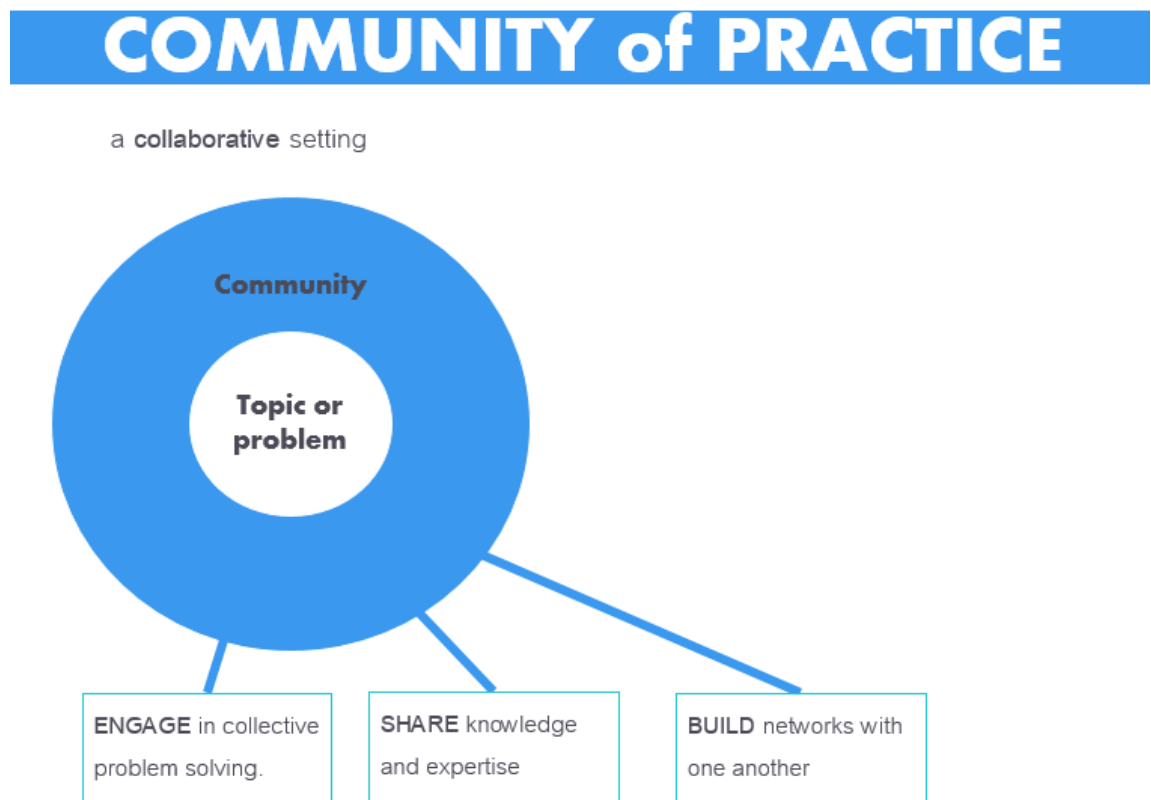


Figure 2: A Community of Practice (Wenger et al, 2002; Lesser and Storck, 2001; Goldstein et al, 2010).

For a traditional organization like the NPS that has been around for 98 years, becoming a more collaborative, leaner organization is no easy transformation. Therefore, when the agency makes a conscious effort to move toward more nontraditional, collaborative management styles in

their offices and parks, it is important to pay attention to these attempts at transformation and develop an understanding of how and why these nontraditional practices emerge, how they are sustained, and their impact on the agency.

Introducing *Urban Matters*

The *Urban Matters* community of practice is one such example of how the NPS is moving toward a more nontraditional, collective approach for park management. *Urban Matters* emphasizes working across organizational boundaries, challenges the NPS to become more aware and responsive toward urban issues, and helps elevate an ethic of innovation within the agency. The goal of the overall *Urban Matters* effort is (1) to cultivate innovation and collaboration among NPS parks, program, and partners, and (2) increase NPS relevancy and connections in urban areas.

The seeds of *Urban Matters* were planted in 2012 at the City Parks Alliance *Greater and Greener* conference in New York City.¹ The City Parks Alliance is an independent, national organization dedicated to urban parks. It operates as a network of individuals and organizations interested in the creation, revitalization, and sustainability of urban parks. 39 NPS officials came together at the *Greater and Greener* conference to discuss critical issues for urban parks, programs, and partners. They identified six main issues. These six areas of interest became the six topical sub-communities of practice within *Urban Matters*. Each sub-community revolved around a particular urban issue, seen below:

1. Urban Innovations
2. Urban Policy
3. Branding Urban NPS
4. Urban Parks as Portals to NPS Diversity
5. Introducing Youth to Nature
6. NPS Role in Economic Revitalization in Urban Areas

Seventeen community of practice meetings occurred during the summer and fall of 2013. The graphic below provides a more detailed picture of how many people attended the meetings, the composition of the meetings, and the geographical locations of the participants.

¹ Visit www.cityparksalliance.org



Figure 3: The Urban Matters community of practice

The *Urban Matters* community of practice was led by 15 individuals. The community leaders planned and facilitated the 17 community of practice sessions and helped advance *Urban Matters* both within the agency and with partner organizations. These leaders were a mix of NPS and partner organization staff. These community leaders were interviewed for this research study precisely because they had an in-depth understanding of the *Urban Matters* community of practice due to their involvement in each step of the community of practice.

Research questions and framework

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to better understand *Urban Matters*, this study asks three main research questions:

- (1) Why did the *Urban Matters* community of practice emerge?
- (2) How was it sustained?
- (3) How has *Urban Matters* impacted the NPS thus far?

THE COLLECTIVE IMPACT FRAMEWORK

This research uses the collective impact framework during data analysis in order to answer these three research questions. Collective impact is a specialized form of collaborative governance that focuses on uniting a committed group of participants from various organizations and agencies to work in concert with one another to create a common agenda to solve a collective or social problem (Kania and Kramer, 2011; Hanleybrown, 2012). The framework can be divided into two parts. The first part of the framework examines the factors of formation for a collective impact initiative. These factors are: (1) an urgency for change, (2) influential champions, and (3) financial resources. The second part of the framework consists of five essential pillars that must be present in order for a collective impact initiative to be successful. These essential pillars, as outlined by Hanleybrown et al (2012) are the presence of a backbone organization, continuous communication, common agenda, shared metrics, and mutually reinforcing activities.

The Literature

Prior to reporting the results of the *Urban Matters* case study, key concepts in the literature and a discussion of the research methods and design used in the study are provided. This literature review examines community of practice theory, collaborative governance theory, and the collective impact framework.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

A *community of practice* is a collection of individuals who come together around a topic area or set of problems to share knowledge and expertise, build networks with one another and engage in collective problem solving (Wenger et al, 2002; Lesser and Storck, 2001; Goldstein et al, 2010). Communities of practice are collaborative settings, structured around three main elements: a domain, a community, and a practice (Wenger et al, 2002). *Domain* defines the issue the community focuses on, creates a sense of identity, and builds common ground (Hara and Schwen, 2006; Wenger et al, 2002). The domain helps participants become involved, directs learning, and gives meaning to the participants' actions. *Community* consists of the individuals interested in the domain. Strong community interactions increase trust by allowing participants to listen, share ideas, and ask tough questions that challenge the status quo (Wenger et al 2002; Goldstein et al, 2012; Hara and Schwen, 2006; Cardona et al, 2012). *Practice* is the specific information shared within the community. This refers to the knowledge created, shared, and sustained by the community (Wenger et al, 2002).

