

INSTITUTE
AT THE GOLDEN GATE



BUILDING STEWARDSHIP THROUGH INTERNSHIPS

Lessons from Golden Gate National Recreation Area
and Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore



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Defining Stewardship

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing world, park leaders are seeking new ways to effectively steward the natural and cultural resources under their care – creating long-term, thoughtful methods for ensuring the sustainability of these important systems.

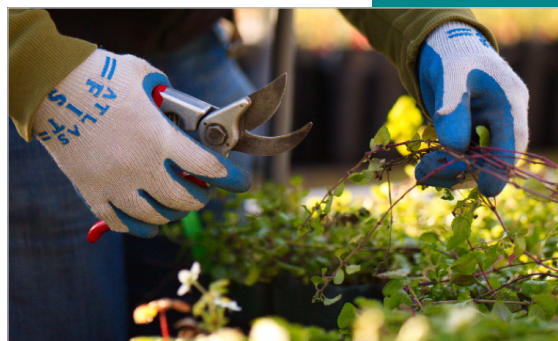
Yet with an increasingly urban population, how can parks and the conservation movement create the next generation of environmental stewards? Are internships a useful tool in achieving this aim?

In exploring whether park internships can help to create the next generation of engaged, informed, and active stewards, this report asks the following questions:

- (1) Do park internship programs create long-term park stewards?
- (2) If so, what are the key elements of a successful, sustainable park internship program?

Both the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (popularly known as the Golden Gate National Parks) and Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore have established internship programs that are successfully instilling a spirit of stewardship in many of their participants. Such programs could offer a roadmap for others seeking to create new park advocates and are valuable examples to study and support.

Over the past 20 years, internships in the Golden Gate National Parks have increased in number and spread across several departments and partner organizations. This growth reflects a larger, national trend toward increased intern opportunities and highlights the importance of a centralized effort to document and analyze how they operate.



The term “stewardship” can mean different things to different people. Its meaning is open to interpretation, and has shifted dramatically over time. For instance, 50 years ago, the goal in stewarding national parks was to “preserve, or where necessary recreate, the ecologic scene as viewed by the first European visitors.”¹

These days, however, stewardship is viewed differently, with one recent paper suggesting that it “involves land, money, planning, public participation, commitment, awareness, and volunteerism.”²

For the purposes of this report, we will consider stewardship in the most general sense, to mean preserving and caring for natural, cultural, and/or social resources.

1 “Wildlife Management in the National Parks: The Leopold Report,” Advisory Board on Wildlife Management appointed by Secretary of the Interior Udall, 4 March 1963

2 “The Excellent City Park System: What Makes it Great and How to Get There” by Peter Harnik, pp. 47-60 in *The Humane Metropolis: People and Nature in the 21st-century City*, ed. by Rutherford H. Platt, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

DO PARK INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS CREATE LONG-TERM PARK STEWARDS?

Many of the park internship programs in this study did not start out with a primary focus on fostering park stewardship. In fact, many program managers and intern supervisors we interviewed stated they did not have clear goals around building stewardship through internships.

However, our study of internship programs in the Golden Gate National Parks and at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore indicates that such programs do help foster a sense of stewardship, whether intentionally or not. Our research suggests that internship programs build long-term stewards in three ways:

- a) Park interns become individual stewards in the course of their work.** Working in a park in almost any capacity means protecting the environment, whether you are restoring habitat for endangered plant species or helping build community support by way of the public affairs office. Interns are immediately drafted into practicing stewardship in the short term regardless of whether or not they continue in the long term.
- b) Internships have the potential to broaden the diversity of park stewards.** Some intern programs specifically target participants from communities that have historically felt less welcome in national parks. Internships therefore offer an opportunity to engage and welcome future park stewards from parts of society that may not currently use and benefit from our nation's parks.
- c) Interns spread stewardship values to their networks and communities.** Many internships draw in individuals who already feel a strong sense of stewardship or have an interest in this area. These interns can play an important role in building stewardship among their friends, family, and wider community. Additionally, interns frequently oversee park volunteers,

shaping and delivering a message of stewardship as they demonstrate how to care for natural resources. For instance, some restoration programs, such as Presidio Park Stewards in the Golden Gate National Parks, are managed exclusively by interns. In this way, one intern can pass on the sense of stewardship to many.

