



**METROPARKS  
TOLEDO**

# Connecting the Pieces

**STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2020**



A photograph of a dirt path winding through a dense, lush green forest. The path is covered in fallen leaves and leads into the distance. The trees are tall and thin, with a thick canopy of green leaves. The overall scene is bright and vibrant, suggesting a healthy, natural environment.

# Translating Vision into Action



## **At 90, Metroparks Toledo is in the best shape of its life.**

New parks, trails and programs; stable funding; a fresh brand; ever-increasing visitation; and exceptional community support have broadened the park system's reach and bolstered its reputation in the community.

In the last 15 years, the park system has enlarged its land holdings 50 percent, increased the number of parks from 9 to 16 and integrated a botanical garden. Two more parks and a regional trail are set to break ground in 2018, with still more parks and trails on the drawing board.

Metroparks is well on its way to accomplishing a long-term goal of placing a park within five miles of every resident of Lucas County, and connecting parks to parks, and parks to people.

### **WHAT'S NEXT?**

Growth has been so rapid that some members of the staff will see the number of parks double during their tenure. Maintaining clean, safe, natural parks at the highest level of professional standards is a mandate, but also a challenge during this period of rapid change.

The purpose of this strategic plan is to communicate a vision for the future of our park system. The graphic in the center of this book illustrates Metroparks desired future state, while seven priorities outline the action needed to achieve it.



### **TODAY, TOMORROW, FUTURE**

The three-volume Comprehensive Plan is available in the Our Story section of [MetroparksToledo.com](http://MetroparksToledo.com).

Today is a system-wide service delivery and systems analysis plan. It outlines the operational, staffing, and service delivery needs to exceed the expectations of Lucas County residents.

Tomorrow includes a set of site-specific, conceptual master plans for landholdings considered priority areas for park development.

Future serves as a conceptual level blueprint designed to establish a truly integrated regional park system that enhances the quality of life for Lucas County residents and strengthens the national image of the greater Toledo area.



## **The Big Ideas: A Park Within 5 Miles of Every Home**

### **INCREASE ACCESS**

Metroparks has pledged to place a park within five miles of every home in Lucas County, and we are very close to fulfilling that promise. Data show that people's willingness to travel to a park diminishes if the park is further than five miles away. Having a park close to home increases usage, enhances neighborhoods and improves lives.

### **CONNECT PARKS TO PARKS**

Imagine a region where parks are connected to each other and to neighborhoods through a network of regional trails, providing safe, attractive corridors for travel and recreation.

### **CONNECTING PARKS TO PEOPLE**

Creating new experiences will connect people with nature. Treehouses, island camping, mountain bike trails, tree climbing and other innovative activities will make memories and create enthusiasm for the outdoors.

# **“Great cities have great parks.”**

John Crompton, distinguished professor,  
Texas A&M University; expert on the value of parks

**“Local park and recreation agencies advance our nation’s communities in many different ways. Not only are parks leading the way in terms of conservation, health and wellness and social equity, they are also engines of significant economic activity.”**

National Recreation and Park Association

**“Parks provide intrinsic environmental, aesthetic, and recreation benefits to our cities. They are also a source of positive economic benefits. They enhance property values, increase municipal revenue, bring in homebuyers and workers, and attract retirees. At the bottom line, parks are a good financial investment for a community.”**

American Planning Association

# 57%

prefer a home close to parks and open space  
(2001 Metroparks Survey of Lucas County Voters)

# 50%

would be willing to pay 10 percent more for a house located near a park or protected open space  
National Association of Realtors (2001 voter survey)

# 65%

of home shoppers feel parks would seriously influence them to move to a community  
National Association of Home Builders

**“...cities are characterized by a sense of place, beauty in the natural environment, a mixed-use transportation system and a 24-hour lifestyle. These are the characteristics that will attract the creativity and brainpower that undergird the new economy.”**

Steven Roulac, futurist, The Roulac Group

# Nearly 5 Million Annual Visits!

## HIGHLY RATED

94% of Lucas County voters surveyed had a favorable opinion of Metroparks  
85% said they had visited a Metropark in the last year  
59% said Metroparks help promote a positive image of Lucas County