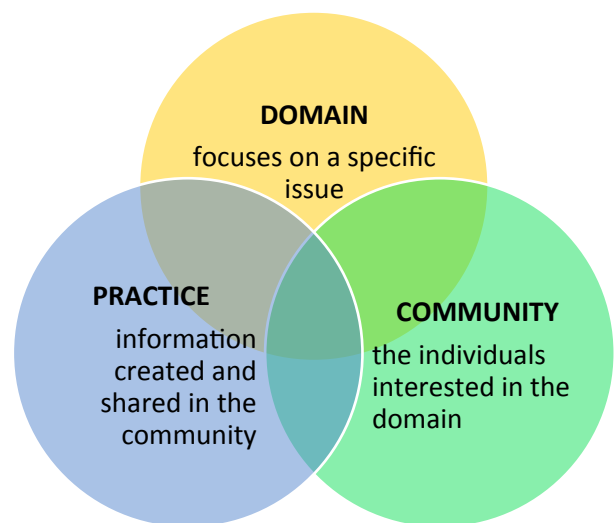


Figure 4: The three main elements of a community of practice (Wenger, et al, 2002):

A community of practice has several identifying characteristics, which can be seen in Table 1

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE CHARACTERISTICS	
Barab & Duffy (2000); Wenger (2000); Hara and Schwen (2006); Iverson & McPhee (2008); Lesser & Prusak (1999)	
1. Common heritage	Shared goals, meanings, identities, and practices combine to form a supportive, interdependent culture
2. Mutual engagement	The depth of social capital; social capital is the social resources people in a community utilize to add value to themselves and their organizations
3. Shared repertoire	The communicative vocabulary
4. Informal networks	Interaction through informal social networks
5. Reproduction cycle	Ability to multiply and branch out as new members work with experienced peers and experts.
6. Joint enterprise	The level of learning and the knowledge-building endeavors present within the community.

below.

Table 1: Community of practice characteristics

The literature illustrates how participants may acquire social capital as a result of being in these communities of practice. This is one reason individuals participate and why leaders with accumulated social capital can play a key role in the process (Wasko and Faraj 2005; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Lesser and Storck, 2001). The role social capital plays in communities of practice may be seen through increased opportunities for participants to develop a network of peers who have similar interests. Additionally, one study found that communities of practice advance the interpersonal relations needed to develop trust, which is essential in building social capital (Lesser and Prusak, 1999). Researchers point to intangible rewards associated with communities of practice. These include professional connections, relationship development, identity creation, and a sense of inquiry (Wenger et al, 2002; Cardona et al, 2012). Another study found organizations that build communities of practice create and share knowledge more consistently (Cardona et al, 2012). Through situated learning, communities of practice are able to capture both social and objective knowledge. They diverge from traditional training sessions or workshops by shining light on an

organization's 'noncanonical' practices, these being the work arounds and actual practices of the professionals in the field. In this way, the organization is able to better understand the complexities of practice and enhance the practice through innovations and creative solutions (Brown and Duguid, 1991). Studies have also pointed to the smaller, nimbler structure of communities of practice, saying this structure allows greater freedom from the hierarchical design inherent in large bureaucratic organizations (Goldstein et al, 2010; Lesser and Storck, 2001). Brown and Duguid (1991) expand on this further, finding that communities of practice offer large organizations a way to experiment. The experimental nature found in communities of practice often drives innovation by offering participants a space beyond the structured core of the organization to 'simply try something new' (pg. 51, Brown and Duguid, 1991).

Collaborative Governance

According to Emerson et al. (2012), collaborative governance is the 'new paradigm' for governance in democracies. The *Urban Matters* community of practice is one example of this new paradigm. Collaborative governance can be described as an arrangement where public, private, civic agencies and stakeholders collectively engage in consensus-based decisionmaking. This form of governance shuns working in isolation in favor of multi-sector, multi-regional participation that brings together a broad range of participants to solve commonly shared public policy problems or issues (Vernon, 2005; Heikkila and Gerlak, 2005; Agranoff, 2006; Ansell and Gash, 2008; Emerson et al, 2012). Participants' incentives to collaborate, equity, and prior history of conflict or cooperation all affect the collaborative process (Ansell and Gash, 2008). Initially, incentives to participate are low due to the generally voluntary nature of collaboratives and the perception that participants can solve their problems independently. However, incentives to participate increase if individuals see their achievement dependent on the cooperation of others, realizing the necessity of working closely with them on the broader problem or issue (Weber, 1998; DeLeon and Varda, 2009; Ansell and Gash, 2008).

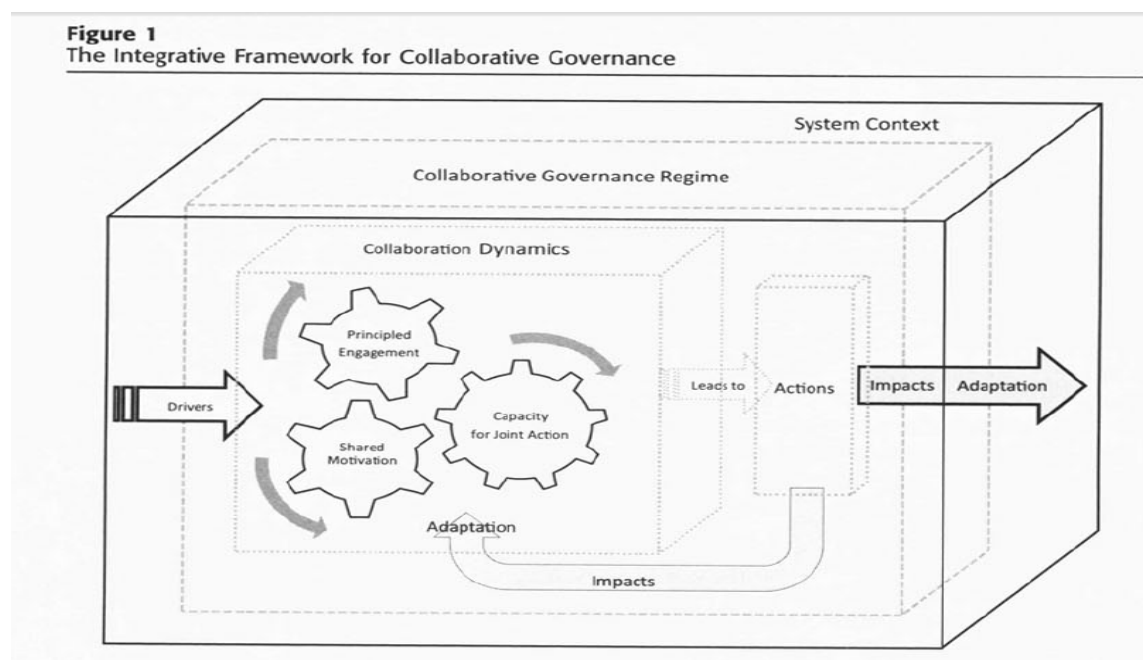
CHARACTERISTICS OF COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE	
Participatory decisionmaking	Vital for reaching common goals and objectives.
Enduring leadership	Brings participants to the table & keeps them involved. Leaders also establish rules and norms, trust, dialogue and resources.
Horizontal networks	The strength and extent of the social network is critical to attract and retain participants.
Equality in power	The collaborative process must have consistent ground rules, transparency, and clearly defined roles.
Trust building	This is a long-term process that can be strengthened by repeated interactions, including face-to-face dialogue.
Common purpose and goals	A well-defined problem, clear mission, and shared values advance this characteristic.

