

Engaging Young Adults in a Sustainable Future: Strategies for National Parks and Other Special Places

A Front End Evaluation Final Report

Prepared for

The National Park Foundation

Prepared by

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This report reflects insights from the following staff, participants, and experts in the fields of park operations, environmental sustainability, and youth development who were interviewed or participated in the design charette:

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Table of Contents

Overview of Project Findings.....	1
Attachment 1: NPF Strategy Level Theory of Change.....	3
Attachment 2: Program Design Principles from the Literature Review.....	4
Attachment 3: Guiding Principles Developed at the Program Design Charette.....	9
Attachment 4 : Overview of Interview and Focus Group Analyses.....	10
Attachment 5: Synthesis of Program Design Principles.....	11
Attachment 6: Program Design Level Theory of Change.....	12
Appendices	13
A. Detailed Findings from Interview and Focus Group Analyses.....	14
B. Interview Guides (focus group and individual interviews).....	26
C. Charrette Notes.....	29
D. Charette Agenda and Participant List.....	36

Overview of Project Findings

The purpose of this project was to inform the National Park Foundation's (NPF) program development strategy for engaging young adults age 18 to 25 in environmental sustainability through collaboration with national parks and their partners and communities. This project positions the NPF to capitalize on research- and experienced-based knowledge about engaging young adults in the design of new initiatives. Program development for this key age group is an essential part of the NPF's overall strategy of engaging the full spectrum of youth audiences.

For this project, the NPF worked in partnership with the NPS Conservation Study Institute and Shelburne Farms to systematically undertake an in-depth, front end evaluation¹ to learn about relevant opportunities and best practices to inform program development. The evaluation project team conducted an extensive literature review of relevant evaluation and research findings, used a participatory information gathering process through interviews with key stakeholders, and convened a program design charette. The team interviewed 18 experts in the fields of sustainability, youth development, and park operations, as well as 4 participants and 7 supervisors from the Alternative Transportation Interpreters² program. The findings from the literature review and the interview data were integrated and used as the basis for the day long program design charette during which NPF staff, the evaluation team, and 9 additional invited experts critically reviewed and creatively contributed to the findings of this project.

Project findings are presented in six attachments. The first four represent analyses from separate sources of information (interview and focus group data, literature review, and design charette). The remaining two products synthesize information across these sources. This synthesis illustrates a convergence of study findings, increasing confidence that these reflect more general principles and are a reliable basis for program design. This document also includes an appendix with supporting documentation such as preliminary findings from interviews, selected notes and documents from the charette, evaluation plans, and interview guides.

Attachment 1: NPF Strategy Level Theory of Change

This is a one page graphic representation of the NPF's strategic context for the design of new initiatives for young adults would take place. This graphic describes the underlying premise and assumptions that are at work, the overarching program design strategies, and the intended macro-level outcomes, and how these together shape the strategic role for the NPF. This theory of change was developed by integrating data from evaluation interviews and literature review with insights drawn from conversations with NPF and NPS staff. Participants at the charette reviewed a draft and provided comments. This document is akin to a "30,000 foot" view of the overall NPF program design landscape.

¹ "Front end evaluation" is a systematic inquiry that precedes program design and implementation. It is sometimes also referred to as a "needs assessment."

² From 2003 through 2009, this NPF-sponsored project placed young adults in host parks to provide interpretation of local alternative transportation options and related issues.

Attachment 2: Program Design Principles from the Literature Review

This four-page summary identifies six program design principles that emerged from an extensive review of existing evaluation and research on program design and related impacts of youth programs. This summary provides examples of how these principles can be implemented through a variety of programs in various settings. This literature review summary was designed to be readily accessible to the NPF and NPS as well as a broad range of other audiences.

Attachment 3: Guiding Principles Developed at the Program Design Charette

Participants at the charette explored and critically discussed drafts of the NPF strategy level theory of change, the program design level theory of change, and the literature review documents. By the end of this one-day session, the group developed a set of key guiding principles for NPF to consider while exploring potential next steps in program development. These guiding principles reiterated much but not all of the other data gathered for this evaluation (see #5 below). The charette participants added unique insights and syntheses not found elsewhere in the evaluation data.

Attachment 4: Findings from the Interview and Focus Group Data

The analysis of the 19 interviews and two focus groups identified four overarching themes that can inform NPF program design and development. These four themes closely align with the other data gathered for this evaluation (see #5 below).