Regardless of whether park leadership and supervisors are intentionally designing experiences to create a spirit of stewardship in the interns, there is evidence that well-managed internship programs do have this impact. In interviews with park managers, several highlighted this consequence of internships. One said she and her interns think together about what they want to “instill in and teach volunteers.” When her interns deliver that message of stewardship, “they tend to own it.” Many of their volunteers share this sense of ownership—some have been coming back to serve regularly for decades.

Internships Create Both Stewards and Future Staff

A 2013 survey¹ sent to 358 current and former interns in the Golden Gate National Parks supports the idea that internships not only build long-term stewards, but are also an excellent model for creating a pool of trained, talented future staff. Of the 125 program participants who completed the survey, 75% had gone on to do

¹ Full survey text in Appendix C



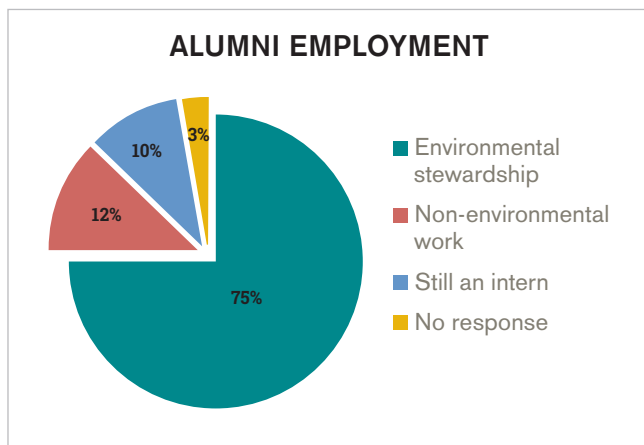


Figure 1

environmental stewardship work after completing their internships; 12% were working in other fields, including veterinary medicine, public education, and agriculture; and 10% were still interns at the time of the survey.

Internships' Role in Training Land Management Professionals

Furthermore, preliminary research suggests that successful internship programs can create future employees not just for the organization that hosts the interns, but for an entire field.

Breaking down the survey results from Golden Gate National Parks, the 75% of respondents who found employment in environmental stewardship took that commitment in a variety of professional directions. Of those alumni still in environmental stewardship, 36% are employees of one of the three local park partners: Golden Gate National Recreation Area (National Park Service), the Presidio Trust, or the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. Another 18% work for a government body, many of them National Park Service (NPS) employees in

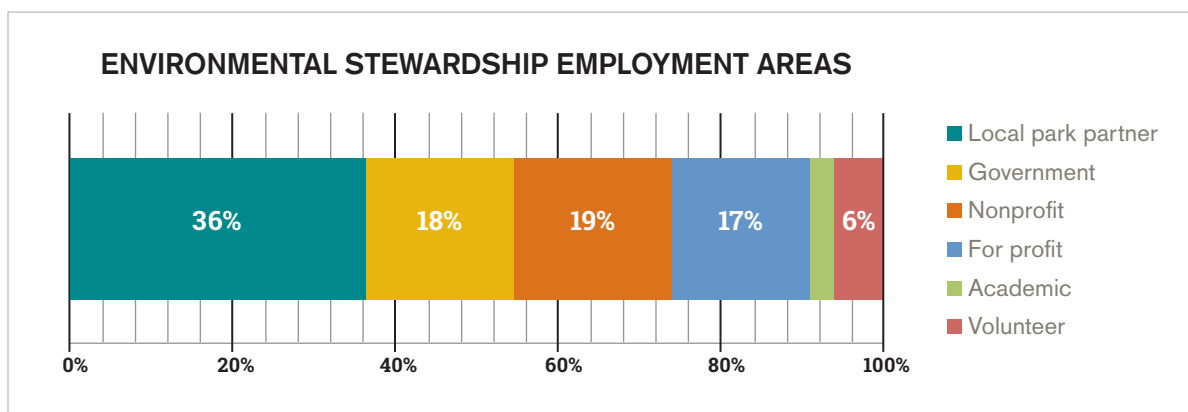
other parks. In addition, 19% work for environmental or conservation nonprofits and 17% do related for-profit work, frequently as consultants or contractors for the national parks. The remaining 9% include a few alumni who have gone into relevant academic fields as graduate students, post-doctoral researchers, or professors, or are spending their time as volunteers on stewardship projects.

Many former interns are establishing careers that allow them to study and care for natural resources. The fact that they have spread into different sectors indicates that internships are providing something deeper than a simple career pathway. Though a sizeable portion of the alumni have stayed in or returned to the Golden Gate National Parks, the majority went elsewhere and remained committed to the stewardship ethic. While this data does not prove causation, there is a promising correlation between park internships and a long-term involvement in stewardship.