## COMMUNITY MEMBERS AGREE

*(on a five point scale where 5.0 is "strongly agree")*

	Agree/ Strongly Agree
The Metroparks contribute to the betterment of Lucas County	64%
Metroparks helps to promote a positive image of the county	63.55%
Metroparks give visitors a safe and natural place to run and play	61%
Metroparks helps us to be healthier by providing opportunities for a healthy lifestyle	57.28%
The Metroparks does a good job fulfilling its mission of providing Lucas County residents with clean, safe and natural parks	56.45%

# 58%

are frequent visitors –  
have been to a Metropark  
within the past month  
(2017 voter survey)

# 85%

visited Metroparks  
within the past year  
(2016 voter survey)



## 7 in 10

Americans regularly  
visit their local park  
and recreation  
facilities (NRPA)



## 9 in 10

agree that their  
communities benefit  
from everything  
their local park and  
recreation agencies  
offer (NRPA)



## 3 of 4

corporate executives  
rate quality of life  
features as important  
factors when choosing  
a location for a head-  
quarters, factory or  
other company facility  
(Area Development)





# Outdoor Experiences

82

PERCENT OF OHIOANS SURVEYED WHO RATED OUTDOOR RECREATION FACILITIES AS *VERY IMPORTANT*

1

Experience Nature;  
quiet time/serenity

2

For fun/  
entertainment

3

To spend time  
with family  
and friends

TOP REASONS PEOPLE GAVE FOR SPENDING TIME OUTDOORS



**97.5%**  
Walk, hike



**84.9%**  
View wildlife/  
birding,  
photography,  
fishing/  
hunting



**67.2%**  
Water-related  
activities  
(swimming)



**62.3%**  
Boating



**59.2%**  
Camping

WHAT THEY LIKE TO DO OUTDOORS

1

Natural surface  
trails

2

Canoe/kayak  
access

3

Wildlife viewing/  
birding areas

WHAT THEY WANT MORE OF



# Four Growth Areas

## NEW EXPERIENCES

Our mission is to conserve the region's natural resources and connect people with them. New opportunities to engage in nature create treasured family memories and deepen the bond between people and their parks.

People value what they experience. Amenities such as treehouses, mountain bike trails and water trails go beyond passive programming, inviting people to immerse themselves in nature. An evolution of experiences will keep them coming back.

The foundation of the Metroparks experience is our trail system. Surveys show that trails are the number one reason people visit the parks. Trails connect parks to parks, and people to parks. According to the northwest Ohio focus groups in the 2013 State-wide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), "improved or paved trails are in high demand," and the "development of trails is a major concern...including more improved trails and connectivity among trails."

## STAFF ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Delivering new experiences will require an organizational culture where everyone plays a role in building Metroparks reputation in the region and beyond.

Metroparks is a larger organization, with a greater scope, than it was only a few years ago. Members of the staff stretch themselves and their resources to meet the ever-growing demands of additional parks, trails, programs and amenities. Metroparks must hire, retain and invest in a skilled, high-performing workforce to continue quality work and excellent customer service on an increasingly larger scale.



### **COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

With such an aggressive vision, Metroparks will need to find other talented organizations for strategic collaborations. These mutually beneficial relationships will help us achieve our future state and change the region's identity.

