



2024-25 Committee and Task Force Accomplishments Through August 2025

BEST PAPER COMMITTEE

Chris Beth, CPRP, Chair

The 2025 Best Paper Committee focused on selecting the best Master's thesis, in line with every other, odd-year tradition. The committee undertook an extensive announcement campaign, collaborating closely with universities that offer programs in parks and recreation, natural resources, and related fields. Six submissions were received. We then promoted three master students' theses to the final round of the Best Paper. The winner is Carly Knudson, who attends the University of Utah, and her thesis title is: "Relationships Between Sociodemographic Factors, Time in Nature, And Mental Health Outcomes In Undergraduate College Students". The runner-up is Miranda Foster, who attends the University of Montana, and her thesis title is: "Visual Semiotics In Parks: Assessing Pictorial Symbol Effectiveness In Outdoor Recreation Settings". Carly Knudson will receive \$750 cash prize and a \$500 stipend to travel to the NRPA Conference to receive her award at the banquet.

BRANDING AND SOCIAL MEDIA COMMITTEE

Stacie Anaya, CPRP, Chair and Jill Geller, CPRE, Vice Chair

In 2025, the Branding and Social Media Task Force (BSMTF), now a Committee, advanced the Academy's mission by strengthening its digital presence, refining communication processes, and laying the groundwork for long-term branding and marketing strategies. Through collaborative engagement with Academy staff, Board leadership, and committee liaisons, the Task Force achieved significant progress in establishing consistent, impactful messaging across platforms, while also identifying strategic improvements for the year ahead. Our Key Accomplishments are:

- **Consistent Social Media Cadence:** Developed and implemented a year-long posting calendar aligned with the AAPRA Planning Calendar. Established a process for gathering content through designated committee liaisons ("Town Criers") and coordinated posts with standardized hashtags, tags, and accessibility guidelines.
- **Expanded Online Presence:** Increased LinkedIn followers by more than 100% to 1,165, with 581 new followers in the past year. Standardized use of hashtags and tags to improve engagement and visibility.
- **Website Review and Updates:** Completed a full audit of the Academy website, assessing audience relevance, functionality, and content organization. Addressed broken links and outdated information while recommending a spectrum of improvements to be considered by staff and the board.
- **Branding Standards:** Created Social Media Posting Guidelines with accessibility best practices and introduced updated letterhead graphics. Updated Social Media Toolkit to provide better guidance for new members. Recommended broader brand standards across all Academy communications and platforms.
- **Defined Roles and Processes:** Formalized roles such as Communications Wrangler and Town Criers, ensuring consistent coordination with committees and earlier planning of campaign calendars.
- **Data Tracking:** Began collecting website and LinkedIn engagement metrics and identified the need for deeper analysis to guide content strategies and measure impact.

BYLAWS COMMITTEE

Dina Trunzo, CTRS, Chair and Dr. Terry Robertson, Vice Chair

The purpose of the Bylaws Committee is to respond to requests from the Board of Directors for proposed additions or amendments to the bylaws. The Board approved the suggestions made in the fall of 2024 and then the membership voted and approved the revisions in February 2025. The current Committee will meet in the fall of 2025 to review amendments and additions being recommended by the Board. Upon a vote by the Bylaws Committee, the proposed edits will be sent to the Board for its review and approval, and as per the Bylaws, will then be voted upon by the membership.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Dr. Jean Keller, Chair and Tim Herd, CPRE, Vice Chair

The American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration, Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society (PRPS), and National Park and Recreation Association (NRPA), through the Career Development Committee, produced and launched a national campaign entitled, *A Choice Career: Parks and Recreation*, including a video and toolkit to introduce high school and college students to parks and recreation as a viable career choice. The campaign has had over 3,000 LinkedIn, almost 4,000 Facebook, and more than 3,000 Instagram visits. Task Force members have shown the video and promoted the profession at movies in the parks, summer staff orientations, and throughout Parks and Recreation Month.

Committee members will present a session at the NRPA Conference entitled *A Choice Career: Parks and Recreation*, and the Task Force's work will be highlighted in the Exhibit Hall as well. As the Committee members explored the marketing of the recreation and park profession, it was noted that the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Outlook Handbook needed updating. The Committee will undertake this work in the fall.