Scholars have identified several defining characteristics of collaborative governance. These include participatory decisionmaking, enduring leadership, horizontal networks, equality in power, and trust building (Weber, 2005; Ansell and Gash, 2008; Weber and Khademian 2008; DeLeon and Varda, 2009; Lauber et al, 2011; Cheng and Sturtevant, 2012; Weber, 2012). When it comes to the structure, institutional design plays a role in developing collaborative capacity and collaborative success (Ostrom, 1990; Ansell and Gash, 2008; Weber, 2012). Researchers have found that collaboratives with formal structures and working groups did a better job locating and utilizing resources, managing projects, and using websites to advance the collaborative (Cheng and Sturtevant, 2012). Adler et al (2011) found that collaborative communities experience the highest

Table 2: Characteristics of collaborative governance

levels of success when they (1) define and build a shared purpose, (2) develop processes that allow participants to work together on projects that are both flexible and disciplined, and (3) cultivate an

expectation as well as an infrastructure of contribution. One specific example is Weber's (2012) research on the Blackfoot Challenge, a well-known collaborative conservation effort in Montana. Weber emphasized the structure of the Blackfoot Challenge by highlighting its active board of directors, lean bureaucracy, dynamic staffing model that varies the team depending on the collaborative's growth stage, and its ethic of accountability and transparency. This collaborative also intentionally seeks focal members within the community and carefully selects collaborative partners (Weber, 2012). Partners are particularly important when collaborative efforts are looking to increase the collective capacity for action. By focusing on securing support from partner organizations and those in positions of authority and influence, the collaborative will have greater support (Lauber et al, 2011, Cheng and Sturtevant, 2012).



One framework that integrates many of these key elements is Emerson et al's (Figure 5) collaborative governance regime framework (2012). This framework has six essential elements of collaboration--system context, external drivers, collaborative dynamics, actions, impacts, and adaptation. Emerson's framework rests on three interconnected dimensions: the system context, the collaborative governance regime, and the collaborative dynamics and actions. System contexts consist of *political, legal, socioeconomic, and environmental influences*. External drivers include *leadership, consequential incentives, interdependence, and uncertainty*. The system context and the

Figure 5: Collaborative Governance Regime (Emerson et al, 2012)

drivers affect and are affected by the collaborative governance regime.

Emerson et al (2012) point to three primary collaborative dynamics, these being principled engagement, shared motivation, and joint capacity. *Principled engagement* involves a variety of stakeholders across organizations, technologies, and backgrounds. During the engagement process, participants verbalize individual and shared interests and values, define common objectives and tasks, have candid conversations, conduct procedural and substantive decision-making, and develop action items (Emerson et al, 2012). The second component of the collaborative dynamic is *shared motivation*. Mutual trust, understanding, internal legitimacy, and commitment all contribute to the shared motivation among participants (Emerson et al, 2012). The third and final component is the *capacity for joint action*. This capacity did not exist prior to the collaborative and grows throughout the duration of the collaborative. Capacity for joint action rests on procedural and institutional arrangements, leadership, knowledge, and resources (Emerson et al, 2012).

Collective Impact

Understanding the previous literature on collaborative governance is critical for understanding collective impact because collective impact builds on prior collaborative scholarship (Kania and Kramer, 2011; Hanleybrown et al, 2012). As previously stated, the collective impact framework is the guiding framework for this research paper. Therefore, it is important to offer a detailed explanation of collective impact in order to understand the study results and recommendations.

This framework is specifically designed to help understand how and whether a collaborative governance effort is likely to be effective, both in its formation and its sustenance over time, as a vehicle for problem solving and policy implementation. Collective impact is defined as the “commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem” (Kania and Kramer, 2011; pg. 36). Collective impact can help organizations develop an alternative model of change and problem solving grounded in a networked, collaborative approach (Hanleybrown et al, 2012). The collective impact framework, with its focus on preconditions or collaborative success, focuses our attention on the initial difficulty of overcoming a collective problem.

The framework provides three preconditions for collective impact. The first is an urgency for change. This urgency for change arises from a crisis, from new funding, or an innovative approach. The second precondition is the presence of influential champions. The dynamic leadership these champions possess catalyzes the collective impact initiative and sustains it over the long run. The third precondition is financial resources. The collective impact framework also emphasizes the critical importance of five pillars, or variables, associated with the successful maintenance of a collaborative effort. The five pillars (see Figure 6) are a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, ongoing communication, and a backbone organization (Kania and Kramer, 2011; Hanleybrown et al, 2012). The first feature, the *common agenda*, allows all participants to have a shared vision for the change they seek. The common agenda grounds participant commitment to the larger community as well as motivates action (Wenger, 2000; Hanleybrown et al, 2012). The second feature is a *shared measurement system*. Monitoring collective impact through a set of shared indicators establishes a common language that will not only measure progress on the common agenda, but also reinforce ongoing learning within the community. The third feature, or pillar, of the framework is *mutually reinforcing activities*. These activities are the tangible display of the common agenda. The fourth component is *continuous communication*. Continuous communication can aid in building trust between the different participants and organizations. Regular meetings reinforces a common motivation and vocabulary. One research study found that establishing dense networks with strong, direct ties and encouraging regular contact between participants reinforces habits of collaboration (Wasko and Faraj, 2005). The final element of collective impact is the presence of a *backbone organization*. Many communities of practice have a backbone organization coordinating the group and resources (Goldstein et al, 2010). The backbone organization helps to manage the initiative and brings a specific skillset to the entire effort (Kania and Kramer, 2011). The backbone organization provides strategic direction, facilitates participant dialogue, assembles funding, handles communication and outreach, and supervises data collection (Hanleybrown et al, 2012). The backbone organization unites the varied actions of multiple organizations and participants and relates these actions back to the collective impact issue at hand (Hanleybrown et al, 2012).

COLLECTIVE IMPACT INITIATIVE

Hanleybrown et al, 2012; Kania and Kramer, 2011

Collective impact: *the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem.*

Three Preconditions of Collective Impact

1

Influential champion

Dynamic leadership is crucial in catalyzing and sustaining collective impact initiatives.

2

Financial resources

Lasting for 2 or more years.

3

Urgency for change

Emerges from a crisis, new funding, or an innovative approach.

Essential Elements of Collective Impact

1

COMMON AGENDA

A shared vision for change, an understanding of the problem, and a joint approach for solving it through mutually agreed actions.

2

SHARED MEASUREMENT

A comprehensive set of shared indicators to monitor performance, track progress and learn what is and is not working.

3	MUTUALLY REINFORCING ACTIVITIES <i>Coordinated actions among participants</i>
4	CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION <i>Regular meetings over a series of years builds experience among participants, allowing them to recognize and appreciate the common motivation behind their various efforts.</i>
5	BACKBONE ORGANIZATION <i>A separate organization and staff employ a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative.</i>

Figure 6: Collective Impact (Kania and Kramer, 2011)

Research Methods and Design

The goal of this research is to determine how and why *Urban Matters* emerged, how it has been sustained, and the impact it has had thus far on the NPS. Given that this research project examines *Urban Matters'* activities, processes, and key leaders, a case study method is the preferred method of analysis (Creswell, 2003). The researcher worked with the *Urban Matters* community of practice leaders for one year as an intern with the Conservation Study Institute. During 2013, the researcher attended 17 community of practice meetings, participated in dozens of planning and preparation conference calls, and was a part of NPS directorate meetings to discuss the *Urban Matters* process.

This study used semi-structured, open-ended interviews with *Urban Matters* community of practice leaders. Semi-structured interviews are the most common method for analyzing collaborative conservation efforts where participants are asked to talk about a collaborative effort (Conley and Moote, 2003). Interviews were 30-45 minutes each. The target population was the 15 individuals who led the *Urban Matters* community of practice. Ten of these individuals worked for the NPS and five were employed by partner organizations. The partner organizations were the Institute at the Golden Gate, the Center for Park Management, and the Quebec Labrador Foundation. Due to the limited size of the total population, all of the 15 leaders were invited to participate. Invitations were sent out via email. Of the 15 leaders invited to participate, 14 accepted the interview request and 12 were able to participate. The interview questions used for this study



can be found in the appendix. Questions were formulated after completing a comprehensive survey of the literature and *Urban Matters* documents. The collective impact framework guided the development of interview questions. Each interview was recorded and subsequently transcribed. Using NVivo, a data analysis software program, interview transcripts were analyzed using a hybrid approach that combined deductive and inductive coding to gather data that spoke to the formation, sustainability, and impact of *Urban Matters*.