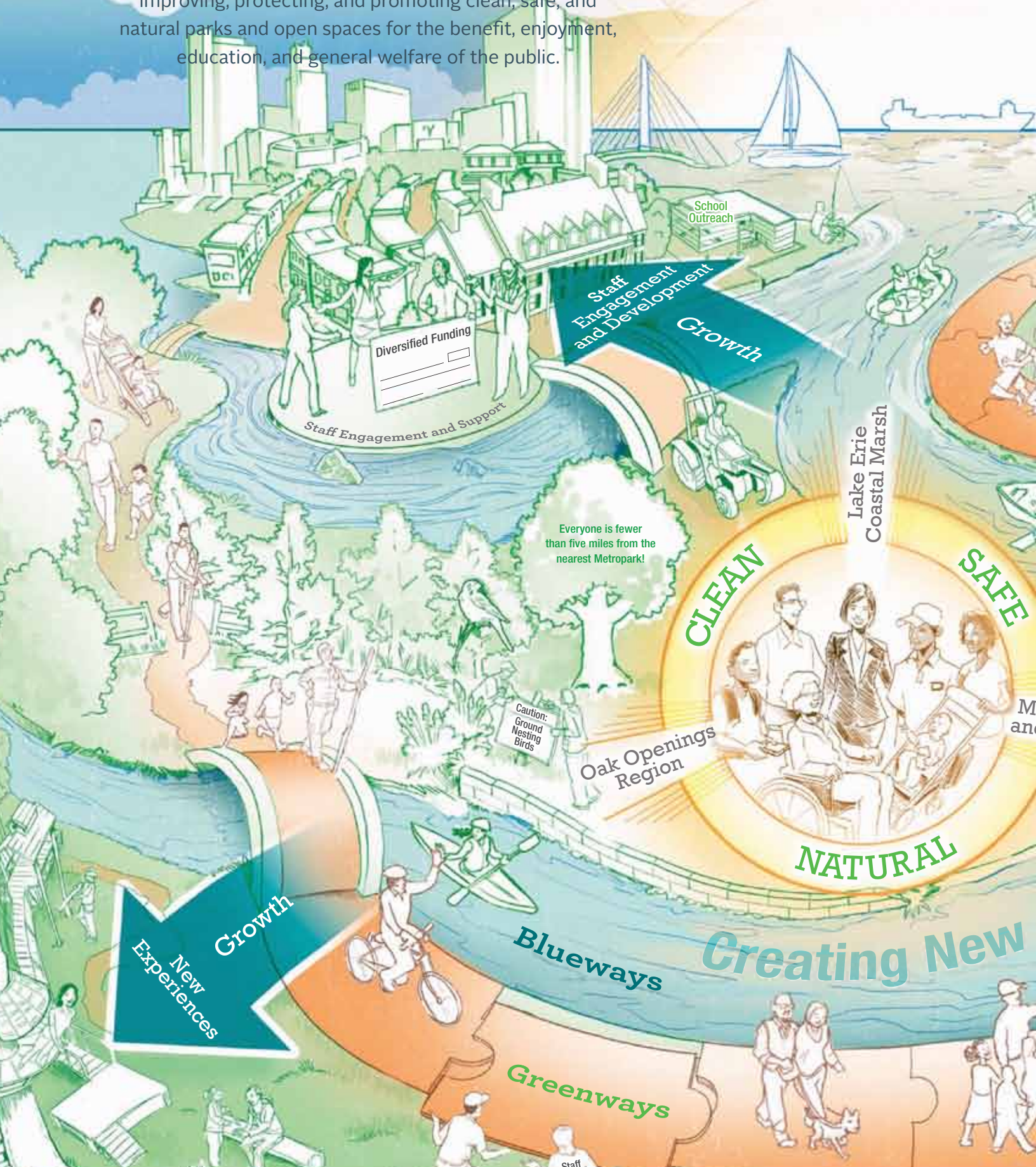
We will know we are successful when Metroparks becomes an agency that others want to partner with. Already, we have identified 14 potential partner opportunities. To get to where we are going, the entire organization needs to think of collaboration with others as one of the keys to our success, just as we currently think of volunteers.

### **NEW PARKS**

Based on community surveys, people's willingness to travel to a park diminishes significantly if it is further than five miles away from their home. In Ohio's 2013 SCORP, the single greatest barrier to outdoor recreation is a lack of free time. Additional parks close to where people live reduce these barriers.

# Mission Statement

Conserve the region's resources by creating, developing, improving, protecting, and promoting clean, safe, and natural parks and open spaces for the benefit, enjoyment, education, and general welfare of the public.



Staff Engagement and Support  
Diversified Funding  
Staff Engagement and Development  
Growth

Everyone is fewer than five miles from the nearest Metropark!