EXTERN COMMITTEE

Bill Foelsch, CPRP, Chair and Bill McAdam, CPRP, Vice Chair

Extern Program Sponsor: [Williams Architects](#), Itasca, Illinois

The Academy Extern Recruitment and Selection Subcommittee's work, coordinated by Externship Committee Vice Chair Bill McAdam and augmented by the promotion and contacts of our Past Externs, resulted in 28 Externship applications from throughout the country. Many thanks to Past Extern Katie MacCammon for her excellent work on promotional announcements for our recruitment efforts. The subcommittee reviewed and selected the 2025 Class of Externs, two of whom are Ernest T. Atwell Diversity Externs. These Externs receive a full package registration to the 2025 NRPA Annual Conference and reimbursement of expenses up to \$1,000 for travel and lodging. They are also invited to participate in all Academy-related meetings including the Extern Reception, the Annual Membership Meeting, and the Annual Awards Dinner.

The Mentors and Buddies Subcommittee, coordinated by Linda Kotowski, began the process of recruiting Extern Buddies from past Academy Externs and Extern Mentors from Academy members. This pairing of Extern, Mentor, and Buddy is designed to enhance the value of the Extern's experience at the conference, and to initiate what will hopefully be a longer-term professional networking opportunity. The Externship Committee thanks Red Barn Communications (Brit and Shelley) for their efforts to support the application submission and ranking process for Externs, Mentors and Buddies through the on-line *Submittable* program. The following are our Externs, Mentors and Buddies for the 2025 NRPA Conference:

2025 Extern	Mentor	Buddy (Former Extern)
Dantez Bennamon	Tara Eggleston Stewart	Gabby Vera
Audrey Cooper	Nancy Kaiser	Maxime Pierre
Jordan Perry	Bill Tschirhart	Tabitha Martinez
Emmeline (Emmy) Richards	Janet Bartnik	Molly Keays

We thank all the Externship applicants, and our Mentor and Buddy candidates for their interest in this valuable Academy program, fostering professional and career communication and networking between young professionals, mid-career professionals and seasoned pros. The annual Extern-Mentor-Buddy Virtual meeting was held August 4th. Additionally, our individual Extern-Mentor-Buddy pairings have been holding direct conversations over the summer to help Externs plan their NRPA Conference experience.

The 2025 Externship Committee is grateful for the assistance of the following former externs who served on the committee this year: Michael Biedenstien, Kathy Capps, Adriane Clutter, Anthony Iracki, Molly Keays, Tabitha Martinez, Katie MacCammon, AJ McCage, Cassie Paddock, John Stutzman, Tom Venniro, and Kimberly Zygmant.

The Committee is hosting the Annual Extern Reception for the NRPA Annual Conference on Monday, September 15th, 5:30 – 7:00pm at Café Tutu Tango, 8625 International Drive, Orlando. We sincerely appreciate the sponsorship of Williams Architects, Inc. for their enthusiastic support of the AAPRA Externship Program and Troon Golf for their support of the reception.

JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION (JEDI) COMMITTEE

Roslyn Johnson, CPRP and Kim Reser, CPRP, Co-Chairs

This summer the JEDI Committee conducted a survey of committee members aligning committee goals and actions for the next year. Survey findings include:

Top 3 focus areas for the JEDI Committee for the last six months of 2025 year

- Bias and cultural competence training
- Building a more inclusive organizational culture
- Community engagement/outreach

Types of activities or initiatives the committee should undertake

- Virtual Workshop/Sessions/Forums
- Resource creation (guides, toolkits, etc.)

Specific populations or topics needing more attention from the committee

- Shifting Language/messaging; resource guides
- Developmental and physical disabilities
- Unrepresented communities/professionals; antisemitism; LGBTQ+

Support or resources would help individuals contribute more effectively to JEDI work

- Consistent meetings with whole committee
- Focused and broader conversations with NRPA and committee on help needed
- Subject matter expertise to chart work and develop outcomes

Define success for our committee last six months of 2025 year

- Engage Academy members (trainings, virtual seminars, panel discussions, executive level resources and tools)
- Written goals and objectives; committee succession planning

The JEDI Committee is currently finalizing plans to host an off-site experience for Academy members, mentees, and externs during the 2025 NRPA Conference in Orlando on Wednesday, September 17 from 2pm to 5pm. An LED glass gym floor will transform into multiple playing surfaces in seconds, as well as be used for educational learning opportunities. From basketball to tennis, to pickleball, to motion graphics to letters of the alphabet. Catering and transportation to and from the site are being finalized. Next steps for the committee include a 2025 Fall virtual “Conversations That Matter” panel with “round table” discussions. Topics relating to the changing legal and political landscape surround diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts will likely be the subject matter of conversation (tools needed, universal language, etc.).

