



## 2025 National Gold Medal State Park Questions & Judging Criteria

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Provided in this document is the 2025 National Gold Medal Award application questions with assigned point values and maximum word counts.

This document also provides criteria to assist the National Gold Medal Award Judges assess the applicant's response to the application questions. It is intended as a guide; judges apply their own experiences and knowledge in their assessment.

Applicants should use this document as a guide in framing their responses however, they are encouraged to remember their park system is unique in its enabling legislation, resources, constituents, and challenges. The National Gold Medal Award seeks to identify those entities (public agencies, state park systems, and armed forces installation programs) that demonstrate excellence in managing and delivering high quality parks and recreation services.

PLEASE NOTE: The total word count and point value varies for each question.

- 1. Recognizing each state park and recreation system is unique in its purpose, mission, culture, financing, enabling legislation, etc., what does your park system do well in managing its resources to meet its stated goals?**

MAXIMUM WORDS 300 / MAXIMUM 15 POINTS

This question is for the park system to explain in broad terms what they judge they do well. Why do they believe they are a national leader in managing their agency? This is question is **not** about the magnitude of their resources (budget, revenues, grants, staff, facilities, etc) but how well they fulfill their mission and serve their constituents using the resources they have. The response should be linked to their enabling legislation, their master or strategic plan and their mission. How well do they execute, demonstrate, and measure advancement toward their mission? The response is intended to tie what the park system was created to do with how effective they are at managing their resources to achieve its mission.

- 2. Based upon your response to Question #1, what measurements is your park system employing to evaluate what you say you are doing well? Cite three examples of measurements and how the data is being used in decision-making.**

MAXIMUM WORDS 240 / EACH EXAMPLE IS A MAXIMUM OF FOUR POINTS, FOR A TOTAL OF 12 POINTS

In Question #1 the park system is asked to state why it is a leader in managing its resources to meet its stated goals using the resources it has. The magnitude of the resources is not important; what is important is how effectively they manage their resources to achieve their mission. The park system is to provide three examples of the types of data collected and how it is being used in their decision-making.

- 3. Well managed state park systems know the source(s) of its funds, *regardless of the amount*, and plans how it will utilize those funds. Describe the park system's fiscal management strategies and cite two examples of how the system allocates its funds to respond to its stated mission and goals.**

MAXIMUM WORDS 240 / MAXIMUM 10 POINTS

This question seeks to learn the park system's overall fiscal planning and management philosophy and how it applies the money it receives or generates to meet its stated mission and goals. This question is **not** about the amount of funds the park system receives. The focus is on what the park system does with the funds it does receive. Response should share the park system's fiscal management philosophy as well as two management strategies it uses in allocating its funds.

- 4. Well managed state park systems consistently communicate *internally* to ensure their team members are informed and engaged; they are included in the decision-making processes; and they are motivated to succeed. Cite three examples undertaken in the last three years of *internal* initiatives or actions that demonstrate how the park system communicates, engages, and connects with its team members. Explain the intended outcomes and how they are being measured.**

MAXIMUM WORDS 240 / EACH EXAMPLE IS A MAXIMUM OF FOUR POINTS, FOR A TOTAL OF 12 POINTS

The intent of this question is for the park system to identify actions it is taking to communicate and/or connect *internally* with its team members. Did these efforts result in improved staff morale, more efficient decision-making, and/or sharing of resources, etc.? Whatever the initiative or action undertaken, did the park system identify the desired outcome(s) and how are they being measured?

- 5. Enlisting and engaging with *external* entities, i.e., communities, customers, businesses, partners, or coalitions, can expand the park system's resources and influence. Cite three examples undertaken in the last three years that demonstrate the system's efforts to increase its resources or influence by involving *external* partners (i.e., community members, foundations, friends organizations, customers, businesses, or coalitions). Explain the intended outcomes and how they are being measured.**

MAXIMUM WORDS 240 / EACH EXAMPLE IS A MAXIMUM OF FOUR POINTS, FOR A TOTAL OF 12 POINTS

The intent of this question is to identify how the park system is communicating or connecting with members of its community, customers, and partners to build relationships, increase resources, or expand its influence. Whatever the initiative or action undertaken, did the park system identify the desired outcome(s) and how are they being measured?