Results

The conditions within which *Urban Matters* emerged contained the three primary precondition variables identified by the collective impact framework. Turning to the five pillars of collective impact, at the time of the analysis the *Urban Matters* initiative has successfully developed two of the pillars outlined by the collective impact framework. These are the (1) backbone organization and (2) continuous communication. Community of practice leaders discussed aspects of the remaining three pillars and many community of practice leaders conveyed a desire to strengthen these remaining pillars as *Urban Matters* continues to evolve and as the NPS introduces future communities of practice. Each of the preconditions and pillars are discussed in detail below.

FACTORS IN THE FORMATION OF *URBAN MATTERS*

The collective impact framework identifies three preconditions that contribute to the formation of the collective effort. These are (1) an urgency for change, (2) influential champions, and (3) financial resources (Hanleybrown et al, 2012). The data provide evidence for these preconditions and offers support for the *urgency for change*, *influential champion*, and *financial resources* preconditions. All three preconditions aligned to bring about change and contributed to the overall formation of *Urban Matters*.

Three Preconditions of Collective Impact		
 <p>Urgency for change Emerges from a crisis, new funding, or an innovative approach.</p>	 <p>Influential champion Dynamic leadership is crucial in catalyzing and sustaining collective impact initiatives.</p>	 <p>Financial resources Lasting for 2 or more years.</p>

An urgency for change

The first precondition for collective impact is an urgency for change. The demographic shifts in the US were a factor in the formation of *Urban Matters* (Interviewee 1, 2, 3). While the percentage of people living in urban areas has been rising for several decades, the last few years have seen an increasingly pronounced and well-publicized demographic shift. The fact that 80% of Americans now live in urban areas means that NPS parks and programs have become the critical entry points for the NPS to connect with the majority of Americans (Interviewee 1, 4, 5). The urban population is the predominant customer base of the NPS and “we need to serve them where they live in order to get their involvement and support” (Interviewee 3).

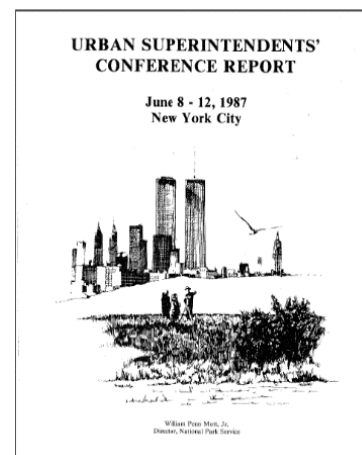
This urgency for change was met with an opportunity. In 2012, the NPS received an invitation to attend the *Greater and Greener* conference in New York City. The conference emerged as a chance for the NPS to engage with over 900 urban professionals from more than 20 countries to demonstrate its commitment to urban issues. One community leader alludes to the fact that the NPS was not going to attend initially but after some deliberation, the NPS decided to participate. This decision played a key role in the formation of *Urban Matters*.

We were seen by the [conference] organizers as MIA early on. We weren’t at the table at all initially so our colleagues in New York said ‘why aren’t you coming to this meeting?’ I think it might have been serendipitous that the conference happened because the Park Service didn’t step up initially [...so the] conference catalyzed the support (Interviewee 6).

There was a turning point toward the end of the *Greater and Greener* conference when an NPS superintendent presented a report published in 1987. The urban issues described in this 27 year-old report were nearly identical to the urban issues NPS participants had just identified during the conference. “The fact that very little had changed [from 1987 to 2012] brought in the whole idea of innovation [as a way to bring about change]” (Interviewee 3). The 1987 report challenged participants to change the way they approached urban issues. This situation revealed the static approach the NPS had been taking on urban issues and reinforced the urgency for change. Thus, the 2012 conference participants were motivated to find new, unconventional, and creative ways the NPS could better address urban issues. To many within the NPS, this conference, and the explicit linkage to the old NPS report, served as “the genesis” for the formation of the *Urban Matters* community of practice (Interviewee 7). Immediately following this conference, the NPS created *Urban Matters*.

Influential Champions

Beyond the presence of an urgency for change, overwhelming support for *Urban Matters* came from several influential champions within and beyond the NPS. Their support underscored the urgency for change and strengthened the agency’s resolve for action. These individuals were champions of collaboration and an increased urban focus within the NPS. The champions, as identified by community of practice leaders, are NPS Director Jon Jarvis, Deputy Director Peggy O’Dell, former Deputy Director Mickey Fearn, and independent management consultant and current NPS Advisory Board member Meg Wheatley. According to the interview data, community of practice leaders said Director Jarvis and Deputy Director O’Dell championed engagement with the urban population and increased collaboration between NPS parks and programs (Interviewee 2, 3, 8).



I think you’re dealing with the paradigm shift. First Jon, and people like him, said the Park Service is more than just a collection of 401 special places. Jon and a lot of the more progressive leadership recognize that we’re talking about the whole Park Service [both NPS parks and programs] and that gets to the urban idea (Interviewee 2).

Community of practice leaders cited Director Jarvis as a supporter of the idea that innovation can be a byproduct of collaboration and that urban parks are often the innovation leaders.

Jon [Jarvis] is quick to point out that it's [urban parks like Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco] that are driving most of the innovation in the agency right now and a lot of that can be extended or transferred to parks in general (Interviewee 2).

Like Director Jarvis, consultant Meg Wheatley also called for greater collaboration. She championed innovation and the need to illuminate the innovation pioneers through her influential work on 21st century leadership. Her ideas around innovation and shining a light on the good work being done are now becoming part of the NPS culture (Interviewee 3). She is a proponent of innovation through the shared learning that takes place in communities of practice, writing extensively about how to build and sustain communities of practice in order to create new information and energize teams (Wheatley, 2002; Wheatley and Frieze, 2006).

Former Deputy Director Mickey Fearn is another influential leader calling for a more innovative and bold NPS culture along with greater NPS urban engagement (Interviewee 2, 3). He has repeatedly called for NPS employees to think and act more boldly and challenged them to develop a greater awareness of how they can serve urban communities. For instance, at the *Greater and Greener* conference, he urged participants to challenge the way the NPS currently operates:

Mickey [Fearn] talked a lot about the alignment of the conservation agenda. You know, the Big Green Organization, and aligning it with the urban agenda, especially environmental justice, and flipping the question to *what's in the best interest of the communities* instead of *what's in the best interest of the agencies*, which is a paradigm shift for the NPS (Interviewee 2).

There is another aspect of the influential champion precondition relates to value congruence. The community of practice leaders' values largely aligned with those stated by the 4 influential champions. This value congruence combined with community leaders' previous or current experience working in urban parks across the country, motivating community leaders to take on leadership roles in *Urban Matters* (Interviewee 3, 4, 6, 12). These community leaders, many of whom have spent significant portions of their careers working in urban parks or with urban programs, now

hold high-level positions within the NPS and partner organizations. One participant said, “the whole emphasis on urban comes from a groundswell trend from certain individuals who have now made it to Washington” (Interviewee 4). In many ways, *Urban Matters* is the result of a new generation of leaders who have worked at the grassroots level in urban areas for many years and after they ascended to higher positions in the organization, brought their urban experience and affinity with them. Their values were affirmed by the 4 initial influential champions. This affirmation, combined with their personal experiences and expertise regarding urban issues and collaborative ways of working, motivated these individuals to take on leadership roles in the *Urban Matters* community.