Caution: Ground Nesting Birds

Oak Openings Region

Lake Erie Coastal Marsh

CLEAN

SAFE

NATURAL

New Experiences  
Growth

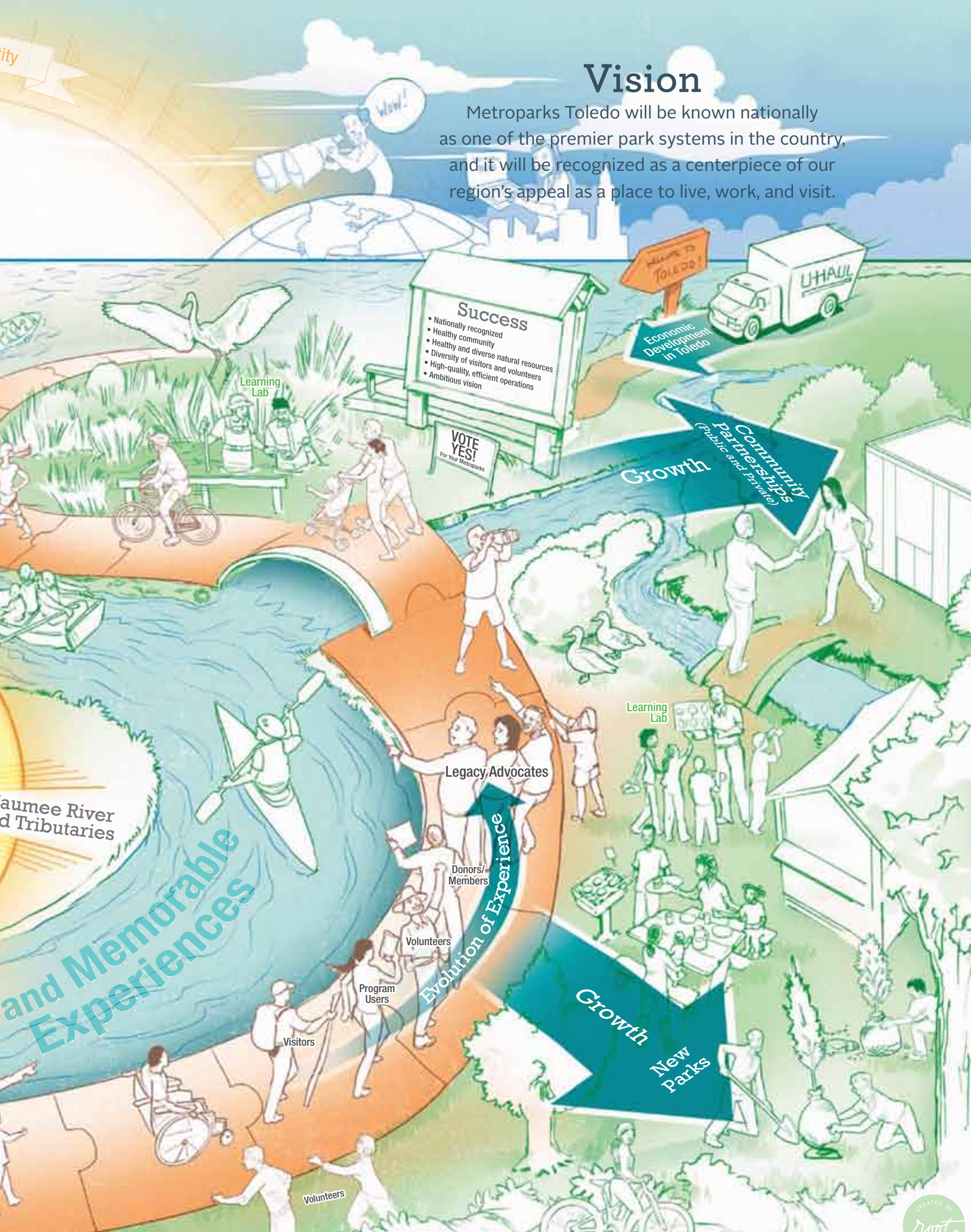
Blueways

Creating New

Greenways

# Vision

Metroparks Toledo will be known nationally as one of the premier park systems in the country, and it will be recognized as a centerpiece of our region's appeal as a place to live, work, and visit.



**Success**

- Nationally recognized
- Healthy community
- Diversity and diverse natural resources
- Diversity of visitors and volunteers
- High-quality, efficient operations
- Ambitious vision

**VOTE YES!**  
For Your Metroparks

**Economic Development in Toledo**

**Community Partnerships**  
(Public and Private)

**Growth**

**Legacy Advocates**

**Evolution of Experience**

Donors/  
Members

Volunteers

Program Users

Visitors

Volunteers

**Growth**

**New Parks**

**Maumee River and Tributaries**

**and Memorable Experiences**

Learning Lab

Learning Lab

# CURRENT STATE

Leadership is passionate, committed and supportive of Metroparks direction.

