

= Pilot ( Parks and Recreation ) =

" Pilot " is the pilot episode of the American comedy television series Parks and Recreation . It originally aired on NBC in the United States on April 9 , 2009 . The episode was written by series co - @ - @ creators Michael Schur and Greg Daniels , and directed by Daniels .

The episode introduces the protagonist Leslie Knope , played by Amy Poehler , as well as the other regular characters played by cast members Rashida Jones , Paul Schneider , Aziz Ansari , Aubrey Plaza and Nick Offerman . Knope is a mid @ - @ level bureaucrat in the Parks and Recreation department in the fictional town of Pawnee , Indiana . In " Pilot " , Knope sets out to turn a construction pit into a park after local nurse Ann Perkins ( Jones ) complains about the dangerous pit during a town meeting . Her anti @ - @ government boss Ron Swanson ( Offerman ) reluctantly allows her to form an exploratory committee after her friend and colleague Mark Brendanawicz ( Schneider ) secretly intervenes on her behalf .

Daniels and Schur first started writing the script in the summer of 2008 , when they were in the early stages of conceiving the series . Like the rest of the series , the pilot was filmed in the same mockumentary style as The Office , the NBC comedy series also directed by Daniels . About one month before the pilot aired , a focus group report discussing several perceived problems with the episode was leaked to the media , which led to speculation that Parks and Recreation was not ready for prime @ - @ time television . The pilot episode featured a number of cultural references to such people as Bobby Knight , Larry Bird and Laura Linney , as well as female political figures to whom Leslie compares herself , such as Hillary Rodham Clinton , Sarah Palin , and Nancy Pelosi .

" Pilot " received generally mixed reviews , although Poehler herself was widely praised by most television critics . According to Nielsen Media Research , " Pilot " was watched by 6 @ . @ 77 million households in its original airing . Although it received lower ratings than the two Office episodes it aired between , television critics pointed out it achieved an identical rating to the popular NBC show 30 Rock , which was broadcast the same night . The pilot , along with the rest of the first season of Parks and Recreation , was released on DVD in the United States on September 8 , 2009 .

= = Plot = =

The episode opens with Leslie Knope ( Amy Poehler ) , the deputy director of the Department of Parks and Recreation with six years of experience in the town of Pawnee , Indiana , discussing with a documentary crew her strong belief in the power of government to help other people . Later , Leslie hosts a community outreach public forum at an elementary school along with her jaded colleague Tom Haverford ( Aziz Ansari ) . Leslie is enthusiastic despite the low turnout and angry complaints , which she describes as " people caring loudly at me " . Local nurse Ann Perkins ( Rashida Jones ) complains about a giant pit near her house , which was dug out by a condominium developer that went bankrupt in the middle of the construction project . Ann says that her boyfriend Andy Dwyer ( Chris Pratt ) broke both his legs after falling into the pit , and she demands something be done about it . Leslie is inspired by the challenge and makes a " pinky promise " that she will fill in the pit and build a park on the land .

Leslie seeks advice from city planner Mark Brendanawicz ( Paul Schneider ) , who feels the project would prove practically impossible due to the logistics and bureaucratic red tape , but Leslie is undeterred . Leslie later fondly tells the documentary crew that she and Mark made love five years ago , but Mark only vaguely recalls the encounter . Leslie , Tom and uninterested intern April Ludgate ( Aubrey Plaza ) visit Ann and meet Andy , a lazy and demanding musician whom she is forced to wait on and support financially . Afterward , Leslie and Ann visit the pit , which Leslie accidentally falls into as Tom and April make fun of her . Ann quickly provides medical assistance . Afterward , Leslie leaves , and Ann tells the documentary crew , " She 's a little doofy , but she 's sweet " . Some time later , Leslie asks her boss Ron Swanson ( Nick Offerman ) for permission to form an exploratory committee for the pit project . Ron initially refuses , but eventually agrees to consider it so that Leslie will leave his office . Ron explains that he does not want the Parks Department to build any parks because he believes government is a waste of money , and that all

government should be privatized and run by corporations for profit . Leslie repeatedly pesters Ron about the park project , but he refuses to commit .

Meanwhile , Tom and April continue to make fun of Leslie , much to the displeasure of Mark . Mark , who tells the documentary crew he is impressed that Leslie has somehow maintained her optimism about government for six years , secretly asks Ron to give her the park project . Mark said doing so would return a favor Ron owes him for unspecified reasons . Leslie and Ann are extremely excited about the new exploratory subcommittee , and the department celebrates by getting drunk . Despite her skepticism about politics and government , a drunken Ann pledges to do whatever it takes to help get the pit filled in , " even if it takes two months " . The episode ends with Ron explaining to the documentary crew how he makes his office as uninviting as possible .