Financial Resources

In order to understand the financial factors, it is first important to explain the management structure of *Urban Matters*. The Collaborative for Innovative Leadership is the organization responsible for managing *Urban Matters*. It is housed within the Conservation Study Institute, an organization within the NPS. The NPS established the Conservation Study Institute to help the agency and its partners operate in more collaborative ways using community engagement and 21st century leadership strategies. The Conservation Study Institute strives to advance “innovation in collaborative conservation for the stewardship of our national system of parks and special places.”² While the Institute oversees the Collaborative for Innovative Leadership, the Collaborative is not an organization in the traditional sense of the word. Rather, it consists of a network of professionals who work together from various agencies and organizations to build and sustain communities of practice and other collaborative mechanisms that accelerate knowledge exchange, develop new and innovative approaches, and share practical experience. During the *Urban Matters* initiative, four organizations worked to co-manage the collective effort. The organizational chart below helps to show the structure.

² <http://www.nps.gov/csi/>

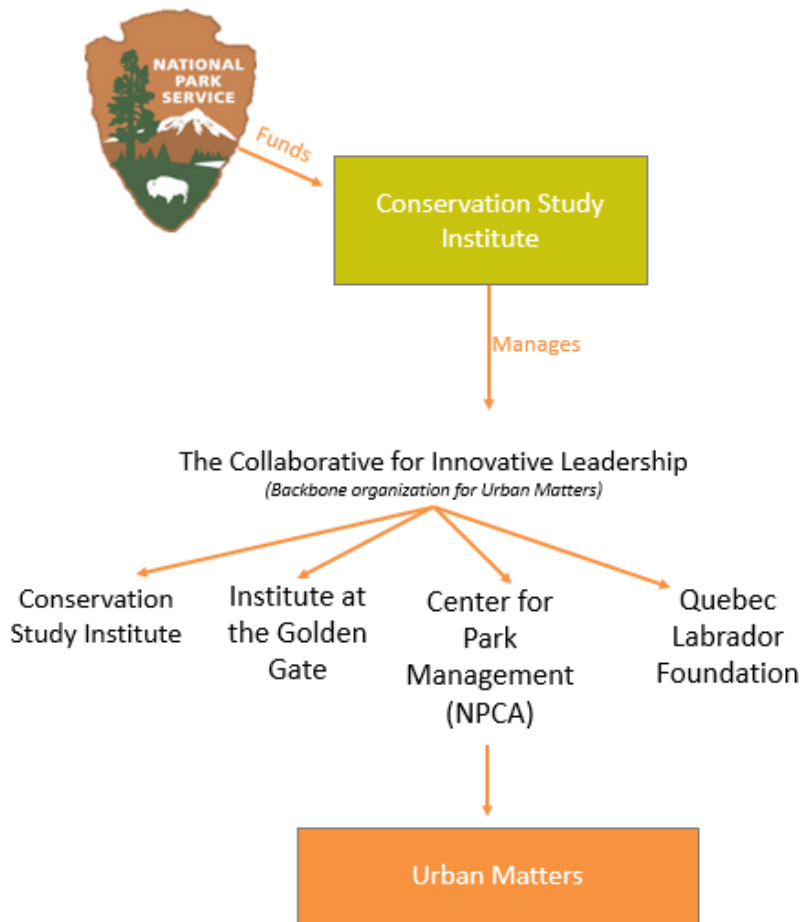


Figure 7: Management structure of Urban Matters

Neither *Urban Matters* nor the Collaborative for Innovative Leadership had a budget dedicated to the collective effort. Consequently, the financial support for *Urban Matters* came from a variety of places. *Urban Matters* relies on funding from the Conservation Study Institute in the form of three dedicated full-time employees for the *Urban Matters* effort. The Conservation Study Institute has a yearly operating budget of \$436,000. In addition, the organizations that make up the Collaborative for Innovative Leadership indirectly fund *Urban Matters* because the individuals within these organizations use a portion of their time to collaboratively manage *Urban Matters*. An additional \$100,000 in funding came from the Northeast Regional Office in 2013 through a cooperative agreement. This financial support has contributed to the effort's sustained presence.

This analysis shows that there were adequate, but not overwhelming, financial resources available for *Urban Matters* and that these resources allowed *Urban Matters* to emerge and sustain itself thus far. Participants commented on these financial resources, saying:

[The support] was there in words and actions but in terms of dollars, I think it's been the Northeast Region that's been shepherding a lot of the load, which is fine as a pilot, but as some point, other regions and offices need to help provide some [financial] structure for this effort. [...] (Interviewee 8).

...

The receptability from the leadership has been phenomenal. They've given us a lot of reign and allowed us to experiment with this and have given financial resources too.[...] I give them a lot of credit for allowing this to emerge. That trust shows me a desire for doing things differently, for understanding that the world is changing around us, and for seeing the need to bring down silos. (Interviewee 7)

The collective impact framework does not go into detail about the type and amount of financial resources necessary for an initiative to form, but as we can see in the case of *Urban Matters*, the initial startup funds from the NPS and the Collaborative for Innovative Leadership as well as additional funds and support from other regional offices have contributed to the effort's overall staying power.

Sustainability and management

The following section goes through each of the five pillars of collective impact and discusses the evidence found within *Urban Matters* for each of these pillars. The analysis strongly supported the presence of the backbone organization and affirmed its role in sustaining the initiative. Data also supported the presence of continuous communication with NPS leaders and community of practice leaders. The data did not provide strong confirmation of a fully-developed common agenda that was

shared among the community leaders. Community leaders commented on the need for better defined goals and outcomes. Similarly, the analysis did not discover an abundance of evidence for the use of shared indicators and measures. Three participants expressed their desire for more developed metrics and evaluations in order to better gauge the impacts *Urban Matter* had thus far. Finally, while the collective impact approach states that mutually reinforcing activities are key to successful collaborative maintenance over time, the analysis shows that it is important to first develop an awareness of the existing cultural context of the NPS. This helps such reinforcing activities experience greater success. In all of these findings, it is critical to remember that *Urban Matters* is still ongoing. The presence or lack of presence for certain collective impact pillars speaks to the fact that this initiative is still young and also indicates the importance of strengthening certain pillars as the initiative progresses. Collective impact initiatives last 10 years or more, so assessing *Urban Matters* after two years of existence means that this analysis intends to inform the upcoming stages of the *Urban Matters* process and also inform the NPS as it institutes communities of practices in the future.

INSTITUTING AN ENDURING INFRASTRUCTURE OF SUPPORT

After the initial *Greater and Greener* conference on urban issues, the NPS deployed the *Urban Matters* community of practice. The Collaborative for Innovative Leadership, a network organization comprised of NPS and partner staff, served as the backbone organization providing essential support for the *Urban Matters* effort. The presence of a backbone organization is essential in sustaining a collective impact initiative. Community of practice leaders affirmed the central role the backbone organization played in sustaining the effort.

The backbone organization helped move things forward and helped provide that facilitation function that coordinates and pulls things together. And they were the connector too. That's critical. This positioned us to move forward (Interviewee 5).

The Collaborative for Innovative leadership supported *Urban Matters* across all six measures identified by the collective impact framework. It offered strategic direction, facilitated partner dialogue, conducted data collection, managed communications, handled community outreach, and secured funding. *Urban Matters* benefited from having the Collaborative for Innovative Leadership

coordinate the effort and assemble the supporting infrastructure. In addition, the *Urban Matters* case demonstrates how a backbone organization can effectively access and build social capital to strengthen a collaborative initiative.

What the [Collaborative for Innovative Leadership] did and Michael [Director of the Conservation Study Institute] did in facilitating *Urban Matters* helped bring structure to the effort (Interviewee 2).

...

The backbone of the [*Urban Matters*] operation was very helpful and it can't be overemphasized enough how useful it was.[...It was great] having someone make sure we had the calls together, that we felt supported, and that we were able to talk about our different experiences and ideas for how to conduct [community of practice meetings] (Interviewee 8).