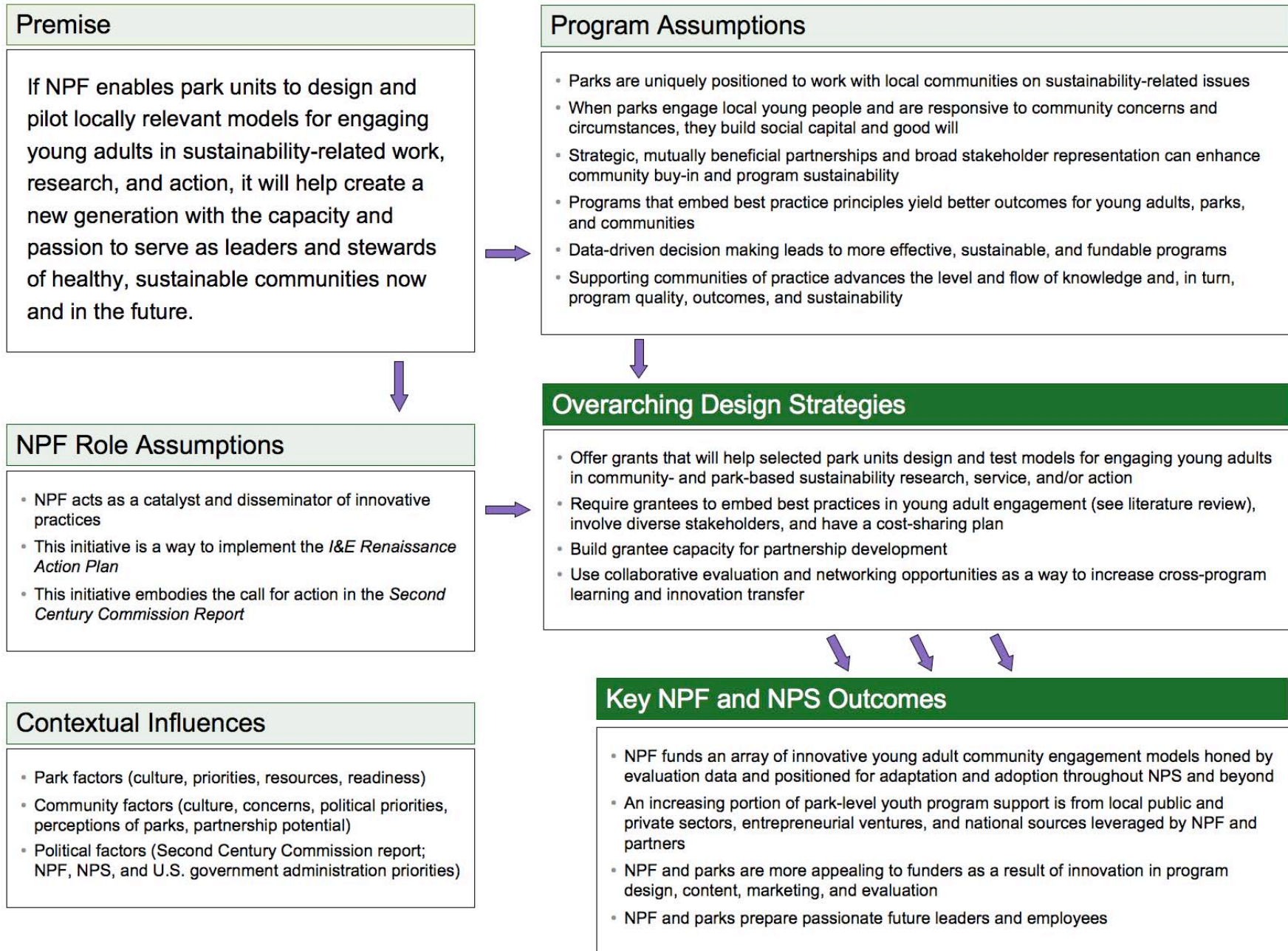
Attachment 5: Synthesis of Program Design Principles

This synthesis of program design principles emerged from the literature review, program design charette, and interview data (#2-4 above). This synthesis illustrates a convergence of study findings, increasing confidence that these reflect more general principles and are a reliable basis for program design.

Attachment 6: Program Design Level Theory of Change

This theory of change maps the relationship between program design principles and the outcomes that parks, partners, communities, and young adults seek. This theory of change was initially crafted from the literature review, interview data and dialogue from the charette and the synthesis table (#5 above). One of the key insights emerging from this study is that parks, their partners, and communities working together can create powerful opportunities for engaging young adults in creating a sustainable future. The goals, needs, actions, and benefits of each of these groups are complementary and reinforce each other. This graphic – together with the synthesis of principles (see #5 above) – can serve as a guide for future NPF and NPS sustainability program development to engage young adults. It also provides a foundation for future evaluation research.

Attachment 1: Engaging Young Adults in a Sustainable Future: NPF Strategy Level Theory of Change



Attachment 2:
Program Design Principles from the Literature Review

NOTE: This attachment is formatted on the next four pages to be extractable and printable as a stand-alone document.

