

NRPA July- Dec 2022 Park Champions Specialist Intern

Washington, DC/Remote

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NATIONAL RECREATION
AND PARK ASSOCIATION

What is Parks and Recreation?

When I started, I wasn't quite sure and wanted to learn more! I knew about some programs in the neighborhood where I grew up-- there was a rec center and playground that all the neighborhood kids played at that I knew counted as parks and recreation, and there was even a public pool where I used to swim that were run by the city's parks and recreation department. Otherwise, I was totally in the dark. It turns out that parks and recreation is a lot of things! There are trash and recycling programs, out of school time meal programs, childcare programs, gyms, pools, job assistance programs, and so much more that all fall under the umbrella of parks and recreation. Parks and recreation impacts a lot of people's day to day lives, and they don't even know it. Here's what my experience was like taking a step into that space.



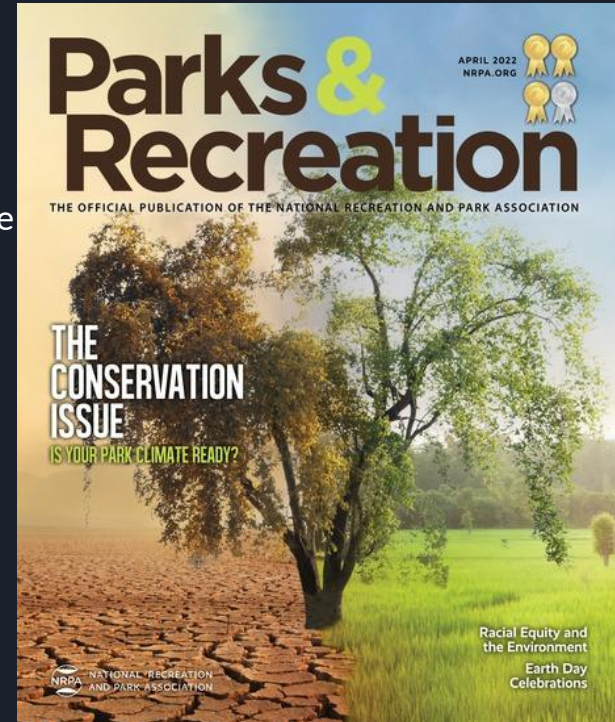
Life as the Park Champions Intern



I was hired as the Park Champions Specialist Intern at NRPA in the Public Policy and Advocacy department. I found that my experience was split in four different ways: working on the Park Champions Initiative (PCI), writing for the magazine, working on advocacy campaigns, and experiential learning outside of the office. This reflected the description on NUWorks, and my boss was really accommodating in that he let me pursue other projects within the organization that I was extremely passionate about. I was the youngest and least experienced in the office, but I was always made to feel like an equal part of the team, which was really nice. I felt like my input and perspective was always valued. This was a paid position, and overall I really enjoyed it!