Urban Matters utilized a "unique" and "new" support infrastructure that paired NPS employees with partner staff to collaboratively manage the community of practice (Interviewee 9). Throughout the process, partner staff paired with NPS employees to prepare, facilitate, and market the meetings. This intentional coupling of NPS and partner staff to jointly lead the community of practice demonstrated the importance of working across organizational lines to build and sustain these interorganizational relationships. In the *Urban Matters* case, the backbone organization instituted this specific structure. This structure contributed to the longevity of the initiative because community leaders worked collaboratively to plan and facilitate these meetings (Interviewee 4). The fact that specific individuals were in charge of each community session reinforced a sense of responsibility and accountability, which helped carry the initiative forward (Interviewee 2). If there had been a looser, more organic structure during the initial stages of the community of practice, *Urban Matters* might not have had the necessary organization or leadership needed to sustain itself (Interviewee 4).

While the collective impact framework goes into detail discussing the various ways an effort can be supported by the backbone organization, it does not mention how a backbone organization's social capital can affect the collective effort. Social capital is the structure and the resources within human relationships. Social capital refers to how these relationships are used to produce mutually

beneficial action and outcomes (de Souza Briggs, 1997; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998; Maak, 2007). This study found that the backbone organization plays a leading role in accessing and building social capital to propel the initiative forward. Because the backbone was seated within the agency, it was able to move around the NPS more freely to see if the effort could get more traction (Interviewee 5). In the case of *Urban Matters*, the backbone used its social capital to both develop and maintain trust with the NPS leadership as well as to foster new relationships between community of practice leaders and partner organizations that served to further collective action. The power of connections and social ties to NPS leadership was one of the factors that has allowed *Urban Matters* to sustain itself (Interviewee 5, 7, 10, 11).

Somebody in a park could try to do what [The Collaborative for Innovative Leadership] is doing right now and it would go nowhere beyond that park, but because of Michael's [Director of the Conservation Study Institute] and the [Collaborative's] connection to DC and because [Michael's] got a lot of social capital, he's been able to really leverage that to the advantage and get much greater buy in. If an entrepreneurial person with the exact same ideas and values and motivations, but without that social capital or that connection to DC [tried this], they couldn't get to where we are today. So I credit Michael and [the Collaborative for Innovative Leadership] for that success (Interviewee 11).

The Collaborative for Innovative Leadership was able to access and broker social capital across organizational and hierarchical lines to gain support at both the field and leadership levels (Maak, 2007). The initiative initially started within a single agency and has now spread to include 23 partner organizations. The community of practice leaders contributed to the development of social capital by linking new community of practice participants to experts in the field, increasing trust, and developing a shared language and context among community members (Lesser and Storck, 2001; Wasko and Faraj, 2005; Interviewee 4, 7, 9). By linking participants together, the community developed a 'know-who' between participants, as well as a know-how. This allowed *Urban Matters* to become more than just a knowledge exchange (Iverson and McPhee, 2008; Brown and Duguid, 1991; Interviewee 4, 10, 12). The Collaborative for Innovative Leadership was able to play to its strengths by recognizing social capital as one of its primary assets and used this capital to promote *Urban Matters* within the various levels of NPS leadership.

COMMUNICATION AND TRUST

Continuous communication is one of the five pillars for collective impact initiatives. The *Urban Matters* data provided strong support for this pillar. *Urban Matters* communicated across a variety of levels, engaging in both outward and upward communication. *Urban Matters* communicated with NPS leadership, *Urban Matters* community of practice leaders, community of practice members, partners, and field staff. The community of practice leaders point to *Urban Matters'* effectiveness in communicating upwardly with NPS leadership. This is a particularly important audience as there can be pushback from those in leadership who do not want to see a change in the status quo. Abele (2011) says this “establishment bucking” is unavoidable. However, resistance can be tempered through effective communication. Engaging respected leaders from the NPS in the *Urban Matters* process has ensured its sustained presence. Community of practice leaders felt like *Urban Matters* communicated well with NPS employees.

There's more potential with *Urban Matters* because there is so much internal NPS buy in. [...] I think Michael [Director of the NPS Conservation Study Institute] is spreading a wide net, making sure people are brought in and communicating what they're thinking about and what they're doing (Interviewee 10).

Community of practice leaders discussed the importance of continuous communication and trust. Collaborative governance theory stresses the necessity of trust-building activities. One of the most effective ways communication can contribute to strong levels of trust is through face-to-face dialogue. Collaborative governance theory underscores the importance of engaging horizontal networks and allowing for face-to-face interactions within these networks. Even though *Urban Matters* was a primarily web-based community of practice, community leaders also derived great value from face-to-face interactions.

It seemed like the *Urban Matters* strategists worked really well together and I credit that to them having time face to face, in New York City [at the Greater and Greener conference] and in [San Francisco]. This allowed them to trust each other (Interviewee 10).

...

Having the face-to-face time first was very important. Had we tried to do it all over the phone, it would have been more difficult because it's nice to get to know people and build a sense of trust where you can then talk openly and honestly (Interviewee 4).

While the collective impact framework does not go into depth about the type and quality communication, the broader literature on collaborative governance underscores the importance of engaging collaborative partners across organizational lines. This engagement is critical for building support and increasing the capacity for collective action. The analysis of *Urban Matters* found that *Urban Matters'* outward communication was not as strong as its communication internally and upwardly.

It's high time to start having conversations [with our NPS partners] that are less dominated by the Park Service and are more outwardly focused. [...Through *Urban Matters*] we started to get a really good handle on our own [NPS] urban inventory, but we don't know as much about our potential partners yet and that's a big can of worms to open, but I think it's going to be fruitful so I hope it happens (Interviewee 10).

The community of practice leaders who were not NPS employees said the atmosphere was inspiring and collegial but some added that it was hard at times because they felt out of the loop and would have appreciated more interorganizational mingling and conversations.

It was a little hard as a non-NPS employee. [...] I think if there were more direct relationships between the support team and the strategists that it would've made for a more fruitful conversation (Interviewee 10)

...

I still don't feel like I'm at the table, or that I'm fully part of the process. (Interviewee 11)

While the community of practice did achieve some partner participation, one community of practice leader stated that "they didn't stick around because they weren't being asked direct

questions and there wasn't a clear question or ask of the people on those calls, so it was a bit of a missed opportunity." (Interviewee 10)

DEFINING AND ALIGNING GOALS

Urban Matters was designed to be a flexible, creative body of change. This can be seen in the comments from some community leaders who expressed their desire for *Urban Matters* to be a primarily emergent effort. Yet, these leaders also realized that this emergence must be tempered with a certain level of direction and guidance.

There is a tension between trusting in the process and allowing people to feel comfortable. [...] I can feel that tension with people really needing to know where we're going (Interviewee 7).

The collective impact framework talks about the importance of defining and aligning goals to guide the effort. It calls this process the "common agenda" and it is one of the five pillars of the framework. The common agenda (1) defines what the problem is and (2) determines a clearly defined plan of action to address it. The idea of a common agenda is rooted in the collaborative governance literature which points to the importance of establishing a common purpose and goals by defining the problem, forming a clear mission for action, and creating shared values in order to advance the mission. The community of practice literature also echoes the need to forge a shared repertoire based on mutual goals, vocabulary, and activities that further the collaborative's goal.

The analysis did not find a fully-developed internal agenda that laid out a comprehensive vision for *Urban Matters* community leaders in such a way as to define shared goals and outcomes. However, the analysis did find evidence of a broader agenda being developed for the NPS as a whole. This document, termed the Urban Agenda, has yet to be launched and was still being formulated at the time of this study. When it is launched it will be "an action plan for change" that people can actively rely on as a resource for the work they do in their urban communities (Interviewee 11).

While the Urban Agenda will offer guidance and provide action steps for the entire agency, the leaders of *Urban Matters* expressed their desire for an internal agenda that could have been shared among these 15 leaders earlier in the process that would have better outlined the vision and shared goals for *Urban Matters*.