Engaging young adults in a sustainable future: Strategies for national parks and other special places



Managers of national parks and other public lands are recognizing that they must engage youth and communities in new ways in order to remain relevant and meet 21st century challenges. An overarching goal is to help young people develop the capacity and an enduring commitment to serve as leaders and stewards of natural and cultural resources in public lands and host communities. In the program development and evaluation literature, core program design elements are associated with youth outcomes that can pave the way toward this goal. This overview synthesizes the current state of knowledge about six of these design components, drawing from research in youth engagement, service-learning, and other fields.

Involve youth in real world challenges

This strategy is most effective when young people identify and explore issues that affect their lives, environments, and communities, and when they visualize and help enact possible solutions.^{9, 21, 35, 37} Research shows that this helps young people become motivated learners,⁴ build a sense of connection to those places,^{13, 16} and learn to think systemically and tackle problems.^{15, 17, 18, 40} They are also more likely to behave responsibly toward the environment¹ and become leaders of change.^{6, 24} For instance, the Earth Force program engages adolescents in investigating and taking action on local environmental issues that matter to them. Multi-year evaluations^(e.g., 29) point to improvements in participants' attitudes about environmental stewardship and their abilities and inclinations to collaborate with adults to tackle related problems. The studies also reveal gains in skills used to effect change in environmental practices and policies.

SAMPLE STRATEGIES:

- ◆ Partner with college faculty or youth-serving organizations to engage young adults in identifying, researching, and acting on sustainability-related issues on public lands and in communities.
- ◆ Bring youth and mentors from the private sector together to launch sustainability-related business ventures (e.g., monitoring services).

Ensure a diversity of participants and perspectives

Effective programs engage a cross-section of young people, often reaching into underserved communities. They also guide participants to identify, empathize with, and learn from diverse perspectives; use different lenses for examining local issues; and develop interpersonal skills.^{1, 10, 28} In one example — a quasi-experimental national study of 1,500 college students involved in community-based service-learning — engagement with diverse populations and their needs advanced students' abilities to look at issues in new ways and opened their minds to a range of perspectives.¹⁸

SAMPLE STRATEGIES:

- ◆ Use a service-learning or community-based research approach in youth programs.
- ◆ Employ a broad lens on sustainability that helps youth consider environmental justice concepts and their local application.
- ◆ Increase participation of minority and underserved young people by building relationships with youth-serving community organizations, having a park presence in communities, involving community groups and families as participants and advisors, and employing a more representative workforce.^{6, 27}





both parties are respected for their unique contributions¹¹ and when adults serve as models, mentors, and guides rather than authority figures.¹ An evaluation of Green Street, a Canadian program that engages youth in action-oriented environmental sustainability, found that such relationships were key to motivating, inspiring, and otherwise preparing participants to work toward a sustainable future.³

Invite and value youth input and perspectives

This means giving young people age-appropriate input in areas such as project initiation or selection, planning, decision making, and evaluation.^{9, 12, 20, 22, 30, 34} Studies indicate that when young people have opportunities to exercise their voices, they develop leadership and civic knowledge and skills, are better able to articulate opinions, and see themselves as change agents.^{9, 12, 30} For example, a study of 200 high school students engaged in service-learning projects in 10 Indiana schools found that as the level of student voice increased, so did feelings of efficacy and competence.³² Encouraging youth participation also enriches organizations. A key study showed that nonprofit organizations that involved youth in many spheres became more embedded in their communities, connected and responsive to youth, and appealing to funders.⁴³

SAMPLE STRATEGIES:

- ◆ Structure programs to enable youth to take on increased responsibilities for identifying and researching sustainability issues, considering possible solutions, and communicating with peers and the community.
- ◆ Involve youth in project advisory groups.
- ◆ Help staff and partners understand and buy into the concept and value of youth voice.^{20, 31}

SAMPLE STRATEGIES:

- ◆ Work with community collaborators over time to build a shared project vision and goals; identify interdependent roles; clarify responsibilities; and develop systems for communicating, making decisions, and evaluating the effort.^{5, 26, 39}
- ◆ Invite community youth specialists to help park education staff apply principles of youth development and participation to program design.
- ◆ Have adults with expertise in civic participation help participants deepen their analysis of sustainability issues²⁴ and examine and practice action strategies.

Cultivate partnerships with and among community organizations, citizens, and youth

Organizational partnerships that are long term, equitable, and mutually beneficial have been strongly linked to project quality and sustainability.^{2, 5, 25} Youth-adult partnerships have been found to enhance young people's civic knowledge, project engagement, community attachment,¹⁰ leadership skills, and self-esteem.¹¹ These are most effective when