Staff takes pride in being part of an agency that is essential to the community and the environment.

Additional collaboration is needed to eliminate a siloed, protectionist mentality.

The role of programming needs clearer definition and direction.

More clarity around the mission and strategic goals would help all staff better interpret their roles.

There is some misunderstanding and concerns about the financial future, and how we are going to manage rapid growth.

**Diversity of Funding –**  
Sustain what we've started to deliver on our compelling future

**Maintenance of Core Services –**  
Continue to deliver on our core services and maintenance of existing assets

**Strategic Community Partnerships –**  
Establish and maintain community partnerships to strategically collaborate with other talented organizations and achieve our future state

**Staff Development and Performance –**  
Invest in training and development of our staff to create high-performing leaders who advocate for our culture and foster memorable visitor experiences

**Evolution of Culture –**  
Define the future state culture we want to have, build it and allow it to impact all that we do



# FUTURE STATE

Metroparks will **ENHANCE** the reputation of **THE TOLEDO REGION** as a place to live, work and visit by:

Preserving, protecting and restoring natural areas and maintaining **CLEAN, SAFE, NATURAL** parks for today's visitors and future generations.

Operating a **PARK WITHIN FIVE MILES** of every Lucas County household.

**CONNECTING PARKS TO PARKS, AND PEOPLE TO PARKS,**

both physically with trails as well as through outreach and programming.

## **Engagement in Our Story –**

Engage our people in understanding and telling our future state story

## **Clarify our Approach to Programming –**

Reframe and redefine programming.

## **HOW WE ACHIEVE OUR FUTURE STATE**

The following pages describe desired outcomes, strategic actions and measurable goals and objectives for seven priorities.

# Diversity of Funding

A wide variety of funding sources propels creative new opportunities without overburdening taxpayers.

## DESIRED OUTCOME:

Pass the levy

## STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Establish an engaged Citizens Campaign for Metroparks Board
- Support Citizens Campaign in their goal to raise a minimum of \$100,000 by 1/1/2022
- Continue high quality offering of parks and experiences to the community
- Effectively message Metroparks Mission, Vision and performance

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New and expanded grant opportunities (have a continuous pipeline)

- Continually seek new grant opportunities
- Entire organization supports grant application needs and processes
- Exceptional performance and compliance with grant awards
- Finalize and follow Metroparks Toledo Grant Funding Plan

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High-functioning foundation to support park district

- Continue to support and foster relationship with Metroparks Toledo Foundation
- Articulate a clear and compelling case for support
- Define clear priorities for philanthropic funding
  - Update financial plan, park improvement plan and budget at least once per year
- Facilitate donor relationships between Metroparks stakeholders and the foundation

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Increase earned income

- Identify sponsorship opportunities that support and enhance Metroparks' mission
- Maximize existing earned income and seek additional opportunities
- Develop a holistic corporate engagement program
- Identifying and implement operational efficiencies throughout the district

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Develop diversified funding plan

- Contrast capital plan and future operating expense against current resources
- Track percentage of future goals funded
- Develop target mix and distribution of funding sources for foundation, grant and earned income efforts



# Core Services



Metroparks commitment to clean, safe, natural parks is the priority above all else.