LEGENDS IN PARKS AND RECREATION COMMITTEE

Christine Dropinski, CPRP, Chair and Dr. Melissa Weddell, Vice Chair

Legends Program Sponsor: [Landscape Structures](#), Delano, Minnesota

Since the fall of 2024, the Legends Committee has undertaken an exhaustive audit of the Legends Library to identify gaps in posted videos and biographies dating back to the program’s inception. This effort has led to a series of recommendations aimed at revitalizing the program, including a complete overhaul of the nomination and selection process, clearer parameters for videos and biographies, and a more efficient program schedule. In pursuit of closing inventory gaps, the committee contacted 15 legends or their nominators whose videos were missing, receiving positive commitments from at least half to locally produce and submit their own recordings. To date, the AAPRA website’s Legends Library has grown from 114 (75%) to 117 (76%) posted videos and from 43 (28%) to 83 (54%) biographies. The committee also completed posting the final four topical videos from the 12-part series produced between 2016 and 2024 and improved internal communication by reorganizing and adding key records to Basecamp. Major recommendations have been prepared for the AAPRA Board, including two-year appointments for committee leadership, a clarified program intent that positions Legends as an oral history rather than an awards program, a policy stating that legend status is only conferred once a video is posted, and a push for locally produced videos, made more feasible through recent technology improvements.

Looking ahead, the committee is preparing a detailed report for the AAPRA Board outlining its recommendations for the program’s future. Initial steps are already underway to update the Legends webpage, finalize new nomination and selection materials, and send out best-practice guidelines to encourage local video production for the first 15 of the missing videos—half of which are expected to be completed without cost to AAPRA. In cases where no local support is available, Zoom technology may be used to record videos, with minimized funding needed. Additional priorities include developing a marketing plan to increase the visibility and use of videos and biographies and restarting the nomination and selection process for future legends. Together, these actions aim to ensure the Legends Program preserves its rich oral histories while streamlining operations for long-term success.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Janet Bartnik, CPRE, Chair and Becky Benna, CPRP, Vice Chair

The Membership Committee reviewed and updated the membership criteria scoring information prior to opening (and advertising) for nominations. The committee hosted a nomination information webinar to help inform the membership of the process. The committee received and scored six nominations, recommending four candidates for election to the Academy.

The committee is in the process of recommending that the Board submit proposed bylaws changes to the membership that, if approved, will add a new membership category and revise several sections of the bylaws relating to membership.

I want to acknowledge the dedicated work of the Membership Committee members: Becky Benna, Art Anselene, Michal Anne Lord, Sonya Shaw, Cindie Sullivan, and Bill Zimmermann. I also want to thank Board liaison Michael Kalvort, Jane Adams, and Brit Kramer for their additional support.

MENTORSHIP COMMITTEE

Kimberly Garrett, CPRP, Chair and Nancy Kaiser, CPRP, Vice Chair

The APPRA Mentorship Program was established in 2014 with the goal of partnering less experienced park and recreation professionals with established professionals in leadership positions from throughout the United States. This unique 1:1 Mentor/Mentee relationship provides an opportunity for younger professionals to gain experienced practitioner insight and advice on several topics including professional career advancement, day-to-day working situations, and heightened awareness of career opportunities in the parks and recreation field.

The 2025 class of mentors/mentees has 95 pairings! Mentee applicants live in 28 different states, with the greatest number of applicants hailing from Texas, North Carolina, Illinois, California, Arizona and Minnesota. Mentor applicants are also from 28 different states with Texas, Virginia, Ohio, New Jersey, Illinois, Michigan, Colorado and California having the greatest number. For approximately 60% of mentees, this is their first year participating in the program. Conversely, 70% of mentors are previous participants in the program! This number reflects the true dedication of park and recreation professionals to ensure that the next generation of leaders is well prepared.

Monthly meetings between mentors and mentees started in April and will continue through November with the hope that a physical meeting will occur at the NRPA Conference in September for those able to attend the conference. At the conclusion of the program, a participant survey will be distributed and an end-of-program virtual roundtable will be held.