Routinely engage youth in critical reflection

This involves using a range of activities to help participants examine, evaluate, and make connections among their experiences, assumptions, behaviors, and emerging understanding. When young adults develop the capacity and habit of critical reflection, they are better able to think like scientists, act like citizens of a democracy, and serve as leaders. They also see themselves and the issues they explore in a broader community and global context.^{1, 8, 19, 36, 38} In service- and community-based learning programs, this strategy has been correlated with positive outcomes in civic knowledge, skills, and engagement.¹⁰ For example, the study

of college students referenced on page 1, column 2 revealed that continuous reflection helped the young adults deepen their understanding of issues, apply their learning to real life situations, and improve their problem solving skills. It was also correlated with openness to new ideas and the ability to see issues in new ways.¹⁸

SAMPLE STRATEGIES:

- ◆ Ensure that staff and partners working with youth understand key principles and strategies for fostering high quality critical thinking and reflection.
 - ◆ Develop reflection activities that can help youth reach specific desired outcomes.
 - ◆ Example: Invite participants to use evidence they gather to develop and publically communicate an opinion on a sustainability-related issue.
-

Seek longer term projects and involvement

The duration and intensity of contact with environmental places and programs affects outcomes and is a key factor in the choice to become environmental professionals.^{14, 41, 42} Longer term projects, especially those with follow-up support, have been shown to have greater impact on young people's civic engagement, social responsibility,

and belief in their ability to make a difference.^{1, 7} For instance, one rigorous study of college students in a community-based service-learning program concluded that most of the positive change in attitudes about civic responsibility occurred at the end of two years of intensive engagement.³³

SAMPLE STRATEGIES:

- ◆ Design programs that give participants a selection or progression of developmentally appropriate opportunities to participate.
 - ◆ Collaborate with higher education institutions, youth-serving organizations, potential employers, or other entities to create "stepping" stones that enable sustained involvement.
 - ◆ Have park science staff collaborate with college faculty to design and implement a multiyear course on sustainability research and innovation.
-

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Header, page 1, Tim Willson; Circular image, page 1 and photo in upper left, page 2, Boston Youth Environmental Network; all others courtesy National Park Service Conservation Study Institute.

Attachment 3: Guiding Principles for Engaging Young Adults in a Sustainable Future

Developed at the Program Design Charette

In December of 2009, the National Park Foundation convened a group of 18 staff, evaluators, and experts to inform its strategy for supporting young adults age 18 to 25 in working on environmental sustainability with parks. Charette participants explored the context surrounding this program design initiative, looked broadly at existing knowledge and data, and used the expertise gathered in the room to filter and focus the range of strategic options facing NPF. By the end of the six-hour conversation, the group converged with a fairly clear consensus on a set of key guiding principles for NPF to consider as they continue exploring potential next steps. They are:

- **Empower young adults as agents of change.** *Involve them in program design, proposal writing, decisions, publicity, and evaluation, as appropriate to the model. Pay them. Give them responsibility to serve as ambassadors.*
- **Be age and stage appropriate.** *Serve those who can benefit most. Integrate career and/or job focus.*
- **Exhibit innovative approaches.** *Not “business as usual.”*
- **Focus on real issues and meaningful work.** *Be responsive to local community needs and circumstances.*
- **Help build capacity for ongoing change.** *Both young adults and their NPS staff counterparts need support.*
- **Attach to nationally relevant issues.** *Examples include obesity, “unplugged and offline” movements.*
- **Clarify strategic fit.** *Connect the project to the spectrum, tiers, or succession of NPS/NPF programming.*
- **Leverage young adults’ spheres of influence.** *Tap into and develop family, peers, and community networks.*
- **Be scalable at some level.** *Show potential for sharing, replicating, institutionalizing, expanding reach.*
- **Articulate a thoughtful, principle-based recruitment mechanism.** *Getting the right participants is crucial.*
- **Cultivate outcome-related partnerships.** *Engage the right stakeholders from the beginning; focus existing youth organizations and the private sector on parks.*
- **Ensure expertise in youth development.** *Park staff and/or partner organizations need to be able to reach young adults and help them find meaning on their own terms.*
- **Provide authentic places for transformative experiences.**
- **Plan for financial sustainability.**
- **Identify succession capability.** *Use evaluation for ongoing improvement. Identify participant next steps.*
- **Use mentors when deep individual engagement is required.**
- **Feature diversity representative of the area (or nation) being served.**
- **Offer incentives for involvement.**
- **Include interdisciplinary participation across park departments.** *This encourages resiliency rather than dependence on individual champions.*
- **Be research-based.** *Reflect principles from literature on best practices.*

Attachment 4: Overview of Interview and Focus Group Analyses

A series of qualitative interviews and focus group sessions were conducted as part of this study to inform the design of a new program for the National Park Foundation that would engage college age students in topics related to environmental sustainability.

What were we trying to learn?

These types of questions guided the interviews and focus group sessions:

- How have other organizations engaged this age group in sustainability-related initiatives?
- Which key ingredients, design elements, and “best practices” lead to success and long-term sustainability of such programs?
- Which park-related sustainability needs can engage young people?
- What barriers exist to engaging college-age youth in sustainability-related efforts in parks?
- Which types of groups and structures can help NPF deliver this type of new program?
- Who else can help NPF design and develop this program concept?