= = Production = =

= = = Conception = = =

Immediately after Ben Silverman was named co @-@ chairman of NBC 's entertainment division in 2007 , he asked Greg Daniels to create a new comedy series . Silverman and Daniels previously worked together on The Office , a half @-@ hour comedy Daniels adapted from the British comedy of the same name by Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant . Daniels wrote the pilot for what eventually became Parks and Recreation along with series co @-@ creator Michael Schur , who had served as a writer on The Office . Daniels and Schur had been considering ideas for a possible show with cast members Rashida Jones and Aziz Ansari , but the concept for the series did not form until they learned Amy Poehler could play the lead character . Once that casting was determined , the script for the pilot episode was first written in the summer of 2008 revolving around her as a city bureaucrat seeking to turn an enormous construction pit into a park . They also decided the script would include the mockumentary comedy style of The Office and , like that show , would allow for improvisation on set . However , they did not consider the script an Office spin @-@ off and NBC officials vehemently insisted to media outlets that the show was a completely separate series , despite the similarities between the two shows .

= = = Writing = = =

The first draft of the script portrayed Leslie and Mark as slightly less likable characters . Originally , Mark asked Ron to green @-@ light the park project not to help Leslie , but because he was attracted to Ann and wanted another excuse to keep seeing her . These elements of the script were changed after press tours and focus group screenings . The show 's writers spent time researching local California politics and attended Los Angeles City Council meetings . Daniels and Schur wanted the pilot to establish that one of Leslie 's duties was talking to the public on a regular basis , and they deliberately portrayed her public forum meetings as poorly attended except by a select group of angry residents . Schur said , " I 've been to some community meetings in my life , and it is often this feeling of utter sparseness . That nobody cares . " In writing the script , Schur wanted Mark and Leslie to have a long history together before the events of the episode , rather than having the two characters meet for the first time on screen , which he felt had already been done in many television shows . The first shot of the pilot was originally a scene with Ann standing over the pit and staring at it with an annoyed expression , followed by a documentary interview with Ann and Andy . The opening scene was changed because Daniels and Schur decided they wanted the first scene of the series to be set in a park . As a result , the episode started with a cold open of Leslie interviewing children in a park , then using a broom to push a drunk man out of spiral slide . Daniels had such a specific vision for the scene , he drew an elaborate and detailed storyboard sketch of a drunk man stuck in a tubular slide .

Some parts of the episode consisted of a mixture of written dialogue and comedic improvisation from the actors . In one such scene , Aziz Ansari attempts to flirt with Rashida Jones when she

speaks at a Parks and Recreation public forum . The scene was included in the script , but Ansari continued to improvise long after his dialogue ended , and Jones said she found it difficult to keep a straight face during filming . Schur encouraged Ansari to continue , and suggested the line in which Ansari asks to go away with Jones for the weekend . Daniels called the scene " probably the highlight of the pilot . " The ending included another example of written dialogue mixed with improvisation , when Ansari recited a list of unusual things Leslie has attempted to do while drunk . In other scenes , the written dialogue was abandoned altogether in favor of improvisation , such as the scene of Ann and Andy talking on Ann 's couch after Leslie fell into the pit and injured herself . Chris Pratt improvised a number of other lines and scenes in the episode , including when Andy asked Leslie to pass him his " itch stick " , which he then used to scratch under his leg cast in an awkward and disgusting way .

The pilot script included several political cultural references . Leslie compares herself to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in describing the prevalence of women in government . Leslie invokes former U.S. Presidents Richard Nixon and George W. Bush as shining examples of democracy . The episode also features several references to sports figures . Ron has a poster of Bobby Knight , the famous retired basketball coach , hanging in his office . The Bobby Knight image later had to be removed from the show for legal reasons . Leslie has an autographed photo of Indiana @-@ born basketball player Larry Bird on her desk . It reads , " To Lesly , Sink That Shot , Larry B. " This is a reference to a deleted scene in which Tom reveals he has tricked Leslie into believing he has brunch with Bird once a month . Tom himself actually faked the autograph , and deliberately misspelled her name " Lesly " as a joke .

= = = Filming = = =

Michael Schur made his directorial debut with the pilot episode . The original cut of the pilot episode was 48 minutes long , and had to be trimmed down to 22 minutes . Due to the improvisational style and hand @-@ held camerawork of the series , a great deal of extra footage is filmed in each episode and ultimately has to be discarded for the final cut . Amy Poehler said of this , " For every show , there could probably be a second show of stuff we 've edited out . " Brief portions of those deleted scenes were interwoven into short montage sequences that played along with dialogue from the documentary @-@ style interviews conducted within the episode with the characters .

