A Student Competition to Reimagine America's National Parks
Parks for the People is a collaborative initiative of the U.S. National Park Service, Van Alen Institute, and the National Parks Conservation Association, with support from the National Endowment for the Arts and Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy.

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ABOUT

Introduction

Parks for the People is a design competition that will reimagine America’s most spectacular public places—its national parks—by using design as a catalyst to creatively rethink their connections to people and their role as revered natural, social, and cultural destinations.

As a culminating project of Designing the Parks—a partnership to promote well-designed public parks in America—Parks for the People invites student and faculty teams to help build a common foundation of design principles for these extraordinary sites as the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) embarks upon a new century of park design.

For almost 100 years, national parks have provided the public with opportunities to witness the wonder and value of nature, to reflect and explore, to learn about a common history and heritage, and to be immersed in the uniqueness of a landscape. As stewards of these natural and cultural treasures, the NPS oversees parks that are constantly changing. The last great wave of national park design occurred in the 1950s, largely focused on automobile infrastructure. In this new century America’s national parks are facing unprecedented challenges: shifting demographics, climate change, rapidly changing communications technologies, new transportation prototypes, and economic constraints are but a few of the urgent issues confronting today’s national park designers, planners, and managers.

This is also a time when popular interest in the design of public spaces has never been higher. This renaissance of interest has been stimulated in part by an intense focus on energy conservation, sustainability, and climate change. It is equally responsive to a growing commitment to broader inclusion and engagement of diverse communities and demographic groups who have not been traditional park users. How we plan and design our national parks in response to these changing imperatives will have an enormous impact on how successful we are at creating welcoming, meaningful, healthy, and enduring places that last well into the future.

To advance design excellence across the National Park System, Parks for the People will serve as a testing ground for ideas that grew out of Designing the Parks, an examination of the past, present, and future of park planning and design. Through a two-part conference in 2008, Designing the Parks brought together professionals in history, landscape architecture, architecture, historic preservation, and related fields to explore a unified design vision and produce a preliminary set of design principles to shape national parks in the twenty-first century. Parks for the People will field-test the following six draft design principles on real NPS sites:

- Reverence for place
- Engagement of all people
- Expansion beyond traditional boundaries
- Advancement of sustainability
- Informed decision-making
- An integrated research, planning, design, and review process

Today, as the NPS prepares to celebrate its centennial in 2016, these principles will shape our response to new opportunities to design a greater, richer national park experience. Seeking to inspire the next century of park stewardship, Parks for the People reimagines what national parks can be, asking bold questions that look afresh at park design.
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• How can design enhance the park experience?
• How can parks become more accessible?
• What is “preservation” and how can it evolve?
• What new ventures or partnerships could help connect parks to people?
• What is “sustainability” and what is its future role?
• What part can technology play in parks?

Goals

The overarching goal of the competition is to generate new and innovative ideas for twenty-first century national parks, the experiences of their visitors, the sustainability of their infrastructure, and their relationship to the public. Participating student and faculty teams will work with park administrators to create model solutions for seven park sites in each geographic region of the U.S., and use these design paradigms to create a stronger national identity for our open space ideals. Throughout the competition, schools will have an opportunity to engage with NPS and its rich cultural and historic assets, including access to park leadership, in-depth encounters with park sites, and the chance to build long-term relationships with park staff and resources.

The Competition

The competition is organized into two distinct stages. During the first competition stage, teams will be responsible for assembling and submitting a proposal for a Spring 2012 studio class based around one of these seven national parks. This proposal will be created from faculty and student research that focuses on their chosen park site, and should be reflective of the NPS design principles listed above. This research may address specific park projects, but may also investigate design and planning solutions that consider the way a modern visitor of any age, ethnicity, and ability relates to a national park and its story. In addition, the research may explore NPS policy and how park design, planning, and management ideas are shaped by such policy.

This first stage of the competition gives schools an opportunity to rethink research agendas to be more multi-disciplinary. To that end, participating schools could team up as a consortium to leverage complementary strengths and capacities. We strongly encourage interdisciplinary thinking and collaboration between designers and the environmental and social sciences, landscape ecology, communications, and other fields, along with new partnerships with local agencies, community groups, and nonprofits that may support each school’s studio work and further enrich the national park experience. At the same time, the competition aims to introduce new regional, public, private, and university partners to NPS and infuse the national parks’ design process with contemporary ideas and practices.

From this pool of proposals, seven student and faculty teams (one chosen for each of the seven regional parks) will be selected to proceed to the second competition stage and participate in a Spring 2012 semester design studio. The detailed brief for this Stage 2 studio will be determined after Stage 1 proposals have been evaluated by VAI, NPS, and the competition advisory team.

The competition will evolve as faculty and student research responds to the needs of the selected sites. As selected parks offer widely varying typologies for testing a range of design ideas, the competition seeks responses tailored to the issues and environment of each design studio’s chosen park. At the end of the competition, seven distinct studios will present design responses reflecting the unique issues, ecologies, and histories of that particular park type.