Methods

During the spring of 2009, evaluation staff worked with NPF and conducted a preliminary literature review to identify a purposive sample of interviewees. Fourteen people responded to an NPF invitation and were interviewed in round I. Interviewers used a discussion guide to inform 30- to 60-minute conversations (see Appendix B). After preliminary analysis of the data, a second round of interviews included five additional respondents. Evaluators recorded interviews, took field notes, and generated detailed field notes. During the fall of 2008, evaluation staff conducted and transcribed two focus groups, one with four youth from the Alternative Transportation Interpreters (ATI) program, and one with seven ATI supervisors from host parks (see Appendix C for focus group protocols). Thus, the data and analysis represent a total of thirty respondents. Page 25 features a list of interviewees.

Note: Per request of NPF staff, interviewees were selected based on their association with innovative, inquiry-based programs.

NPF SYP Key Themes from Data

Most of the insight on program design offered by the people we talked to can be boiled down to four overarching principles. The Foundation should keep these in mind as it builds its program to fund youth working on sustainability issues in parks:

1. **ENSURE LOCAL FLAVOR** – Support and build capacity for programs adapted to location-specific needs and opportunities and strengthened by strategic partnerships between parks and local communities.
2. **TARGET UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS** – Look beyond college-enrolled youth. Reach out to collaborate with local partners, including youth-serving organizations, that understand and can help overcome barriers to participation. Be specific about age range, demographics, and need level (i.e., high ability v. high need) of intended participants. In sum, meet them where they are at.
3. **BE ENTREPRENEURIAL** – Provide real, needed services to parks, communities, or both.
4. **VALUE YOUTH AS LEADERS** – Engage youth not just as participants, but as program designers, future and current business/community/park leaders and employees, educators, and primary communication pathways to social networks. Embed best practice principles of youth development and learning.

Attachment 5. Synthesis of Program Design Principles

Key Emergent Themes	Program design principles (see attachment 2)	Charette results (see attachment 3)	Interview and focus group data (see attachment 4)
Real Authentic Challenges	Involve young adults in real world challenges	Focus on real issues and meaningful work. Be responsive to local community needs and circumstances. Provide authentic places for transformative experiences. Attach to nationally relevant issues. Examples include obesity, “unplugged and offline” movements.	Be Entrepreneurial – Provide real, needed services to parks, communities, or both.
Diverse Perspectives	Ensure a diversity of participants and perspectives	Articulate a thoughtful, principle-based recruitment mechanism. Getting the right participants is crucial. Feature diversity representative of the area (or nation) being served. Offer incentives for involvement.	Target Underserved Populations – Look beyond college-enrolled youth. Reach out to collaborate with local partners, including youth-serving organizations that understand and can help overcome barriers to participation. Be specific about age range, demographics, and need level (i.e., high ability v. high need) of intended participants.
Empower Youth	Invite and value participant perspectives, opinions, and decision making	Empower young adults as agents of change. Involve them in program design, proposal writing, decisions, publicity, and evaluation, as appropriate to the model. Pay them. Give them responsibility to serve as ambassadors.	Value Youth as Leaders – Engage youth not just as participants, but as program designers, future and current business/community/park leaders and employees, educators, and primary communication pathways to social networks. Embed best practice principles of youth development and learning.
Develop Succession of Experience	Seek longer term projects and a development a progression of involvement	Be age and stage appropriate. Serve those who can benefit most. Integrate career and/or job focus. Clarify strategic fit. Connect the project to the spectrum, tiers, or succession of NPS/NPF programming. Identify succession capability. [Use evaluation for ongoing improvement.] Identify participant next steps	
Reflection	Routinely engage participants in critical reflection		
Strategic Partnerships	Cultivate reciprocal partnerships with and among community organizations, citizens, the private sector, and young adults	Cultivate outcome-related partnerships. Engage the right stakeholders from the beginning; focus existing youth organizations and the private sector on parks.	Ensure Local Flavor – Support and build capacity for programs adapted to location-specific needs and opportunities and strengthened by strategic partnerships between parks and local communities. Target underserved populations – Reach out to collaborate with local partners, including youth-serving organizations that understand and can help overcome barriers to participation.
Capacity and Program Sustainability		Build young adult and NPS staff capacity. Ensure expertise in youth development. Use mentors for deep individual engagement. Reflect principles from literature on best practices. Identify succession capability. Use evaluation for ongoing improvement. Include interdisciplinary participation across park divisions. Plan for financial sustainability. Be scalable by sharing, replicating, institutionalizing.	Value Youth as Leaders – Engage youth not just as participants, but as program designers, future and current business/community/park leaders and employees, educators, and primary communication pathways to social networks. Embed best practice principles of youth development and learning.