Indiana Dunes does not currently have a similar dataset, and data collection on park internships is generally rare. However, the preliminary research from our interviews and analysis of the Golden Gate National Parks survey suggests not only that internships can help foster a sense of stewardship, but also that they can be a successful way to identify and train future land management professionals.

So, what are the key features of a successful internship program?

Figure2



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNSHIPS: WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL, SUSTAINABLE PROGRAM?

Internships support park stewardship in an immediate sense by creating individual stewards, in a long-term sense by widening the audience from which future stewards may come, and in a broad sense by teaching stewardship values to personal networks, visitors, and volunteers. Results from the Golden Gate National Parks intern survey show that there is also a strong correlation between completing a park internship and continuing to work in environmental conservation and stewardship.



Given these findings, it is in the interest of park leaders and land managers to develop successful, sustainable internship programs. The following section sets out the key elements or features for parks seeking to

build such programs. These insights are based on a review of strategies currently in use at the Golden Gate National Parks and Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

(i) View Your Interns As Future Park Leaders

If internships create a valuable community of stewards and even a pool of trained recruits and future staff, then the flipside is clear: interns should not be viewed merely as “cheap” or “free” labor. Yes, in some cases interns can help organizations do more with less. However this is a short-term approach that yields little long-term benefit to either the intern or the organization. The most effective internship programs in both the short- and long-term are those that train and inspire the next generation of park stewards.

Many of the recommendations that follow demonstrate how to build a program that adheres to this philosophy. The important message underpinning all of them is to invest as fully as possible in nurturing highly skilled experts and not to discount interns’ organizational and professional value.

(ii) Pay Your Interns

The Golden Gate National Parks found that paying interns a stipend, not just offering school credit, is crucial in making internships accessible to young people from low-income backgrounds—and in making internships a meaningful preparation for later jobs. Additionally, intern managers report that providing intern housing increases program accessibility and builds community.

(iii) Fund Your Programs

Even without taking housing and stipends into account, as one manager said in an interview, “It costs money to run good volunteer and intern programs” Lack of funding is the barrier park leaders are most likely to encounter, and though there are ways to find financial support for this kind of programming, none are easy for public employees.

In the Golden Gate National Parks, funding for internships is handled in several different ways, depending on the agency. The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy is a nonprofit and can fundraise, and the Presidio Trust is a federal corporation with the ability to operate for profit—both agencies have at least one dedicated staff member focused on internships, and both have regular line items written into their annual budgets for supporting internship programs. Meanwhile, the NPS funds some of its internships through special monies, federally appropriated for dispersal through the Youth Partnership Program (YPP). YPP requires the national park to work

in partnership with a nonprofit organization to provide programming on park lands—in this case, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy is that partner.

At Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, a smaller staff and a different set of partnerships have made finding funding a group effort. A few park internships are funded through the nonprofit Dunes Learning Center, but many more are funded through “soft money” supplements to the park’s base funding, often one- or two-year research grants that prospective intern supervisors have found and applied for on their own. These grants often come from nearby universities, or from organizations and agencies focused on specific topics like resource conservation or historic preservation. Park employees recognize that their base funding is a finite resource and so they each commit time to looking for grants in order to keep hiring the 75–80 interns they bring on annually.

The park also wrote a cooperative agreement with the local branch of Boys & Girls Club which allows it to hire teenagers. This agreement is particularly interesting because Boys & Girls Club provides the transportation (usually a challenge for the park), and although the framework was created for summer work, a few of the young participants have extended into the academic year, still coming to work in the park on Saturdays.

Both the Golden Gate National Parks and Indiana Dunes also accept interns through the federal Pathways Program (which replaced the old Student Temporary Employment Program and the Student Career Experience Program). In addition, Golden Gate draws interns from AmeriCorps and Public Lands Corps, and Indiana Dunes leverages

Youth Conservation Corps, Southwest Conservation Corps, and the Student Conservation Association.