NATIONAL GOLD MEDAL AWARDS COMMITTEE

Karen Hesser, CPRP, Chair and Stacey Laird Dicke, CPRP, Vice Chair

National Gold Medal Award Sponsor: [Musco Lighting, Oskaloosa, Iowa](#)

The National Gold Medal Award honors public park and recreation agencies and state park systems throughout the United States and armed forces recreation programs worldwide that demonstrate excellence in long-range planning, resource management, and innovative approaches to delivering superb park and recreation services with fiscally sound business practices. The Gold Medal Committee's purpose is to prepare and deliver materials to market the program to encourage agencies to apply, and after the finalists are announced, to assist with the Gold Medal Reception and to champion the finalists within their communities following the NRPA Conference. (The Committee does not judge the Gold Medal applications.)

A webinar entitled "Going for the Gold – Medal that Is" is available on the Academy's website that shares the requirements of the nomination process and was led by a panel of three professionals from Gold Medal Award winning agencies, who shared how to prepare a successful application.

Stacey is facilitating the "Going for the Gold Medal" Session at the 2025 NRPA Conference in Orlando. The session will be held on Thursday, September 18 from 10:30 AM - 11:30 AM EST in Room W308. Panelists include Mindy Albert, South Suburban Park District (CO); Stephanie Chelar, New Braunfels (TX) Parks and Recreation; and Benjamin Rae, Dickinson (ND) Parks and Recreation.

The Gold Medal Committee will be embarking on a new initiative following the conference in Orlando, a *Gold Medal Ambassador* program. This initiative will support and connect agencies that are either applying or considering it, with an experienced applicant familiar with the program and whose agency has received a Grand Plaque. The Ambassadors will also help to promote the Gold Medal Award program via local, state, and national conversations.

The Committee is currently preparing to assist with the Gold Medal Gala Reception for the 27 agency finalists at the NRPA conference. Karen and Stacey and the Gold Medal Committee will connect with the Finalist agencies to re-present their Gold Medal Plaques locally (either in person or virtually) and to acknowledge the outstanding efforts of the Finalists. Accompanying them will be local representatives from our sponsor Musco Lighting, without whom this program would not be possible.

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Tracey Crawford, CTRS, CPRP, Chair

The Nominating Committee met in May and June, brainstorming candidate names and then verifying their interest in serving on the Academy Board of Directors. All candidates confirmed that they understand the policy that members of the Academy Board are not allowed to apply for the National Gold Medal Award for their agency until their term has ended, nominate an individual for membership or write a letter of support for a nominee.

The following slate of candidates was submitted for Board approval: (✓ indicates the elected candidate)

President-Elect

Jodie Adams ✓

Stacey Laird Dicke

Treasurer (2-year term, 2025-27)

Michael Kalvort ✓

John Prue

Board of Directors (2 vacancies, 3-year term)

Stacie Anaya ✓

Michael Clark

Nancy Kaiser

Dina Trunzo ✓

Following the Board's approval of the slate, each candidate was notified to submit a brief bio, photo, and statement as to why they want to serve the Academy. Candidate's photo, bio, and statement were linked on the electronic ballot and posted on the Academy website for reference. Candidates were notified of their status upon ratification of the election results. We thank everyone who agreed to serve the Academy, and we wish the new Board of Directors much success in the coming year.

PUGSLEY MEDAL COMMITTEE

Elizabeth Kessler, CPRE, Chair and Lewis Ledford, Vice Chair

Pugsley Medal Sponsors: [Davey Tree Expert Company](#) and the [National Park Foundation](#)

We are pleased to present accomplishments of the 2025 Cornelius Amory Pugsley Medal Committee. The Honorable Cornelius Amory Pugsley Medal recognizes individuals whose outstanding contributions, exceptional leadership and innovative efforts have made a positive, lasting impact on the preservation of public parks and conservation in the United States. This prestigious medal is presented by the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration in partnership with the National Park Foundation and The Davey Tree Expert Company.