Attachment 6: Engaging Young Adults in a Sustainable Future: *Program Design Level Theory of Change*

Program Design Principles

Parks, partners and communities. . .

- Involve young adults in real world challenges
- Invite and value participant perspectives, opinions, and decision making
- Cultivate reciprocal partnerships with and among community organizations, citizens, the private sector, and young adults

- Ensure a diversity of participants and perspectives
- Routinely engage participants in critical reflection
- Seek longer term projects and a developmental progression of involvement
- Build participant and staff capacity in youth development, use of action strategies, public communication, and more

Outcomes

Young Adults (age 18-25)

- Increase confidence and a sense of efficacy & empowerment
- Become leaders and contributors in finding solutions to environmental challenges in parks and host communities
- Adopt an ethic of civic engagement and service
- Build thriving social connections with peers
- Become mentors for younger youth
- Spread environmental sustainability and justice ideas through youth and community networks
- Co-create intergenerational mentoring relationships
- Learn and apply career, technical, leadership, and problem solving skills
- Find and create employment opportunities
- Begin developing sustainable lifestyles and habits

Parks/Partners/Communities

- Deliver on shared mission and goals related to creating sustainable communities and building a sustainable future
- Build capacity to support young people's civic engagement and career options
- Prepare passionate future leaders
- Realize positive culture shifts and innovation as a result of engaging young adult voices
- Enhance youth development across a full spectrum of ages and stages
- Leverage funds via partnerships
- Benefit from the accomplishment of tangible sustainability work, often in a cost efficient manner

Communities/Regions/Society

- Become more vital due to civically engaged young adults with the tools and desire to work toward innovative solutions to local and regional issues
- Address local concerns through partnerships that are responsive to unique contexts and circumstances
- Benefit from the accomplishment of tangible sustainability work, often in a cost efficient manner
- Derive future benefit from a growing citizenry and workforce of caring skilled leaders and stewards

Appendices

Appendix A: Detailed Findings from Interview and Focus Group Analyses

Decision Framework

The themes in the interview and focus group data (Attachment 4) so far do not point to one obvious “best solution” for how the National Park Foundation should build its program to fund youth working on sustainability issues in parks. However, the data can be analyzed and organized to reveal five major dimensions of decision making. The menu options overlap and are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Numbers in parentheses refer to sample program notes that begin on page 18.

Decision dimension 1: Audience type and reach	
<i>Menu of potential options →</i>	<i>Implications, examples, notes</i>
a) Target students enrolled in college.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (3c, 6c)
b) Target underserved, non college (typically urban) youth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1a, 1e, 1f, 2b, 3e, 4f, 5a) • Note: Key strategies include engaging families, communities, youth-serving organizations, and ethnically/racially diverse mentors and role models. • Decide on high ability vs. high need audience. (5d)
c) Reach many for a shorter duration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (2a, 6b, 6c)
d) Reach fewer for a longer term.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a continuum of support for leadership, civic engagement, service learning, career development, or a combination. (1a, 2b, 3c, 4c, 4f)
Decision dimension 2: Program scope, context, focus (park level)	
<i>Menu of potential options →</i>	<i>Implications, examples, notes</i>
a) Operate within park boundaries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use service or research projects to address park-specific sustainability issues and goals. (2a, 3d, 6c, 6e)
b) Actively reach into host communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish NPS as a community leader/catalyst for sustainability. • Develop long-term strategic partnerships; local partners collaborate with parks to design, fund, implement, and evaluate custom programs. (1a, 1b, 1f, 2b, 3c) • Address community needs (e.g., energy economics, jobs, health, environmental issues, education) in the service of sustainability goals. (1a, 1b, 1c, 1e, 2e, 3a, 3b) • NPF builds capacity via networking structures, training, collaborative evaluation, and so on.
c) Build in explicit leadership or career development component.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a culminating week of outreach and career development. • Build mentoring/youth-adult partnerships with local businesses, agencies, or higher ed institutions. (1e, 2e, 3a, 3b, 4b,) • Create a progression of opportunities that pave the way for park careers. (3c, 4e, 4f) • Expose participants to full range of park admin and operations.
d) Focus on innovative sustainability-related research and action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support youth-designed investigations that address park-community-related sustainability issues. (1a, 1c, 1e, 1f, 2e, 3c, 4a, 4e) • Train or otherwise support staff and partners in using service-learning or similar investigative learning strategies. • Set up a sustainability “scholars” program. (4a, 4e)

e) Focus on introductory park experiences and sustainability education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcome barriers to participation by engaging underserved youth along with family and community members in shared experiences. (5a, 5c) • Train youth or park or community volunteers to lead these ventures. (5b, 5c)
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Decision dimension 3: Role and extent of partners