An awards ceremony will be held for the winning teams in Summer 2012, with Spring 2012 semester studio
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work exhibited online. A select number of students from each of the seven finalist teams will be eligible for paid summer internships with NPS in 2012 or 2013.

Schedule

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Advisory Committee

- Cathie Barner, Project Director, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy
- Randy Biallas, Chief, Park Historic Architecture and Landscapes, NPS
- Ethan Carr, Associate Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- Nette Compton, Senior Project Manager for Sustainability, NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation
- Susannah Drake, Principal, dlandstudio
- Rodger Evans, Chief, Design and Construction, Western Division, Denver Service Center, NPS
- Shaun Eyring, Chief, Resource Planning and Compliance, Northeast Region, NPS
- Randy Fong, Historical Architect and Project Manager, Yosemite National Park, NPS
- Jeanne Gang, Principal, Studio Gang
- Steven Handel, Professor, Dept. of Ecology, Evolution & Natural Resources, Rutgers University
- Setha Low, Professor, Ph.D. Programs in Anthropology, Geography and Environmental Psychology, The Graduate Center, CUNY
- William Morrish, Dean, Parsons School of Constructed Environments
- Aekta Shah, Director of Youth and Community Engagement, Wangari Maathai Center for Sustainable Cities and Schools
- Gullivar Shepard, Senior Associate, Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates
- Perry Wheelock, Associate Regional Director, Cultural Resources, National Capital Region, NPS
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THE SITES
During Fall 2011, faculty in architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, planning, ecology, preservation, communications, and related fields will organize research teams and begin an investigation of one of seven national park sites as the focus of their studio proposal:

- Northeast Region: Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, Elverson, PA
- National Capital Region: Civil War Defenses of Washington, Washington, DC
- Southeast Region: Biscayne National Park, Miami, FL
- Southeast Region: Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, Atlanta, GA
- Midwest Region: Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, KS
- Inter-Mountain Region: Valles Caldera National Preserve, Jemez Springs, NM
- Pacific West Region: San Juan Island National Historical Park, Friday Harbor, WA

THE SUBMISSION
Please note that the following information pertains to Stage 1 of the competition only. Detailed requirements for Stage 2 will be released in late 2011, with the announcement of Stage 1 winners.

Step 1: Choose one park from one region
Each participating studio team must select one park only to be the focus of their design work. While it is not a requirement, teams are strongly encouraged to select a site within their own region. Submitting schools are responsible for transportation costs to the site, and demonstration of ability to visit the site will be taken into consideration when projects are reviewed. During the Fall 2011 semester, faculty can use this site as the subject of seminars and/or symposia to explore aspects of design, management, and operations, from enhancing access and visitor experience to promoting ecological restoration, preserving historical resources, and integrating recreation and economic development. This is the time to begin exploring partnerships and to develop potential collaborations.

Please visit the following link for information about the NPS regions:

Step 2: Assemble a design studio thesis
After a site is selected and initial research has been conducted, each participating team is required to formulate and submit a design studio thesis—that is, a short synopsis (two page maximum) of the studio's overarching goals and direction, design principles, and applicability to both its chosen site and the National Park System at large. The design thesis must provide the context and framework for the studio, tying it together by asking pointed questions and providing specific avenues of design and planning exploration. The design thesis must describe an approach and a process to park design. It could consider broad issues, such as:
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• What is access? How can it be reconsidered and improved, taking into account the needs of different demographic groups?
• How should “visitor orientation” be viewed and accommodated in a modern national park?
• What is the social and environmental context of the park and the surrounding community? How might the definition of sustainability be broadened to consider these contexts?
• What is, was, and will be “preservation”?
• How can planning and design bolster park maintenance?
• What defines this and other national parks? How can this definition evolve?
• How can sustainability be enhanced?

Step 3: Create a studio syllabus
For Stage 1 of the competition, each participating studio team must produce a studio syllabus (five page maximum, excluding studio timeline). The studio syllabus will be a natural extension of the design thesis, laying out anticipated studio tasks, assignments, meetings, work products, etc. VAI and NPS may work with studio teams selected as finalists to refine the syllabus to better align the team’s thesis with the specific needs of the site and the requirements of the competition.

The syllabus should explain anticipated products, partnerships, design processes, and their environmental, social, and financial contexts. In formulating the syllabus, importance should be given to creativity of approach and clarity of content.

Step 4: Draft a studio schedule and timeline
The studio schedule will enable VAI and NPS to evaluate the feasibility and completeness of the proposed activities and will provide a framework for the team’s anticipated collaboration and partnerships. The content of the studio schedule is at the discretion of the participating team, but should include a list of studio tasks with anticipated studio exercises, a strategy for anticipated NPS participation, and studio deliverables. VAI and NPS realize that items and timing of tasks are subject to change. What is important is the approach and the process.