What I said initially, which was that it was great that we didn't come in with all of our objectives set, became a little bit hard to work with. I would contend that it took a long time to get to the point where we really understood what we were doing. So strike a balance where you allow for this open-endedness and creatively but define it enough so that people know what's next (Interviewee 4).

...

In any collaboration, the trickiest process is determining what are we trying to achieve from this and what change are we trying to make. Are we trying to test something out? Or are we trying to implement a national policy? Getting people on board with clearly defined, mutually-agreed goals allows the group to move forward in a constructive way. [With *Urban Matters*] it's a bit of a work in progress still [...] There needs to be more clarity on why we're doing all of this and what the next steps are. We need to narrow this down and see what the next steps are (Interviewee 5).

Overall, the majority of community of practice leaders called for more clarity throughout the process. They spoke of their desire for a more developed structure or document that better outlined precisely what the mutual goals, outcomes, and tasks would be.

SHARED METRICS AND EVALUATION

Three participants spoke about the need for a more thorough evaluation process in order to quantify outcomes and communicate impacts better. Their comments support collective impact's shared metrics variable as a key component in the overall success of the collaborative effort and also point to the need for *Urban Matters* to strengthen this area in future efforts.

I wonder if we were successful [in the eyes of the *Urban Matters* community members]. I don't know. Did we have an evaluation with them that really assessed whether this was successful? The post-evaluation piece with the people who participated--if we're wondering how to improve this program into the future—is [vital] (Interviewee 4).

Further development of shared metrics and evaluation tools will enable the initiative to measure and monitor success and impacts. Evaluating the initiative can determine which pieces of the effort were successful, point to ways to improve the program in the future, and can clearly communicate the concrete outcomes that resulted from the collaborative effort.

Working within the cultural context

It is very hard to buck traditional agency culture in order to establish something new. The collective impact framework does not explain the role cultural context plays in bringing about collective change. Yet it does talk about the need for mutually reinforcing activities, a key pillar of the framework. In order to have such activities, it becomes critical to understand the context in which they occur. In analyzing *Urban Matters*, it became apparent that recognizing and understanding the NPS cultural context increases the likelihood of *Urban Matters'* success in changing NPS culture and in creating these reinforcing activities.

Community of practice leaders' comments shed light on the current cultural context. They also indicate the kind of change needed to effect a new NPS culture in order to have the types of collaborative, mutually reinforcing activities they envision. They describe the NPS as a slow-moving agency that is sometimes resistant to assuming a larger role in urban areas. Part of this stems from the fact that not all NPS staff believe the agency should be focusing on parks and programs in urban areas. Some see an increased NPS presence in urban areas as fundamentally opposed to the traditional mission of the agency.

There's a third of us that are very excited about [*Urban Matters*]. There's about a third that know [*Urban Matters*] is going on, and another third thinks [*Urban Matters*] is the worst thing to do--that it's taking us away from Yellowstone (Interviewee 12).

Sitting down with a group of urban park managers at the *Greater and Greener* conference, one community of practice leader asked these managers to share more about what they do in their urban parks. One of the urban park superintendents answered by saying, "First of all, we're not an urban park. We're a national park in an urban setting." This moment defined the challenge of creating a culture shift in the NPS. The community of practice leader added that "the Park Service

rank and file traditional folks did not see their management of urban parks as a place where people walked their dog or swam or ran or rode a bike or any of that stuff.” (Interviewee 2)

The statements from community of practice leaders and members reflect the tension regarding who the NPS exists to serve, what the NPS mission is, and how the agency should operate in the 21st century. This cultural clash also hinders innovation and the bold, risk-taking behaviors and activities that the agency is trying to cultivate. This results in a level of paralysis felt by employees throughout the agency as they are hesitant to take risks and act in innovative ways because they fear agency repercussions (Interviewee 3, 12).

During the 17 community of practice meetings, community members spoke about the changing cultural context within the NPS. “It’s about convincing the agency itself to think differently about its urban parks,” one community of practice member said. They talked about how to merge traditional NPS culture with the nontraditional culture and activities happening in NPS urban park units like geocachingⁱ, BASE jumpingⁱⁱ, and dogwalkingⁱⁱⁱ within the park. Given that urban parks are not traditional national parks like Yellowstone or Yosemite, community members explained that it is often difficult and even a bit illogical to use traditional methods to attract visitors to these places. They believe that increasing the acceptance of nontraditional activities in these urban parks will help increase connections between the NPS and the urban citizens surrounding the park.

Impacts

Admittedly, there are cultural tensions and challenges within the agency but the NPS has been responding in a variety of ways. The *Urban Matters* community of practice has been one way to migrate away from organizational path dependency and explore new ways of working. Recognizing the cultural context has helped the initiative be more successful in its desire to create a cultural shift within the organization. The *Urban Matters* case study is relevant for the NPS as it tries to increase its collaborative efforts. Even though the *Urban Matters* community of practice is less than two years old, initial impacts suggest that *Urban Matters* has made progress towards accomplishing its stated goals of increasing collaboration and innovation. The analysis found three primary impacts of *Urban Matters*. These impacts, described in detail in the following paragraphs, are as follows:

1. *Urban Matters* created a space for NPS and partner professionals to come together and have candid conversations.
2. *Urban Matters* encouraged a culture of bold risk-taking within the agency.
3. *Urban Matters* enhanced networks and professional relationships.

First, *Urban Matters* created a space for NPS and partner professionals to come together and have candid conversations. Through *Urban Matters*, sharing stories and knowledge became more strategic and structured. Prior to *Urban Matters*, community of practice leaders noted there was a lot of activity going on in the field but this activity “wasn’t being done in a strategic way and sometimes people weren’t even telling others about it.” (Interviewee 3) In a large organization that manages over 84 million acres of America’s public spaces, there is a certain degree of irony that there are few collaborative spaces within the agencies for employees to test ideas, communicate with one another, and build strong peer networks. The more than 21,000 employees working for the NPS and the countless partner organizations involved represent a tremendous wealth of human capital. What *Urban Matters* did was create a safe space for public lands professionals to gather together, propose ideas, pose questions, work through problems, and develop connections with their peers (Interviewees 1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 11).

It was inspiring to see these superintendents [who were *Urban Matters* community of practice leaders], who already think out of the box and do a lot of stuff in their own backyards under the radar, talking about these things and being open with each other (Interviewee 10).

...

I now see a lot of people saying, ‘I see how my program or park might be able to align here better or be a player’ (Interviewee 2).

The 17 *Urban Matters* community discussions meant community members were finally able to come together to exchange information, voice frustrations, and create knowledge and ideas for future action in urban areas. The *Urban Matters* community provided an online space for leaders to come together and ‘share some war stories’ and talk about how they ‘take calculated risks to do the right thing.’ (Interviewee 6) This space was not bound by geography, rank, or organization. Instead, members came together because of their common interest in urban park issues.

Secondly, *Urban Matters* encouraged a culture of bold risk-taking within the agency. The majority of the participants said that their involvement in *Urban Matters* increased their ability to innovate and experiment (Interviewees 4, 10, 12). One reason for this was a concept introduced to them during their early stages of participation in *Urban Matters*. Community leaders were asked to read and apply *The Lean Startup* to their work. *The Lean Startup*, a book written by Eric Reis in 2011, called for a more experimental, incremental management approach that championed iterative processes and adaptation. As the community of practice leaders worked through the Lean Startup model together, they cited an increased ability to experiment. One participant said the Lean Startup concept had a ‘freeing’ effect on their work.

It freed me to say to folks, ‘go try this, let’s try this’. It reinforced some things that I wanted to do. [In the NPS] there were so many times you got slapped or were being measured, left wondering ‘is this going to work?’ because if it doesn’t you’re going to get in trouble. So the Lean Startup was this sexy way of putting this [concept] out there, saying, ‘Let’s take a look at this and let’s just experiment.’ (Interviewee 4)

...