Although the series shared the same mockumentary style as The Office , Daniels and Schur sought to establish a slightly different tone in the camerawork of the pilot episode of Parks and Recreation . For example , the documentary @-@ style interviews with characters sometimes feature two separate angles on the same person , with footage of the two different angles intercut into a single scene for the final episode . This distinguishing technique was inspired by The Five Obstructions , a 2003 documentary by Lars von Trier and Jørgen Leth , which Daniels watched at the suggestion of actor Paul Schneider . The pilot episode also makes use of the jump cut technique more often than in The Office . In one example from the pilot episode , a scene repeatedly jumps cuts to several brief clips in which Leslie seeks permission from Ron to pursue the pit project .

The pilot episode was filmed in southern California . The construction pit featured in the episode was dug out by the episode 's producers at an undeveloped property in Van Nuys , a district in Los Angeles . The producers went door @-@ to @-@ door to neighboring residents to seek their permission , then rented construction equipment to dig the hole in the ground . The pit was guarded 24 hours a day , and paparazzi regularly came to the set to take photos of the actors during filming . The exterior of the Pawnee government building , and several of the hallway scenes , were shot at the Pasadena city hall building . The interior parks and recreation department scenes were filmed on a sound stage . The windows could drop water that would simulate falling rain , and the windowsills included fake pigeons . The cold open scene was filmed in an actual playground in Los Angeles . The spiral tube slide used in the scene was the only one of its type left in the city , because the rest had been deemed too dangerous and removed . The public forum scenes were filmed in a Los Angeles middle school . The script originally called for the meeting to be held in a classroom because the auditorium door was locked . However , Daniels said the writers thought the school 's

auditorium was such a " cool location " that they added a scene in which the auditorium lights were turned off in the middle of the meeting .

Singer @-@ songwriter Loudon Wainwright III makes a cameo as Barry , one of the citizens who makes wild complaints at the parks and recreations community meeting . Wainwright was selected for the part at the suggestion of casting director Allison Jones . Comedian and actor Ian Roberts , who worked with Amy Poehler on the Upright Citizens Brigade sketch comedy troupe , also made a cameo at the public meeting as Ian Winston , a man complaining about cursing at the park . During filming , guest star Chris Pratt said Poehler " [ went ] out of her way " to welcome him , and that her polite behavior put him at ease during filming .

= = Reception = =

= = = Pre @-@ broadcast feedback = = =

Parks and Recreation was rushed into production for the pilot to meet the April 9 premiere date . As a result , when the series was paneled at a January 2009 television critics press tour , NBC did not have a finished episode to air , and only had a copy of the pilot episode script available for critics to review . Some of the parts were not yet cast , and without a finalized title , the series was known only as The Untitled Amy Poehler Project or TUAPP . Alan Sepinwall , television writer for The Star @-@ Ledger , said he found the script very funny even though he normally hates reading comedy scripts " because they 're rarely as funny on the page as they are coming out of an actor 's mouth " .

According to a March 18 report that was leaked to television journalist Nikki Finke , focus groups responded poorly to a screening of the rough @-@ cut version of the pilot . Several viewers felt the show was a " carbon copy " of The Office , and needed to be differentiated from that series to avoid coming across as forced and unoriginal . Some viewers found it predictable , slow @-@ paced and lacking character development , and felt the beginning of the episode needed to better explain the situation and setting . Several viewers said the show lacked quality male characters , particularly a " datable " lead male . Other viewers , however , said The Office needed time to develop into a quality show , and they felt audiences would be more patient with Parks and Recreation than other shows due to its connection to The Office . Viewers also said the show 's portrayal of bureaucracy of local government was " very believable " and could provide quirky and silly situations for the show , and they liked Poehler 's character and performance . The release of the report led to speculation in the media that Parks and Recreations was not ready for prime @-@ time television . In response to the leaked negative feedback , Ben Silverman said rough cuts of shows are usually received negatively , even for ultimately successful shows . Schur also said there had been at least four complete edits to the pilot since the focus @-@ group results came in .

= = = Ratings and reviews = = =

The Parks and Recreation pilot first aired on April 9 , 2009 , in the United States on NBC . It was shown in a time slot between two fifth season episodes of The Office : " Dream Team " and " Michael Scott Paper Company " . In its original American broadcast on April 9 , the pilot was watched by 6 @.@ 77 million overall households , according to Nielsen Media Research . Media outlets described it as a solid rating for the premiere , and said it was comparable to average ratings for 30 Rock , the NBC show that also airs Thursday nights ; 30 Rock achieved the same 6 @.@ 8 million overall household rating during the 9 : 30 p.m. time slot on April 9 . " Pilot " also had a 40 percent higher rating than the final episode of Kath & Kim , which previously held the show 's time slot . However , " Pilot " did not capture the same amount of viewers as the Office episodes that ran before and after it . " Dream Team " , which ran at 8 p.m. , drew 7 @.@ 2 million households , and " Michael Scott Paper Company " , which ran at 9 p.m. , drew 8 million households .