This year, the committee met twice to review medal criteria and evaluate a strong pool of nominations from across the country, using the scoring rubric developed by the 2024 Pugsley Medal Committee. Five exceptional nominations were submitted, reflecting the diversity and depth of leadership within our sector. The sustained quality and caliber of these submissions speak to the enduring prestige of the Pugsley Medal and the growing recognition of the program. Through a collaborative and thorough evaluation process, the committee selected honorees who exemplify visionary stewardship and unwavering dedication to community and conservation. We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who took the time to submit nominations as your efforts help elevate and spotlight the important work being done to protect and enhance our parks and open spaces for current to future generations. We encourage all Academy members and conservation partners to continue nominating stellar candidates to duly honor leaders in our field.

We are excited to announce three Honorable Cornelius Pugsley Medals will be presented at the 2025 American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration's Annual Award Dinner on Wednesday, September 17 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Orlando, Florida. Nominators and honorees will have the opportunity to share their life's work. Academy members and partners are invited to join us to celebrate the exemplary achievements of this year's honorees.

A heartfelt thanks is extended to the Pugsley Medal Committee for their thoughtful deliberation, commitment, and expertise in selecting this year's recipients. The dedication to upholding the medals high standards ensure the individuals recognized truly embody the values as envisioned when the medal was established in 1928.

RESEARCH FOR THE PROFESSION COMMITTEE

Dr. Denise Anderson, Chair and Dr. Ellen Drogin Rodgers, Vice Chair

The AAPRA Research to Practice Committee has developed a renewed focus on efforts to bring research to practitioners in ways that are accessible and applicable. Currently the committee is finalizing plans to offer a series of three webinars in 2026 focused on NRPA's 3 Pillars. Each webinar will feature three authors of articles from the past five years of *The Journal of Parks and Recreation Administration* that are centered around the featured pillar, starting with health and well-being. This fall the committee will develop a marketing plan to encourage registration for these free webinars that will include information about CEUs as well. The first webinar will be offered in February, followed by one in late April and one in mid-September 2026.

The committee's second project has focused on working in partnership with NRPA on methods to bring more research to practitioners in ways that are accessible and of interest. Specifically, the committee is working with NRPA on a template to take published research articles and distill them with the original authors and/or graduate students to make the research more usable and relevant for practitioners. In addition, there are some ongoing conversations around ways that the committee and NRPA may be able to work together to bring the practitioner's voice into work that NRPA does in the research arena.

URBAN DIRECTORS COMMITTEE

Dr. Edwin Gómez, CPRP, Chair

The Urban Directors Committee revised the criteria for application, which were adopted by the membership within the revised bylaws. Urban Directors must now be a Director or CEO of a Regional/Special District, County (or Parish) or City park, recreation, or conservation system serving an urban population center of 200,000+ people OR from the most populous Regional/Special District, County (or Parish) or City in that state. Nominees for the Urban Director category must have a minimum of three years' experience in that position.

This year, three New Urban Directors will be inducted at the General Membership Meeting in September. They are 1) Kyla Brown, Parks Director, Riverside County in Jurupa Valley, CA; 2) Nick Walker, Parks Director, Mecklenburg County, NC; and 3) James Wheeler, General Manager (CEO) Superintendent, Haywood Area Recreation and Park District, CA.

AMERICAN PARKS AND RECREATION FOUNDATION

Chris Nunes, CPRE, President

The Foundation has been active with several important organizational tasks, in addition to continuing our core mission of supporting professionals who wish to attend NRPA Schools, but do not have the financial means to do so. This year, we proudly offered two scholarships each for the Supervisors Management School, Revenue Development Management School, and the Directors School—six scholarships in total. A significant step forward this year was the joint work between the Academy and the Foundation to establish a clear procedure for funding requests from the Academy to the Foundation. This process will enhance transparency, streamline requests, and ensure that financial resources are allocated effectively. Additionally, the Foundation welcomed several new members who will bring fresh perspectives and energy to our collective work - Tara Stewart and Robert Carmona. Academy members are encouraged to make an annual donation to the Foundation so that we can continue offering professional development scholarships and preparing the next generation of leaders. In 2024, the Foundation raised \$9,980 for our activities and through July 31, 2025, \$7,770 was raised, which is mostly used for the scholarship program. Our 2026 goal is for 100% of Academy members to participate. Whether it's a \$1, \$10, \$100, or \$1000 contribution, every donation matters. Please make yours TODAY using this [link](#).

Watch for the 2025 – 2026 Committee Participation Survey in October!
This is YOUR opportunity to identify where you want to contribute to the Academy's efforts!