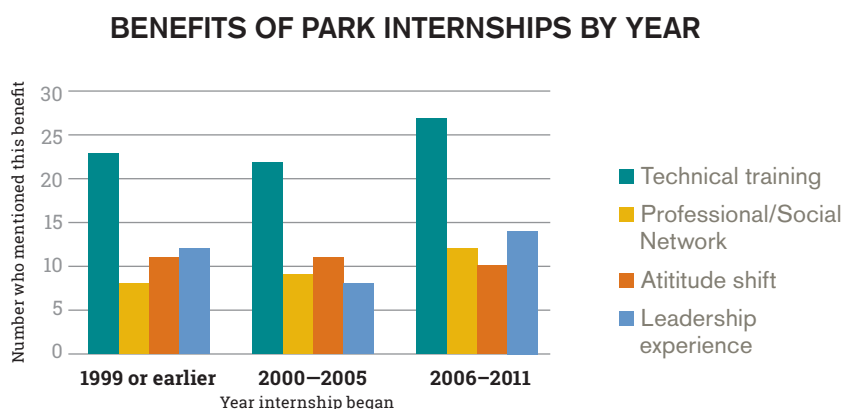
(iv) Design Your Programs As Training Opportunities And Career Apprenticeships

One strong financial argument in favor of putting staff resources and funding into internship programs is their potential to act as employment incubators. These programs can bring a significant payoff in terms of providing technical training and a pool of enthusiastic, talented potential employees.

Sheer diversity of training is a benefit in internships at Indiana Dunes. A manager there said that one of her goals is for interns to know that there are all kinds of jobs in the NPS, not just natural resources and interpretation. She arranges for interns to ride along with law enforcement staff, to work on natural resources projects, to meet researchers, to help with maintenance, to take a rotation with the summer archaeologist, and even to work with the fire crew when possible.

A 2013 survey in the Golden Gate National Parks asked current and former interns: “How do you think [this] position will help you in the future?” as well as “What skills/knowledge gained from your time in the park have you found most valuable?” 67% of participants called out technical training in their responses, including taxonomic identification of plants, GPS/GIS mapping, and use

Figure 3





of restoration tools such as chainsaws. Several also mentioned the value of getting to do a variety of tasks.

The commitment to giving interns marketable skills is particularly strong and specialized in the Golden Gate National Parks' native plant nurseries. A manager in that department described the program as offering expert training and explained that the goal of the internship is to build industry professionals. Nursery supervisors do this by working through a year-long, park-developed horticulture curriculum with their interns; by requiring each intern to choose, complete, and present an independent research or propagation project; and by involving interns in regular, park-wide enrichment classes called Park Academy. Park Academy classes cover everything from soil science to lichenology to drawing, and are open to every intern in the park, not just those assigned to the native plant nurseries.

As mentioned in the previous section, alumni from throughout the history of the Golden Gate National Parks' internships mostly report being employed in environmental stewardship jobs. Whether alumni feel that technical skills they learned as interns have been valuable because they continued to work in the same field, or whether they were able to continue to work in the same field because they had such strong technical training, the results are internally consistent. Survey respondents see clearly that the strength of their internship programs continues to play a vital role in their careers.

Thus the conclusion from a financial standpoint is compelling: since internships are training and career/recruitment tools, they should be viewed this way in terms of the cost-benefit analysis, and designed to maximize this type of outcome.

(v) Provide Leadership Experiences And Opportunities

In addition to technical and general work skills training, internships can also help foster future leaders and managers by providing supervisory and leadership opportunities. In the Golden Gate National Parks' survey, 31% of participants said that a valuable benefit of their internship was experience leading or managing volunteers. In an interview, one supervisor said that for her interns to really live out the ethic of stewardship, she expects them each to be an "ambassador, speaker, [and] leader." She puts large-group, one-day, volunteer projects under intern direction, saying, "I try to step back as much as possible ... The more programs [interns] run, the more they get exposed to."

Throughout the park, interns are responsible for volunteers in many capacities: interns write regular volunteer newsletters, track volunteer participation, present recognition gifts to long-term volunteers, teach volunteer groups restoration techniques and safety policies, oversee volunteers in data collection for citizen science efforts (for example, bird migration counts at the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory), and even drive volunteers to and from remote work sites.

One reason the Golden Gate National Parks are able to give interns so much leadership experience is the internal culture and tradition of adopting high expectations for interns. One manager demonstrated that culture in an interview when she said, "[Interns] have a good deal of autonomy and responsibility. They afford respect." She thought it might be hard to replicate this in a workplace with a tradition of hierarchy.

(vi) Emphasize Mentorship As A Key Component of Intern Management

Mentorship should be viewed as an integral part of the manager's job description, not simply a collateral duty. At Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, staff members have developed an informal mentoring program in which park employees work closely with new interns whom they do not supervise. For example, an interpretive ranger might offer to serve as a test audience for a new interpretive talk that an intern has developed, so s/he can get feedback from a new perspective. One manager offers career development help, too; she gives every outgoing intern a sample resume for a federal job application, a flyer with the web address for the federal government's official hiring site (and a hint that Indiana Dunes starts posting its openings there in January or February), and an offer to look over their resumes by email.