<i>Menu of potential options →</i>	<i>Implications, examples, notes</i>
a) Local partners and parks collaborate on program funding, design, implementation, and evaluation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lays the groundwork for programs that are sustainable and relevant to community needs, values, and sustainability-related issues.
b) National and local partners help embed “best practice” principles of youth development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner example: US Partnership for Sustainability Education (college-related “best practices”) • Partner example: Local youth-serving organizations and funders, especially those that have long-term relationships with and the capacity to serve diverse populations
c) Strategic national partners help leverage funding and support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example: Outdoor Industry Association Foundation (6d)
d) Youth serve as key partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage youth as leaders, program designers, mentors, researchers, and more. (1a, 1c, 1f, 2b, 2e, 3c, 4b, 5c) • Create national and local youth advisory boards. (Use this as a criterion for grants.) • Invite youth to use new media and electronic technologies to tell their stories to peers, park visitors, communities, and policymakers. (1a, 1f) • Train park staff in youth development and leadership +/- work with appropriate partner organizations.

Decision dimension 4: NPF role (program design, implementation)

<i>Menu of potential options →</i>	<i>Implications, examples, notes</i>
a) Serve as lead designer and driver of new program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data reveals cautions about “one-size-fits-all” programs.
b) Provide funds to support/enhance existing program(s).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples: 1) VIP component that meets needs of young people, 2) new implementation phase of NPS Climate Friendly Parks or Green Energy University Partnerships programs (3d, 6g)
c) Fund and build capacity for local initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This increases the likelihood of relevance, strategic partnerships, and institutionalization. • Create grant criteria, networking opportunities, and training support to shape best-practice local programs. • Require cost-sharing (via partnerships). (6g) • Fund park/community liaison positions. (1b) • Support collaborative program evaluation.
d) Start with local pilot projects or feasibility studies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implication: It’s an opportunity to test and learn from locally-adapted ideas, evaluate them, scale up, replicate components, and contribute to a body of knowledge about best practices.
e) Roll out “complete” program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This depends on selected strategies, program type(s).

Decision dimension 5: **Approaches to *program* sustainability**

<i>Menu of potential options</i> →	<i>Implications, examples, notes</i>
a) Dovetail with large-scale national legislation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund non-federal matching requirements for Public Lands Service Corps legislation and/or American Reinvestment and Recovery Act projects that meet sustainability criteria. (2a)
b) Use “double bottom line” model (as with service corps).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program goals accomplished through revenue generating sustainability-related services provided to paying customers.
c) Build capacity for sustainable, long-term, host community programs by developing reciprocal partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a shared vision and collaborate on program funding, design, implementation, and evaluation. • Require cost-sharing. • Create program-to-program networking opportunities.
d) Train youth together with staff from parks and partner organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase likelihood of shared understanding of goals and expectations.

Barriers to Engaging Young Adults in National Parks/Sustainability-Related Projects

One of the key research questions asked, *What barriers exist to engaging college-age youth in sustainability-related efforts in parks?* This chart illuminates barriers and potential solutions suggested by the data.

Logistical and economic	
<i>Barriers</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
Geography/transportation limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in presence in urban centers. (Dialog to find programs and policies that will benefit and be valued by communities.) • Offer micro grants to fund transportation to sites. • Pair youth with transportation with those who need it.
Employment needs and other economic factors Federal hiring limitations (especially for short-term projects)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make contract agreements with SCA (via STEP). • Pay young people via federal employment funds, private sector partnerships, and fee-for-service programs. • Build career and leadership skills for jobs in new green economy. • Engage youth with mentors in sustainability-related entrepreneurial efforts. • Offer a multicultural fellowship for disadvantaged youth to participate in service, leadership, and job skills development. • Manage system for offering college credit for internal park service trainings. Credentialed park people become instructors of record.
Lack of information, knowledge about programs Poorly targeted engagement and recruitment strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know your audiences. • Form reciprocal partnerships with community organizations that understand local cultural norms and youth development. Plan a deliberate outreach strategy. • Engage young people as advisors, focus group participants, and so on. • Involve young people in using social networks and technology to conduct “market research,” spread the word, and recruit participants. • Support youth in sharing their stories and program experiences with local peer groups. • Work with White House Office of New Media. • Collaborate with new “ethnic media” (www.newamericamedia.org), Sandy Close, ED. • Bring high school guidance counselors together for overview of park service vision, programs, careers.
Cultural	
<i>Barriers</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
Cultural norms, history, and socialization Family perceptions of and messages about parks, outdoor experiences, volunteer labor, and so on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate long-term commitment to engaging and supporting young people and community issues. • Have a presence in community (e.g., garden project, interpretive site, park staff in schools). • Support youth in sharing their stories and program experiences with the community. • Engage caring adults and mentors.
Limited diversity of staff and interpretive stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with community advisors and organizations on program planning and implementation. • Create a representative work force that reflects community makeup and values.