The episode received mixed reviews from television critics . Daniel Carlson of The Hollywood Reporter said Parks and Recreation appears to be a " genuinely funny and engaging comedy " and

that inevitable comparisons to *The Office* are not fair ; he also said Poehler " proves instantly she 's got the comic intelligence to carry a series like this one " . Ken Tucker of *Entertainment Weekly* said " Pilot " lacked the " snap and clear character delineation " of *The Office* , but pointed out that show also appeared flat in early episodes ; Tucker said he liked the performances , attitude and atmosphere of the show , although it had few laugh out loud moments . Matthew Gilbert of *The Boston Globe* said the show has the potential to become a " flip , witty political allegory " and praised Poehler and the supporting cast . Los Angeles Times television critic Robert Lloyd praised the show for providing strong female leads , which he said was rare on television . He also said , " It has a kind of sunny charm , a premise fit for a novel ... Poehler and Jones have a nice , contrapuntal rhythm . I stamp this show : approved . "

Alan Sepinwall of *The Star @-@ Ledger* said the series needs to find a way to distinguish Leslie from Steve Carell 's Michael Scott from *The Office* , but he said the pilot episode was funny , particularly the Aziz Ansari character . Sepinwall also said *The Office* did not find its footing until the second season , so comparisons simply based on the pilot were not fair . ( Ironically , most critics now agree that *Parks and Recreation* set a significantly higher standard after the second season . ) Alessandra Stanley of *The New York Times* said the supporting cast needed stronger writing and reinforcements , but that Poehler was excellent in a lead role unique for women because it is based on weakness and wrongheadedness , but still a positive and strong part . Stanley said , " The pilot episode isn ' t perfect , but Ms. Poehler very nearly is . " Verne Gay of *Newsday* said Poehler has " plenty of appeal here " so he felt the show might have potential , but felt the pilot was for the most part a " near knockoff " of *The Office* . Likewise , Paige Wiser of the *Chicago Sun @-@ Times* said " so far it 's a pale Xerox of the paper company " , although she said " there are lots of funny little moments that could add up to a great series . " Robert Bianco said the episode was not funny , and the way in which the scripts and supporting cast ridicule and ignore the Leslie character leaves a " sour whiff of gratuitous cruelty . " He also called the pilot unoriginal and described it as " a style in search of a show , " despite Poehler 's likability . Similarly , Rob Owen of the *Pittsburgh Post @-@ Gazette* said , " Watching Poehler 's pathetic character have her dreams stomped on by apathetic bureaucrats is off @-@ putting , more so than Michael Scott 's obliviousness , " although Owen said the Ansari character was amusing .

Philadelphia Inquirer television critic Jonathan Storm strongly criticized the show , calling it a flat , " miscast mess " with serious structural problems . Storm also said the Leslie character lacked energy and Poehler was playing the part against her comedic strengths . Tom Shales of *The Washington Post* said , " Poehler 's show unfortunately isn ' t worthy of her . It 's dry and hesitant when one longs for it to be raucous and madcap . " David Hinckley of *New York Daily News* said the show was not funny enough to deserve Poehler 's comedic talents , and compared the dialogue to a Saturday Night Live sketch that he said could not sustain a whole sitcom . New York Post television critic Linda Stasi said the pilot lacked laughs and was so similar to *The Office* that " it 's starting to look like a one @-@ trick pony outfit that 's gonna keep dressing that horse up in new saddles , hoping that no one will guess it 's been around the track so many times , it 's worn a ditch in the dirt . " The pilot episode premiered in Australia on Channel Seven on December 1 , 2009 , when episodes from the critically acclaimed second season were already playing in the United States . Sacha Moritz of *The Sydney Morning Herald* said of the episode , " To be frank , tonight 's premiere is weak . But the potential is obvious and word from the US is that it gets much better . "

= = DVD release = =

The pilot episode , along with the five other first season episodes of *Parks and Recreation* , was released on a one @-@ disc DVD set in the United States on September 8 , 2009 . The DVD included cast and crew commentary tracks for each episode , as well as about 30 minutes of deleted scenes . The deleted scenes included on the DVD were originally featured on the official *Parks and Recreation* website after the episode aired . In one of them , Tom talks about changing his name because he thought it sounded too foreign for politics , although he admits this was not a problem for U.S. President Barack Obama . The scene was eventually worked into the second season

episode , " The Stakeout " .