Urban Matters pushed us to think out of the box (Interviewee 12).

Within the NPS, there is sometimes a tendency to want to lay out the whole plan and design before any action occurs. But *Urban Matters* reinforced the importance of testing something out even if it is not perfectly planned and fully formed.

Thirdly, *Urban Matters* enhanced networks and professional relationships. Participants expressed how their collaborative networks had grown, both locally and nationally (Interviewees 1, 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12). For community of practice leaders, these expanded networks meant that their work on *Urban Matters* exposed them to more partner organizations and people with whom they were not previously working with (Interviewee 9). Leaders from partner organizations also commented on the process, saying it was a way for them to build good connections. Through collaborative efforts like *Urban Matters*, traditionally insular agencies can become more of an interconnected network. “The folks that I’ve met and learned about have been helpful to me. Now I have a network of urban parks people.” (Interviewee 12) By linking participants together, the community members both develop relationships and a skill set that results from a collaborative

learning approach that was more than just a knowledge exchange (Iverson and McPhee, 2008; Brown and Duguid, 1991).

Beyond the impacts of enhanced networks, collaborative spaces, and an increasingly broad acceptance of bold risktaking in the agency, *Urban Matters* signals a credible commitment to the NPS' push toward focusing resources on urban parks and communities.

Recommendations

As the NPS continues to push for increased collaboration, this study offers recommendations for how the agency can strengthen *Urban Matters* and future communities of the practice.

Recommendation 1: Secure multiregional funding and resources.

Urban Matters has demonstrated its ability to gather the support necessary to sustain momentum. A community of interest has emerged and initial impacts from the community of practice are beginning to appear. Therefore, in order to propel *Urban Matters* into its next stage and sustain the effort over the long run, it will be important to secure multi-regional NPS and partner organization funding. Broad investment in the next stage of *Urban Matters* and in future communities of practice will help disperse the responsibility across regional offices and organizations as well as ensure that there is national buy-in signified by the funding and resources allocated to *Urban Matters*.

Recommendation 2: Devise an internal agenda for community leaders earlier in the process.

Create a central agenda for community of practice leaders toward the beginning of the initiative. Finalize this internal document during the early stages of the initiative so that leaders are able to frame goals, construct a shared vision, and define key terms and metrics. Participants should feel comfortable with the emergent process but also have an idea of the direction the initiative is heading in terms of outcomes and goals. One way this can be achieved without compromising evolution and adaptation is through establishing intermediate outcomes and embracing 'small wins'

along the way (Ansell and Gash, 2007). If a collaborative process is intentionally designed to be more fluid and does not have a predetermined end goal, identifying intermediate outcomes and celebrating these ‘small wins’ throughout the process can be a fruitful compromise.

Recommendation 3: Develop shared indicators and an evaluation protocol

The collective impact framework notes that this is the most challenging aspect of the process. Challenging or not, developing a shared set of measures to monitor performance, track progress, and discover what is working and what is not working are all central to the effort’s long-term success. Evaluate community of practice members to determine what worked well in the *Urban Matters* community of practice, what did not work well, and gather their ideas for future communities of practice. During this process, explore the demographic of the community of practice members to determine if the community members mirror the demographic found in urban populations. This demographic survey can look at things like age, location, ethnicity, organizational affiliation, and number of years working for the organization. Evaluating the initiative can determine which pieces of the effort were successful, point to ways to improve the program in the future, and can clearly communicate the concrete outcomes that resulted from the collaborative effort.

Another component involves evaluating how *Urban Matters* demonstrated its value to a wide range of participants. Possible indicators to use to determine the value added to individuals and organization include examining (1) value added to the manager/professional involved, (2) value added to the home agency (ie access to information, resources, programs, professional development of staff, outside information adding to the internal knowledge of the organization), (3) collaborative skills, and (4) concrete results (Agranoff, 2006).

Recommendation 4: Strengthen communications between the NPS and the partners involved.

Further enhance engagement and communications with partner organizations in urban areas. Consistently strive for a fully-inclusive, equitable process between both the NPS staff and partners involved. Conduct frequent collaborative check-ins to make sure all participants believe they

are working in an equitable, transparent environment. Work more closely with partner organizations to establish clear roles and activities they can be involved in.

In conclusion, this study used the collective impact framework to evaluate *Urban Matters*. The collective impact framework illuminated ways in which *Urban Matters* has been particularly successful as well as defines areas to continue to develop as *Urban Matters* moves forward. The analysis of *Urban Matters* offers evidence supporting the three preconditions outlined by the framework, as well as shows support for two collective impact pillars thus far. Community of practice leaders stated that fortifying the remaining three pillars will allow *Urban Matters* to sustain itself well into the future and experience greater success. Using the collective impact framework to guide future collaborative efforts will help *Urban Matters* have an even more profound impact upon the agency's goals of fostering effective collaboration and innovation.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Questions

Introduction

1. [If I'm not familiar with their position] I'd love to hear a bit more about the work you're currently doing as [Superintendent of GOGA] as well as the career you've had with the NPS.
2. How did you become involved in *Urban Matters*?
 - a. *What motivated you to take a leadership role in the communities?*

Formation

3. What were the key factors leading to the initial formation of the *Urban Matters* COP? i.e., what people or things mattered most?
 - a. *(after they are done answering) Anything else?*
4. How strong was the initial NPS support for *Urban Matters*?
 - a. *Probe: Has this internal support grown stronger (or weaker) over time? Why do you think this is?*
 - b. *Probe: Have there been previous attempts or initiatives to address urban park issues? If yes, how and why is the Urban Matters COP different?*

*This section corresponds with the 3 Preconditions of Collective Impact (Kania and Kramer, 2011).

Sustainability

5. What kind of infrastructure supports the *Urban Matters* COP and how does it work in practice? (This gets at the "backbone organization" and "common agenda")
 - a. *Have you seen this model of support in previous programs and initiatives?*
 - b. *Are there distinguishing features of the Urban Matters support structure?*
 - c. *You've worked with the Urban Matters COP for several months now. What are the strongest parts of the support infrastructure? In what ways could the support infrastructure be improved?*
6. How well do the strategists and support team leaders work together on the initiative?
 - a. *Ask them to explain why and to describe/offer examples to illustrate.* (This question gets at the "mutually reinforcing" and "communication" components)

*This section corresponds with the 5 Essential Elements of Collective Impact (Kania and Kramer, 2011).

Adaptation & Influence

7. Have your experiences with this community of practice influenced the way you work with NPS staff, partners, and other public lands organizations? If yes, how so?

8. Is the *Urban Matters* of today the same as when the program started? Why or why not?
9. What kind of impact, if any, has *Urban Matters* had on the policies, practices and culture of the National Park Service?
10. Do you consider *Urban Matters* a success? Why or why not?
 - a. *(if not obvious in answer) How do you know success when you see it? (This gets at the “shared measurement” component)*
 - b. *If yes, what are the key factors propelling Urban Matters forward to success? (“communication” component is important)*
11. Given your experience with *Urban Matters*, should the NPS expand the use of COPs to other areas? Why or why not?
 - a. *If yes, what key things should the NPS do to facilitate or foster the development of communities of practice in the future?*
12. Can you think of anything I’ve left out or forgotten to ask you?

ⁱ Still prohibited in some parks, the idea of geocaching inside NPS sites is gaining wider acceptance. More information can be found here: <http://www.nps.gov/ever/planyourvisit/geocaching.htm>

ⁱⁱ This is an annual event at New River Gorge National Recreation Area. More information can be found here: <http://www.nps.gov/neri/planyourvisit/nrgbridge.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ This has been a controversial issue in parks across the country-most recently in Golden Gate National Recreation area. More information can be found here: <http://www.nps.gov/goga/parkmgmt/dog-management.htm>