- 6. State park systems are called upon to demonstrate the results of their services and practices to decision-makers and the public. Cite three outcomes, results, or impacts achieved in the last three years your park system has measured; background about the outcome(s); and the results achieved.**

MAXIMUM WORDS 300 / EACH EXAMPLE IS A MAXIMUM OF FOUR POINTS, FOR A TOTAL OF 12 POINTS

State park systems are often questioned about their value and the impact they are having in the communities they serve. The intent of this question is to determine if the park system has identified and demonstrated the

benefits of their services and programs to its communities and/or decision makers. The park system should describe why these desired outcome(s) were chosen and how progress is measured and communicated.

- 7. State park systems should focus on creativity and innovation. Cite three innovations implemented by your state park system within the last three years that have had a significant impact on service delivery, programs, customer satisfaction, partnerships, financial condition, fiscal sustainability, maintenance practices and/or internal operations.**

MAXIMUM WORDS 300, EACH EXAMPLE IS A MAXIMUM OF FOUR POINTS, FOR A TOTAL OF 12 POINTS

One of the strengths of the parks and recreation profession is it is constantly reinventing itself and adapting to internal and external forces. Has the park system reinvented/adapted by creating new innovations, delivery methods, partnerships, etc.? The intent of this question is to identify any new innovations that the park system has created during the last three years that has had a significant impact to the communities and constituents it serves.

- 8. Cite initiatives or actions the park system has undertaken in the last three years that center equity in programs, policies, and practices to ensure all visitors have fair and just access to the benefits of quality programs and services.**

MAXIMUM WORDS 150, MAXIMUM FIVE POINTS

The intent of this question is to ensure that everyone has fair and just access to quality parks, facilities, recreation programs and services regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, identity, religion, socioeconomic status, age, language, or physical or mental abilities.

Is there an equitable delivery of facilities and recreation opportunities throughout the system and has the park system identified any barriers that need addressing to ensure equity? Does the park system recognize and celebrate differences and ensure visitors feel welcome? The park system can submit it has identified inequities if it reports how it is now addressing them.

- 9. State park systems manage gathering spaces that connect visitors and community members to essential programs, services and spaces that advance health, wellness and improve the quality of life. Cite efforts of system-focused solutions that connect participants and visitors to programs, services and spaces that inspire health and wellness.**

MAXIMUM WORDS 150, MAXIMUM FIVE POINTS

State park systems play a vital role in meeting the evolving health needs of their communities. Health and wellness can include programs that provide access to healthy foods; physical activity; social connections; nature; substance abuse prevention; mental health; and improve air and water quality. The core of this work is equity, ensuring all people have the opportunity to achieve positive health and well-being outcomes.

- 10. Cite initiatives, practices, or actions your park system has undertaken in the last three years that advance or support environmental resiliency and greater sustainability.**

MAXIMUM WORDS 150, MAXIMUM FIVE POINTS

Implementation of system-wide sustainability measures that improve the environment as well as promote human and ecosystem health can include protecting the natural habitat, stormwater management and lowering of water usage, focused maintenance practices, reducing or eliminating use of carbon-based energy, reducing landfill waste, providing programs that educate and engage visitors and community members, and intentional communications through websites, social media, brochures, and signage.

11. Each state park system faces challenges due to internal or external influences. What challenges has your system faced in the last three years and what action(s) has it undertaken to address these challenge(s)? Cite the park system's role in identifying and addressing the challenge(s), the steps/actions undertaken, and the measured effectiveness of the effort(s).

MAXIMUM WORDS 300, MAXIMUM 10 POINTS

There is no specific answer to Question #11 as each state park system is different which means the challenge(s) a park system faces will be unique. This question has three components: identification of the challenge; the impact to the system; and how the system responded. The challenges may be manmade, weather, unprecedented growth, government changes, pandemics, civil or political unrest. These ideas are not inclusive but are provided as possibilities.

TOTAL WORDS: 2610

TOTAL POINTS: 100

**Definitions:**

1. **Undertaken** implies action has begun, launched, started, attempted.
2. **Outcomes** are specific, measurable statements that communicate the goal has been met; they describe specific changes in conditions, behaviors, attitudes, knowledge, or skills expected to occur because of your actions.
3. **Community** is meant to be the agency's service area.
4. **Team members** refers to staff, full and part time, and volunteers.

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