



## URBAN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PROGRAM

# CRITICAL ELEMENTS

### WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL ELEMENTS?

For the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program is defined by four critical elements: **community-focused, intentional, inclusive, and collaborative**. They are the foundation of our Standards of Excellence for building long-term, meaningful relationships with urban communities, especially [BIPOC](#) communities. Each element is essential and interrelated. We measure every action against these elements so that we positively impact the planet and people and hold ourselves accountable to continual progress, not perfection. With this focus, the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program provides a model for addressing systemic racism and advancing equity in conservation.

Historically Excluded	Ethnically Diverse	Culturally Diverse	Conservation Effort
<p><b>Ethnically and culturally diverse groups that have been excluded from decision-making processes.</b> <i>The Service acknowledges that within every community, these groups have been prevented or inhibited from participating in the selection and implementation of and from receiving the benefits of conservation efforts – whether by design or by a failure to create systems that purposely include these groups.</i></p>	<p><b>People of varying national and ancestral origins.</b> <i>The Service acknowledges that mainstream conservation institutions have generally excluded specific ethnicities from conservation efforts. Examples include African Americans, Latin Americans, Native Americans, and Asian and Pacific Islander Americans. The reasons for this – including oversight, implicit and institutional bias, and deliberate exclusion – are interrelated because they are born from historical systems of exclusion that continue to influence all of our thinking to this day.</i></p>	<p><b>The representation of a multitude of identities, ideas, customs, beliefs, traditions, and social behaviors in a group, population, or society.</b> <i>Cultural differences exist across the ways by which people organize and identify (geography, sexual orientation, gender identification, abilities, family structure, socioeconomic status, etc.)</i></p>	<p><b>All projects, programs, events, collaborations, and recreational opportunities that involve participation by community members at any stage in the design and delivery process.</b> <i>The Service engages communities using a wide array of methods. They all require some level of effort and they all contribute to the Service conservation mission.</i></p>

## CRITICAL ELEMENTS

The following describe the critical elements and how the Service can take action to integrate them in the UWCP:

### **Community-focused: Prioritize community needs with long-term commitments.**

#### **We are being community-focused when we:**

- Identify and reflect community members' needs (e.g., language, physical), culture, and values to foster mutual respect.
- Co-design and deliver conservation efforts with community members, ensuring they are responsive to community needs, support community goals, and produce community benefits (e.g., improving public health or education).
- Work with community organizations, leaders, and individuals in a way that all community members feel they have a voice and are empowered to participate in conservation efforts.
- Dedicate adequate staff and resources to support community-focused approaches consistently and over time.

#### **We take community-focused action by:**

- Getting to know the community in a purposeful way— learning from community leaders, partnering with representative organizations, and using community assessment tools.
- Asking community members what makes them feel safe, respected, and welcomed, then working with them to achieve these conditions.
- Being meaningfully present at gathering places and actively participating in community-based events, to listen, understand, and provide appropriate support.
- Involving the community when designing new conservation efforts from the outset with established and communicated processes that are transparent (e.g., constraints such as compatibility with the overarching wildlife mission are conveyed up front); respectful of community values related to their relationship to the built and natural environment; and reflect back where input informed Service actions and decisions.
- Building trust with historically excluded community members, so that they may be ambassadors and conservations leaders who cultivate greater participation in the design and delivery of conservation efforts.

### **Intentional: Adopt community engagement methods that are well-informed, purposeful, and measurable.**

#### **We are being intentional when we:**

- Design our UWCP efforts—including building partnerships, prioritizing audiences, and program development and delivery—purposefully to meet the Standards of Excellence and community-based goals.
- Ground our decisions in empirical research and community knowledge.
- Design and implement evaluation processes to continually learn, adapt, and improve conservation efforts around measurable outcomes.
- Hold ourselves accountable to the community by ensuring conservation efforts provide community-defined benefits.

- Support and contribute to a culture of learning that includes diverse experiences and perspectives.

**We take intentional action by:**

- Making decisions explicit and transparent, specifying intentions and defining measurable goals and desired outcomes.
- Replicating engagement models that are proven to work—using messages and methods that are culturally responsive and cultivating trusted messengers who represent historically excluded community groups.
- Creating or adapting evaluation frameworks that align on-the-ground indicators with high-level outcomes.
- Continually learning from our efforts and communicating successes and failures across the Service and to partners.

**Inclusive: Implement equitable solutions to involve the community in solving conservation challenges.**

**We are being inclusive when we:**

- Increase access to conservation efforts for historically excluded communities by identifying, addressing, and removing institutional barriers that affect these communities.
- Share power with historically excluded community groups by involving them in the design, decision-making, development, delivery, and evaluation of programs.
- Actively work to provide equitable access to the benefits of conservation efforts.
- Extend ethnically and culturally relevant invitations to historically excluded community groups and ensure they are welcomed with relevant markers that they have helped identify and provide (e.g., language, communication methods, music, and food).

**We take inclusive action by:**

- Understanding the ways and places historically excluded community groups gather and express their culture.
- Embracing equity and committing the necessary resources to build trust and participation capacity with historically excluded community groups.
- Engaging historically excluded community groups with authenticity—speaking with, not at; sharing power, not holding power over.
- Establishing practices (e.g., flexible meeting schedules, convenient meeting locations, food, child care, and language assistance) that increase the ability for all community members to participate in programs and/or provide input in all phases of design process through evaluation.
- Celebrating the cultural and ethnic diversity of community groups in our conservation efforts.
- Training staff, volunteers, and partners to understand the importance of inclusion and develop the skills of individuals and organizations to be inclusive.

**Collaborative: Form long-term transformational relationships with community partners and across Service programs with the goal of increasing the collective impacts of conservation efforts.**

**We are being collaborative when we:**

- Share resources, power, and decision making with partners, including volunteers and Friends.
- Find common ground with partners in mission, goals, and tactics.
- Create a culture and network among partners where we openly share and learn from each other.

**We take collaborative action by:**

- Developing meaningful partnerships with the community using a process for aligning goals, inventorying strengths and weaknesses, strategically bringing others to the table, and crafting common language.
- Expanding the Service portfolio of partners to engage with small community-based organizations, ethnically- and culturally-specific organizations, and those in sectors beyond conservation (e.g., health, business, art, and spiritual).
- Becoming ambassadors for our partners and our collaborative conservation efforts.
- Engaging other Service programs to develop shared strategies, methods, and messages and ensure we align community engagement efforts.