At Golden Gate National Parks, staff estimate that in the first two to three months of an internship they spend about 50% of their time training and mentoring their interns. This drops to about 20% of their time in the following months. Key pieces of this relationship building include weekly check-ins and an open door policy. One of Golden Gate National Parks' internship programs even requires supervisors to submit an application detailing how they plan to fulfill their role as a mentor prior to being assigned an intern.

Both case studies for this report emphasized that intern managers must see themselves as more than just supervisors. Building a supportive relationship between an intern and their manager, as well as with other staff, is critical to the growth and professional development of the intern.

(vii) Pass On The Passion

Interviews and survey data suggest that the most effective internship programs should help convey a passion for parks. Energetic, motivated staff and supervisors who ask questions and inspire interns can go a long way towards passing on the passion for stewardship.

A manager at Indiana Dunes explained that it's not important whether their interns stay at the park for future jobs. She said that staff members try to teach interns that they have been entrusted with preserving the land, and that "parks don't stop because there's a fence."

28% of the intern survey participants described broad shifts in their attitude or worldview as valuable internship takeaways. Though each phrased it differently, some key themes and concepts came through: internships at the Golden Gate National Parks teach participants to value teamwork and collaboration, and to work with enthusiasm and kindness, even when the task is daunting. For example, alumni wrote that they learned the following:

- ▶ "When you share your passion and work with others, you can instantly open minds and build community."
- ▶ "I've learned to put myself in someone else's shoes, if only for a moment, to better understand how and why they come to the parks and open space."
- ▶ "[W]orking collaboratively on projects, and supporting the involvement of anyone, regardless of experience or skill, was as important as achieving perfection. Process and methods matter, often more than results."

Interviews with park leaders suggest that this lesson is built into the internship by the way that staff members rely



on each other. One team, which includes employees and interns who work in three different counties, gathers once a week for an in-person meeting, to share what each person is working on, and a “high” (positive experience) and a “low” (negative experience) each person had the previous week. The team leader has made these meetings a top priority—no conflicts allowed. When one team member has an urgent need (for example, one of them said, “if the Wolfback Ridge broom [a noxious weed] is about to go to seed”), the rest of the team drops what they are doing to help. As interns see these practices modeled, and participate in them themselves, the way they approach their work changes in the long term.

(viii) Recruit For Diversity

If the future of parks and public lands depends on creating the next generation of stewards, internship programs need to reach an increasingly diverse audience. This should not be limited to ethnic diversity but should also include more effectively engaging economically disadvantaged communities, those of differing physical abilities, potential visitors of all ages, and populations that generally lack access to our national parks. This can be a challenge for many environmental and conservation organizations and is of paramount importance.

In recent years, there has been a growth in national interest and efforts to improve park relevancy and to reach out to a more diverse audience. Many scholars, leaders, and activists are now writing about and working on this topic. As a starting point, please refer to the National Park Service’s publication *Beyond Outreach*¹ and the Institute at the Golden Gate’s 2015 report on urban youth engagement strategies.²

(ix) Provide Professional And Social Networks To Interns And Alumni

In the Golden Gate National Parks intern survey, 28% of respondents mentioned either the professional or social

network (or both) that came with the internship experience as something that they have found valuable or that they have used often. Alumni described “a network of friends and colleagues that feel more like extended family than anything else,” and “a solid network of professional contacts.” Interviews with park leaders illustrate a supportive, thoughtful team that buzzes with energy. They approach intern development as interest-based rather than simply need-based, so learning conversations between mentees and supervisors happen in trucks, between volunteer programs, and over lunch, whenever the opportunity to think critically about a park issue arises.

One manager said that interns learn from this community that “the kind of conversations you have, how humble you are, how grateful you are—all of this matters.”

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(x) Measure The Results

Establishing basic measurements and indicators to judge the impact of internship programs is important. Ideally, these should be simple, straightforward, consistent over time, and tied to specific program goals. Currently, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore and the Golden Gate National Parks primary evaluation system is based on exit interviews with departing interns.

