



# HOW-TO

# Park Stories



## GET READY! Set goals for using this tool.

Remember to work with your Partnerships for Parks (PFP) Outreach Coordinator (OC) when using input-gathering tools. Your OC can answer questions, offer suggestions, and help you work well with Parks throughout the capital process. To find your OC, visit the People Make Parks (PMP) Website.

## BEGIN PLANNING: AT LEAST 3 MONTHS BEFORE

- Review the Event Planning Tool, Timeline, and Checklist.
- Discuss your goals in using Park Stories. Use the questions below as a guide:
  - > WHY do we want to use Park Stories?
  - > WHO do we want to reach with Park Stories?
  - > WHAT information about people's connection to the park do we want to capture with Park Stories?
  - > WHEN do we want to use Park Stories, so that the largest number of people can attend?
  - > WHERE do we want to host Park Stories to encourage strong turnout?
  - > DO WE NEED signs and instructions for Park Stories in multiple languages - or have an interpreter at the event - to reach non-English speakers?

## ORGANIZE: AT LEAST 2-2 1/2 MONTHS BEFORE

- Explore questions you'd like people to answer with Park Stories. For example:
  - > Special places and events: What's special to you about the park? What events have happened to you in the park that have been memorable or meaningful?
  - > History: How has the park and the people who use it changed over the years? What role has the park played in the neighborhood's history?
  - > Users: Describe the people who use the park. How have local people (including members of your group) contributed to making the park a better place?
- If working with kids and teens, involve them in writing Park Story questions.
- Decide how to best capture Park Stories. Options (from easiest to hardest) include:
  1. Park users write stories on Park Story sheets (see attached). If desired, a photograph of the participant is taken with a digital camera, printed on-site on a PoGo printer, then attached to the Park Story sheet and displayed on a board or clothesline.
  2. Group members interview park users using a cellphone with voice recording software.
  3. Group members interview park users using a digital audio recorder.
  4. Group members interview park users using a laptop computer with recording software such as GarageBand.
  5. Group members interview park users in a formal setting, such as a recording studio.

*\*\* For Options 2 to 5, recordings can be transcribed for reporting or turned into audio pieces, such as podcasts, and posted on the Web. \*\**

## SUGGESTED MATERIALS:

- > Park Story sheets (see attached)
- > Pens
- > Clipboards
- > Large foamcore boards, bulletin board, or clothesline to hang Park Story sheets

Option 1: Include photo with Park Story sheets:

- > Digital camera
- > Polaroid PoGo Instant Mobile Printer

Option 1: Record audio using -

- a) cellphone with voice recording application
- b) digital audio recorder or
- c) laptop with recording software such as GarageBand:
- > Recording sign-in sheets
- > Consent forms
- > Microphones
- > Headphones for group member doing recording
- > Extra batteries, if using digital recorder
- > Plug adaptors, if using cellphone or laptop

## OPTIONAL:

- > Video camera
- > Power strip and extension cord
- > Park Stories Booth (provided by Partnerships for Parks and Hester Street Collaborative)

- Finalize five to seven Park Story questions.
- If conducting interviews in languages other than English, begin the outreach process to find an interpreter.

## ORGANIZE (continued):

- If using Options 2 to 5, pair up as group members for practice interviewing to see what it's like playing interviewer and interviewee. Use the guidelines below to prepare:
  - > Start each interview with general questions (i.e., name, age, and number of years connected to the park or neighborhood)
  - > After general questions, move to specific ones
  - > Prepare one set of questions for people who have a strong connection to the park and another for people who are visitors or passersby
  - > Use follow-up questions to explore interesting answers in more detail
  - > Close the interview with questions about the park today
  - > Avoid questions narrowly focused on park features.

## OUTREACH: ONE MONTH BEFORE

- If doing digital recording, practice facilitating the Park Stories activity by inviting your OC and representatives from local organizations to a run through. If possible, conduct the recordings in the actual location you'll be using to test sound.
- Afterward, ask people for feedback about their experience.
- Based on that feedback, and your own observations, make changes to the activity as needed.

**GET SET!** Check last-minute details leading up to the event.

## PREP FOR THE EVENT: 2-3 WEEKS BEFORE

- Purchase final supplies and review the Event Planning Tool, Timeline, and Checklist to be sure your group is on track.
- Make enough copies of the Park Story sheets for the number of people you think will attend.
- Print a few copies of the Park Story questions, or create a large poster with the questions, as a guide for people.

**GO!** Host the event & make sure everyone is heard!

- Set up the Park Story sheets, pens, and clipboards in a central or visible location.
- **Specific Instructions for Option 1:**
  - > When people approach, explain the Park Stories activity and how it relates to the capital project.
  - > Encourage people to write a story about their experiences in the park on the Park Story sheets, using the prompting questions as a guide.
  - > If taking photographs: Ask people to stand in a bright, well-lit area to take their headshot.
  - > Print the headshot using the PoGo printer, and attach it to the Park Story sheet.
  - > Display Park Story sheets on a board or clothesline to increase interest in the activity from passersby.

## PARK STORIES BOOTH

Hester Street Collaborative and Partnerships for Parks have a mobile Park Stories booth that includes a listening wall and fold out table to conduct interviews. The listening wall has four speakers that one can hold up to their ear to listen to audio of recorded interviews on mp3 players.

To bring the Story Booth to your park event, contact your Outreach Coordinator for availability!



- **Specific Instructions for Options 2-5**

- > Set out the audio recording sign-in sheets and consent forms for when people arrive.
  - > Test equipment and check battery strength.
  - > Ask people to choose a time on the Sign-in sheet. Explain that each recording will take approximately 20 minutes.
  - > Have people sign consent forms and explain that their recordings will become the property of your group to use for reporting purposes.
  - > Interview park users, following the same format as in your run-throughs.
- After the interview, thank the participant for his or her time, and explain how Park Stories will be shared with Parks and used to inform a new design. Let the person know how she or he can stay involved with your group and the capital project going forward.
  - Collect Park Story sheets for review.

## **RUN WITH IT!** Explore and share what you learned.

### **DEBRIEF: WITHIN 1-2 WEEKS**

- Decide how to summarize the Park Stories (written or recorded). Consider analyzing them by looking at common themes, noteworthy events, park history, and representative experiences.

### **ANALYZE AND DOCUMENT: WITHIN 1-2 MONTHS**

- Read the Event-Planning Tool to learn what to include in your one- to two-page Park Stories summary.
- In addition to the items described, for Park Stories you can also include:
  - > Key representative quotes
  - > A brief (250-word) story that was particularly memorable or compelling
- If you used Park Stories sheets: Divide the sheets among group members. Have each member summarize their sheets using pre-agreed categories such as those described above.
- For Options 2 to 5: Download the Park Stories .mp3 files to a computer. Have someone in your group or a volunteer transcribe the recordings. Analyze as you would above.
- For Options 2 to 5: As an alternative to transcribing, edit the stories with an audio editing software program to create short (1- to 5-minute) audio pieces for a Website or podcast.
- Draft, review, and revise the summary, until you're ready to show it to your OC. With his or her help, further edit, if needed, to create a final version.
- If you've only used Park Stories to gather input, start planning future events or explore other tools you can use to discover what your community wants in a new park.
- Once you've gathered input using at least three tools, on different days, and/ or from at least 50 people, depending on the size of your community and park, you should have enough information to write a full Visioning Report that can be shared with the community, your community board, and Parks.

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