## **DESIRED OUTCOME:** “Clean, Safe, and Natural” parks

### **STRATEGIC ACTIONS:**

- Maintain a long range park improvement plan and prepare a 3-year summary of planned major maintenance, capital renewal, and natural area restoration projects with estimated budget and staffing needs
- Develop a staffing plan to ensure that new parks, facilities, and programs are adequately staffed to maintain district-wide core services
- Support ranger operations such that they become a nationally recognized department that is capable of improving the overall safety of the region
- Actively engages the rangers creating action plans for our five department improvement priority areas:
  - Define the role of Ranger at Metroparks Toledo and how do we elevate that role to assume regional significance
  - Develop minimum proficiency standards and processes to hold ourselves accountable for maintaining them
  - Develop a training plan for new hires and veteran rangers
  - Consider alternate organized structures
  - Develop a messaging campaign to promote the abilities and authority of our rangers
- Commit 2%-5% of the value of fixed assets on major maintenance annually
- Develop a comprehensive program that ensures regular audits of facilities, grounds and natural resources against high-level standards and implements necessary action
- Ensure grounds facilities, and historic structures are properly maintained through use of an accurate and comprehensive assetcalc data base
  - Staff will complete a thorough review of the database to ensure accuracy and insert any missing information
  - A process will be developed to ensure new assets are entered, completed work is entered, and obsolete items are moved
- Develop an overarching guidance document that articulates our district-wide natural resource management approach and plan
- Database outputs tracking implementation of annual work plant

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## **Efficient operating models**

- Identify the best operating model for managing park operations that accounts for planned growth
  - Research best practices, attend professional conferences, and tour other park operations
- Consider broader utilization of specialized, cross-functional teams and economies of scale
- Fully utilize existing natural resource management database

# Staff Development & Performance

Metroparks invests in training and development of our staff to create high-performing leaders throughout the organization who advocate for Metroparks and foster memorable visitor experiences.

## **DESIRED OUTCOME:**

**A diverse and engaged workforce that possesses the skills and attributes to support the future state**

## **STRATEGIC ACTIONS:**

- Create an ongoing multimedia recruitment campaign
- Create an uncompromising selection process which ensures an exceptional team
- Develop a robust, structured onboarding program that fosters understanding of our culture and prepares employees for success
- Enhance our employee and volunteer training and development programs to reinforce Metroparks workplace culture, educate all staff about who we are and what we do, and develop internal talent
- Create opportunities for interdepartmental development and collaboration
- Create a performance system that supports supervisors in their efforts to build a high-performance culture and rewards high levels of performance and positive behavior



# Strategic Community Partnerships

Metroparks and its partners are working together in creative, mutually beneficial ways to support Metroparks' mission and vision.

## DESIRED OUTCOME:

Broader Agency Awareness

## STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Embark on initiative to communicate with and be front of mind with public bodies and officials
- Participate with or stay engaged with members of ConneCToledo
- Participate with Destination Toledo to influence regional brand and highlight quality of life amenities
- Identify and engage partners to accomplish goals and objectives cited in marketing plan

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Advocacy

- Activate Citizens Campaign for Metroparks as a functioning board with a mission of supporting Metroparks through levy campaigns and advocacy (participate in NRPA advocacy program)
- Apply resources necessary to support and maintain positive relationships with OEPA, ODNR, OEC, TNC, etc.

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Assistance Implementing Aspects of Our Comprehensive Master Plan

- Engage municipalities to support land acquisition and connectivity portions of the comprehensive master plan
- Engage TMACOG to create a regional open space master plan

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Corporate Support

- Establish corporate and other foundation relationships with an interest in Metroparks' mission and vision
- Identify sponsorship opportunities that support and enhance Metroparks' mission

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Youth Engagement & Education

- Continue outreach and interaction with Lucas County Schools
- Continue to develop relationships with schools contiguous to Metroparks
- Create comprehensive list of youth engagement providers and develop partnership plans

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Broadening Participation in Health & Wellness

- Engage major medical and health insurance organizations to provide support and joint messaging for wellness opportunities
- Explore and define the potential of a community integrated health model program; if warranted define roles of partners
- Continue to engage affinity groups and businesses for running, cycling, paddling, etc. and maintain an element with each for beginners to grow participation and reach wider audiences

# Clear Approach to Programming

Experiences and education are key to fulfilling the mission and moving people along the evolution of experience from casual visitor to lifelong ambassadors, and makes Metroparks an integral part of life in our community.