The Golden Gate National Parks’ 2013 survey, emailed to 20 years’ worth of intern alumni in conjunction with an invitation to a reunion event, provided some helpful preliminary data. However a more frequent, consistently applied approach to learning from past participants (and to programmatic self-reflection) would give internship managers the opportunity to co-design future offerings with their alumni. Additionally, building in a modest amount of staff capacity to analyze the data is important. Measuring results is critical and requires investing time and resources into analyzing and learning from the data.

¹ National Park Service Conservation Study Institute, 2011. www.nps.gov/Civic/resources/Beyond%20Outreach%20Handbook.pdf

² *Engaging Diverse Youth in Park Programs*, Institute at the Golden Gate, 2015.

CONCLUSION

Stewarding our national parks is a major undertaking, and the challenge will likely grow in the years to come. Internship programs are already playing a crucial role in training future park stewards and providing a platform for interns to share the stewardship ethic with community members. Park leaders have an opportunity to commit time and resources to strengthening and developing these programs, thus empowering a new generation of park users and advocates. Incorporating the key features in this report will make internship programs more effective and lead to powerful, long-term change for parks.



APPENDIX A: LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS REPORT

The author and the Institute at the Golden Gate would like to thank all of the individuals who participated in interviews and provided their insights in the making of this report, as well as for their passion and dedication to park stewardship and park interns.

Catherine Carlton | Jane Chin | Frank Dean | Sharon Farrell | Allen Fish | Sue Gardner | Michele Gee | Barbara Holzman
| Sarah Koenen | Terry Kreidler | Howard Levitt | Elizabeth Lindner | Jenny McIlvaine | Greg Moore | Rebecca Morford |
Ray Murray | Yakuta Poonawalla | Nina Roberts | Graham Schnaars | Aleutia Scott | Denise Shea | Alisa Shor |
Chris Spence | Monica Stafford | Kim Swift | Kay Wang | Betty Young



APPENDIX B: PARK STEWARDSHIP SURVEY

Stewardship Intern and Staff Alumni Survey

Hello Friends and Colleagues in Stewardship!

We hope you are able to join us on August 24, 2013 for the Intern and Staff Reunion Event! For everyone that RSVPs by August 1, we will order you one of our special-edition, picnic blankets available to pick up at the party.

Name* _____

Email* _____

Phone _____

Will you be attending the reunion?* ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe

If yes, how many adults (including yourself) and children (including ages) are you bringing? _____

Collectively, we make up an amazing, environmentally-themed network of talent and experience. In an effort to keep us all connected and gather our stories and history, we've put together a few additional questions. This information will help us better track our programs, and enable us to keep in touch with you. Everyone who takes the time to answer these additional questions will be entered into a raffle for a \$100 gift card from REI.

Would you like to connect to Park Stewardship on Facebook? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what's your Facebook name/email address? _____

We'll be posting information about our reunion event and will be collecting photos and stories through Facebook. Most of all, we are hoping to establish a means through which we can all stay in touch throughout the years.

PROGRAM AFFILIATION (OK to check more than one)*

☐ Park Stewardship (formerly Site Stewardship) ☐ Habitat Restoration Team ☐ Presidio Park Stewards

☐ Other _____

What year(s) did you intern or work in the park?* _____

What have your next steps been since leaving the park (school, career, adventures, etc.)? Where are you now?

If you have a stable position in the park, skip this. If you currently intern in the park or have a seasonal position, you can let us know what you hope your next steps to be.

If you currently work in the park, how do you think the position will help you in the future?

What skills/knowledge gained from your time in the park have you used the most, or found most valuable?

In reflection, do you have any recommendations to strengthen our programs?

Finally, help us get connected and stay connected: We are trying to reach all former staff and interns from Park Stewardship, Presidio Park Stewards, and Habitat Restoration Team. We don't have everyone's contact information, so help us spread the word! Friend us on Facebook at facebook.com/park.stewardship to find more information about the event, and to connect in with your amazing network of park friends and colleagues.

Many thanks, Team Stewardship

* Required



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruth Pimentel is an Emerging Leaders Fellow at the Institute at the Golden Gate, focused on policy relating to urban parks. She has worked in the national parks as an intern volunteer manager and field ecologist, and for AmeriCorps as an urban gardener and health educator. She holds a B.A. from Harvard University and resides in the San Francisco Bay Area.

ABOUT US

The Institute at the Golden Gate is a program of the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy in partnership with the National Park Service. Our mission is to make parks and public lands part of the solution to major societal challenges like our healthcare crisis, climate change and urban development. The Institute pilot tests new ideas locally, measures the impact, identifies and shares best practices, and influences policy regionally, nationally and globally.



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