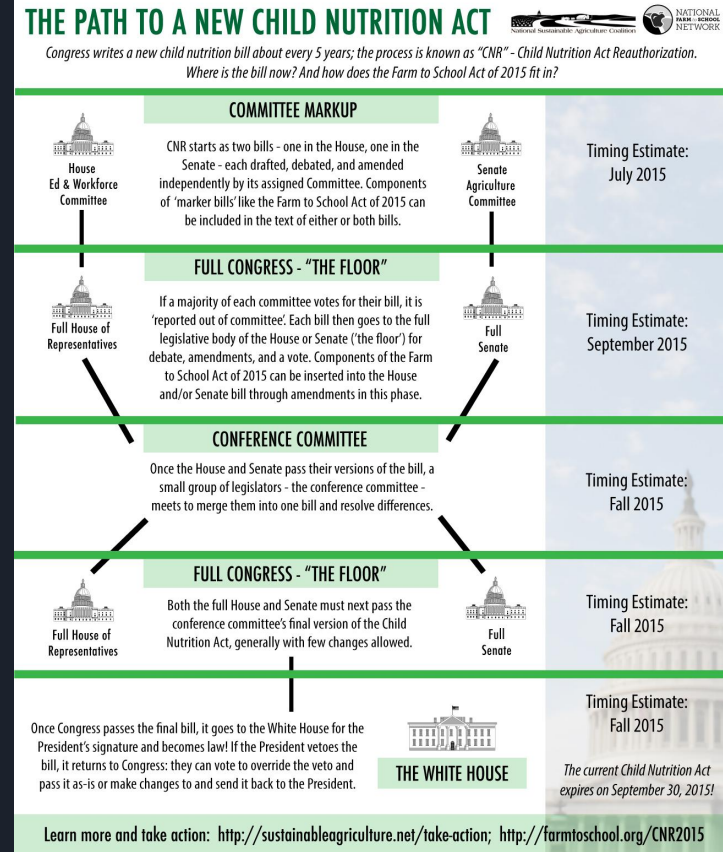
Magazine Articles & The PCI

The majority of my time was spent working closely with my supervisor, Dan, on the PCI. The PCI is an advocacy capacity-building training for state and local p&r officials. We completely restructured the program so it was more accessible to every member of our national organization and clearly taught them what they needed to know to be a more effective advocate for their agencies and programs. Unfortunately, I didn't get to see it put into practice, as the program launches in February 2023. When I wasn't working on the PCI, one of my favorite assignments while working with NRPA was writing for their magazine. It's a national issue with over 60,000 monthly readers, and it felt so good to know that my writing was going to reach that many people. I chose three topics that I found really important and interesting and was given the opportunity to draft and write them mostly on my own.



Advocacy Campaigns

A smaller but still significant part of my work was participating in advocacy campaigns. I wrote for the Child Nutrition Reauthorization campaign, and ran a peer-to-peer texting campaign for the Outdoors for All Act. I learned a lot from both my supervisor and the work I was given. It gave me an insight on how a big nonprofit like this works internally, which was one of my goals, and as I got more comfortable with my place in the organization, I was able to take on more responsibility and branch out to learn additional skills like working with p&r professionals on the ground and even people working for the White House!



Experiential Learning

I was so grateful given the opportunity to tour p&r facilities in DC (some of which I grew up going to!). I broadened my understanding of how they operate internally and the way they work to provide equal opportunities to all residents in DC regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status. They offer a plethora of free programs for residents of the city, with something for everyone. There are after school programs, programs for senior citizens, and so much more.



Another big experiential learning opportunity I was able to take advantage of was NRPA's national conference. I was able to talk to members of the organization from so many different parts of the US. These opportunities made me realize how meaningful it is to me to be involved in the community like this. I am definitely looking forward to exploring the p&r field more after I graduate.



Surprises and What I Wish I Knew

Even though the position description on NUWorks said Remote or Washington, DC, I was surprised at how much of my work was online. There were a few times where I was in person, like the week at Conference and a few meetings and volunteer days in the city, but most of the time I was at home on Microsoft Teams. Even though I asked in the interview what my workday would look like, I wish that they had been more transparent that NRPA has been a fully remote organization since COVID. This was a hard transition for me after a year in a fully in-person school environment, but I fell back into the routine quickly.

The most important thing for me was finding ways to have fun while being most isolated. I spent a lot of time going to museums, cafes, and doing other activities outside of work and home to keep my mental health in a good place.

Otherwise, creating my resume, cover letter, and doing my interviews was exactly as I expected.



Challenges and Lessons

The biggest challenge for me in the workplace was how much of my work relied on other people to complete. I would do a portion of it (ex: drafting a magazine article, creating the template for a text campaign, or even putting together a meeting where I was presenting) and have to run it by different people in different departments before it was put into motion. A lot of things went so much slower than I expected and that was frustrating to me at first.

However, I did learn a lot about my work style. It's very easy for me to be working on several things at once. I like the flexibility and variety when I do a little work for one project and then switch gears to another. It was also helpful in easing a little of this frustration at how much time it took for a project to be done because I always had something else to do in the meantime.

Conclusion!

With NRPA, I had the opportunity to experience new things. I am now a thrice published author in a national magazine, which I certainly was not able to say before joining NRPA's team. However impressive that is, I think my most meaningful experience was working on an article with an outside organization about how p&r encourages socioeconomic mixing in public parks, which I was glad to find that my past Sociology classes such as Environment and Society had prepared me for. I felt like I was promoting something meaningful in my city and it reinforced the idea that I can do something important with the subject that I am passionate about. I think this co-op will stick with me, and even though I want to go in another direction for my next co-op to further explore my interests, I will always keep the lessons about diversity, equity, and inclusion I learned this time close.

Visiting a rec center I went to a lot as a kid!



Volunteering at a food bank with the public policy and advocacy team!