## DESIRED OUTCOME:

Programs are mission based combining engagement, exploration and learning in a fun environment that inspires a personal connection to Metroparks

## STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Programs meet people where they are and continue to grow with them in their personal evolution of experience
- Programs will engage staff, volunteers, members and park visitors in our story
- The roles of special events and programming will be defined and support each other

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**Programming is creative and responsive**

- Programs are flexible, creative and meaningful – appealing to new and experienced markets
- Offering time, location and content of programs, materials and outreach will be determined by appropriate research and feedback
- Develop process and marketing model to create programs that capitalize on community demand and momentum from new program opportunities.
- Structure offerings to support other Metroparks departments through communication and responsiveness to district goals
- Engage other departments to support programming

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**Park usage and engagement is increased through programming**

- Programs are developed to invite people into the park and encourage interaction with nature
- Programs will influence the design and operation of parks, facilities and key amenities across the park system
- Programs are developed to create “behind the scenes” opportunities and expose participants to new and unique locations in the region
- Programming will recognize the great diversity of people who do and do not yet use Metroparks, determining strategies to engage non park users
- Programs teach a succession of skills to create and develop independent users

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**Programs and program delivery are of high quality**

- Develop and retain staff skilled in delivering high quality programs
- Generate earned revenue to expand programming

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**Programming reflects Metroparks’ position as a leader in conservation**

- Communicate internally and externally the quality and breadth of programs and their tie to Metroparks’ mission
- Programming, interpretation and other forms of communication convey the Metroparks conservation mission
- Programs will educate the community about Metroparks’ natural resource management practices and their impact

# The Metroparks Way:

## A Place to Work Where You Can “Get Outside Yourself”

The Metroparks Way is to maintain a fun atmosphere, while valuing high achievement, accountability, creativity, employee well-being and a dedication to mission and vision for the community's future.

### DESIRED OUTCOME:

**Excited & Committed**

### STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Advocates for Metroparks with a positive outlook and a strong belief in the future
- Adventurous, vibrant and fun
- Passionate about and committed to the Metroparks Mission
- Embraces Metroparks Culture

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**Creative & Nimble**

- Are visionary, open minded, innovative, always evolving, changing and anxious to seek new challenges even when it means risking failure
- Acknowledge the need for flexibility

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**Collaborative & Inclusive**

- Ask hard questions, speak up, challenge the norm and give others permission to do the same
- Value all ideas and seek input from all
- Cultivate camaraderie among our staff and partners through trust, respect and support
- Are leaders who develop others
- Communicate up & down

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**Internal Drive for Excellence**

- Think big, push for excellence, go beyond what is expected of us and wow people
- Have the self-motivation and discipline to do what is needed, juggling many tasks to make things happen, while meeting high standards
- Never make excuses or blame others
- Have humility, a willingness to learn from mistakes and accept guidance from others
- Have a personal commitment to learning, development and growth for ourselves, our staff and our organization

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**Have the Privilege to Serve**

- Focus on the visitor experience
- Honored to represent Toledo and Northwest Ohio

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**Diversity**

- Are welcoming and accessible to all
- Are focused on community outreach/engagement



# Engagement in Our Story

Communication is clear and consistent so that all staff, volunteers and the public share an understanding of the park district's history, significance, mission and vision.

## DESIRED OUTCOME:

The brand becomes synonymous with the Metroparks way of operating

## STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- The brand is defined and communicated in such a way that every staff member promotes it in everything they do
- Programming, interpretation and other forms of communication convey the Metroparks conservation mission
- Brand standards are established and adhered to for consistent communication

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Employees effectively represent the brand in the course of their work

- Branded documents and presentation templates are easily accessible to staff
- Processes are in place to produce print and electronic pieces, web pages, videos, advertising and media relations to meet all departments' communication needs
- External channels are maintained to deliver ongoing, accurate information to the public (website, e-newsletters, social media, news releases, annual reports, brochures, etc.)

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All employees know their role in telling the Metroparks story

- Initiate ongoing processes to ensure all employees understand the Metroparks' future state, commitment to "clean, safe and natural" and "the Metroparks' way"
- Internal communications deliver timely, accurate information to all employees.
- Senior staff, leadership team, all-employee and department meetings communicate a consistent vision and emphasize how all staff play a role in telling the story
- Our story is incorporated into employee and volunteer recruitment, onboarding and training programs

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Create an enhanced understanding throughout the region of how parks benefit the community

- Assemble data, facts and case studies to articulate the relationship of parks to economic benefit, quality of life, environmental protection, etc.
- Initiate a campaign to communicate Metroparks' impact and value.