Step 5: Submit the competition materials
Participating design studio teams must submit the following items to Van Alen Institute by 6:00 PM EDT on November 1, 2011:

1. Team Lead/Coordinator and Contact Information
2. Name of Team’s Selected Park
3. Description of Team, including name and biography of the Team Lead/Coordinator(s), list of collaborators with their discipline and anticipated roles/responsibilities, and anticipated number of students
4. Studio Design Thesis (2-page maximum)
5. Studio Syllabus (5-page maximum - excluding Design Thesis and Studio Schedule)
6. Studio Schedule
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The general format of Stage 1 submissions is at the discretion of the applicant, provided the entries include all materials, above, in English. Maximum page limits must not be exceeded. Renderings and/or other elaborate imagery are not necessary as part of the Stage 1 submission. Submission materials must be emailed as a single .PDF document to the following address:


dtpstudio@vanalen.org

The .PDF file must not exceed 10MB in size. Hard copies of submission materials will not be accepted.

Rules and Eligibility
This competition is open to all American academic institutions. These institutions may partner with public and/or private entities at their discretion. All competition submission text must be in English.

In submitting an entry, entrants warrant that the material is their original work, does not infringe upon copyright law, and that they have permission to publish the material.

Team lead/coordinators may submit one entry only. Institutions of higher learning may have multiple submissions provided that a different team lead/coordinator organizes a unique submission with unique team.

Due to the nature of the competition, submissions will not be judged anonymously.

All entries must be submitted to Van Alen Institute’s office by 6:00 PM EDT on Tuesday, November 1, 2011. Late entries will be considered ineligible.

There is no entry fee.

Ownership, Display, and Publication
All material submitted to this design competition will become part of the public domain. Entrants acknowledge that Van Alen Institute may exhibit all entries in an online gallery, and a selection of entries may be chosen for physical exhibition and/or public display. Van Alen Institute will make reasonable effort to notify entrants of any public exhibitions of their work through correspondence with the registered contact.

In entering the design competition, entrants grant Van Alen Institute and NPS unrestricted license to exercise the entrants’ rights regarding their design submissions, including, but not limited to, reproduction, preparation of derivative works, distribution of copies of the design submission, and the right to authorize such use by others.

In entering the competition, the registrant and all team members recognize the competition’s program as the intellectual property of Van Alen Institute and NPS, and agree to credit the organizations by name in any subsequent exhibition or publication of materials. Entrants will be credited on all online and print material published by the organizers of the competition.
EVALUATION & AWARDS

Submissions will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Overall strength and innovation of proposal
- Clarity and freshness of design thesis
- Comprehensiveness of studio syllabus and schedule
- Multidisciplinary nature of team members and collaborators
- Relevance of proposal to chosen site and region
- Understanding and addressing NPS design principles

Point values will be assigned to the above criteria so that the submissions can be evaluated quantitatively. The Jury/Advisory Committee will also perform a qualitative evaluation of the overall creativity of the proposal thesis and syllabus.

Awards

Winners of this design competition have a unique opportunity to foster innovation and vision for the National Park System. While the National Park Service is under no obligation to implement the winning design proposals for specific park sites, these studio projects will be nationally celebrated as exemplary design solutions whose principles embody design excellence at both site and system levels.

Van Alen Institute and all the Designing the Parks partners will ensure broad public visibility for the competition, coinciding with the National Park Service’s 100th-anniversary celebrations. Every school that responds to Stage 1 will contribute to the NPS portfolio of design strategies through an online forum on national park design, which will be a resource for both competition participants and the public.

All seven Stage 2 finalists will be featured on the competition’s online platform and will receive wide media coverage in national publications. The finalists will also have opportunities to showcase their designs for park leadership, advocates, and the public at conferences and symposia.

The winning studio teams—whose schemes best exemplify the Park Service’s design principles and most creatively address each park’s specific needs—will be celebrated at an awards ceremony in Summer 2012. Selected students from each studio will receive a variety of other rewards, including paid summer internship opportunities at national park sites.

QUESTIONS

Questions regarding Stage 1 submissions will be accepted between August 15, 2011 and September 15, 2011, and can be submitted to dtpstudio@vanalen.org. Answers will be posted on the competition website, www.vanalen.org/parksforthepeople.
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PARTNERS

Parks for the People is a collaborative initiative of the U.S. National Park Service, Van Alen Institute, and the National Parks Conservation Association, with support from the National Endowment for the Arts and Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy.

Designing the Parks

Designing the Parks is a partnership among eight diverse organizations committed to sustaining healthy, vibrant public parks as a core of civic life. Embodied in this vision is a framework for planning and designing public parks that are innovative, responsive, respectful, sustainable, and inclusive. This structure is composed of six guiding principles which were developed through a dynamic interactive process. The partners are now facilitating a range of activities to refine and test the principles and ultimately fold them into mainstream planning, design, and management of public parks.