Other	
<i>Barriers</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
Perception of parks as irrelevant to youth and community interests and needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop grant criteria that require young people to be involved in program design, implementation, and evaluation. • Partner with local organizations that have long-term relationships with youth. • Invite youth to serve on planning or advisory teams or boards. • Create opportunities for meaningful investigations of real issues. Support youth action. • Engage youth as co-planners, leaders, problem solvers, decision makers, and communicators. • Focus on real community needs in the service of sustainability. (These might relate to employment, energy costs, or environmentally related health issues.) • Create community liaison positions. • Give program participants tools and opportunities to highlight their park experiences and related community connections by interacting in person and via media with peers and other citizens. • Train park staff in youth development and leadership. • Build long-term relationships with youth by designing a variety of developmentally appropriate platforms for engagement. • Offer multiple park-based outings and then help youth replicate and facilitate these for others. • Hook youth and engage them by mixing in enjoyable social, recreational, and adventure components.
Fear of wilderness experience; limited childhood exposure; lack of “appropriate” gear or assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a welcoming environment and introductory programs. • Engage young adults, their families, and community members in shared park experiences. • Encourage and support youth to take on increased responsibility for leading these ventures.

Expanded Notes on Program Examples and Ideas

The data analyzed so far do not yield one or a couple obvious, fully formed, “silver bullet,” exemplars that are readily replicable. Rather, there are many interesting and successful projects that are driven by an overlapping mix of approaches, some of which are fairly well exemplified in existing programs, and some of which represent idiosyncratic professional expertise and insight gained through years of study and practice. That said, the following section describes many of the program examples and ideas that emerged from the data and are referenced in the Decision Framework.

1. Sustainable Parks and Communities

a. Program: *Inspiring Young Emerging Leaders (IYEL) program at the Chrissy Field Center, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy* – Youth are paid to participate year round, but they must also complete community service. They learn about all aspects of parks and work in teams on self-designed projects that connect communities to the park. Two coordinators oversee the group, but youth have a strong voice in all aspects of the program including recruitment and evaluation. Veterans mentor newer participants, creating a program that supports youth through several developmental stages. – Christy Rocca

b. Idea: *Community/park liaisons* – Fund community/park liaison positions to facilitate youth initiatives (or jointly fund with community agencies). Petroglyphs National Monument had a Chicana person in that role. – Donald Rodriguez, Nina Roberts

c. Idea: *Engage youth in sustainability-related service-learning in parks* – Youth, educators, park staff, and community partners engage in deliberative dialog about local parks and communities. As they do so, they should identify sustainability-related issues. Then they consider causes and effects, explore the ins and outs of different solutions, gather data, and evaluate where they can have the greatest impact. Entrepreneurial or stewardship opportunities might emerge. They create an action plan, implement it, and evaluate its results. By doing so, they develop critical thinking skills; deeper understanding; and a sense of connection, efficacy, and commitment to service. – Jean Berthiaume (For a nice college-level model, See 3c, below.)

d. Idea: *Build organizational capacity via networking and learning opportunities*. Establish a network of parks interested in youth development and leadership. Offer training and networking opportunities. Bring multiple voices, including park leaders, staff, and young people into the conversation. Plan and conduct collaborative evaluations.

e. Program: *Earthforce* – This national nonprofit actively engages young people in addressing issues that matter to them and working to affect the issues through policy advocacy or community education. It trains educators and facilitators in schools and community settings to involve youth in using a six-step problem-solving process. Ten years of evaluation results reveal that the model effectively prompts young people to use their creativity and passions to play a meaningful role in environmental decision making, and it enhances skills related to problem-solving and civic action. It also increased their positive attitudes about environmental stewardship and inclinations to collaborate with adults to tackle environmental problems.

f. Program – *Boston’s Environmental Ambassadors to the National Park Service (B.E.A.N.)*. This is a long-term after school program of the Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area. It enables relationships to develop between B.E.A.N. interns and park personnel and the NPS, which helps sustain the program over time. The program uses paid interns to help develop ideas and concepts, create inclusive interpretation and recreational activities, and develop and implement recruitment plans to reach diverse local audiences.

Through activities such as “career exploration” days, B.E.A.N. also educates interns about potential jobs in the NPS. The presence of B.E.A.N. interns in the park and at other community events also demonstrates to communities and youth of color the NPS’s commitment to diversity. To help ensure program sustainability, staff members develop personal relationships with teachers, schools, and related service programs, and the program relies on external funding sources and a partnership with the Island Alliance.

2. Service Corps (and related)

a. Idea: *Matching Funds* – NPF serves as a source of matching funds required for park-based youth service projects that meet sustainability criteria, e.g., existing NPS public land corps, Recovery Act projects, proposed Public Lands Service Corps. Note: HR1612, Public Lands Service Corps, slated for \$32 Million, could be in place in 2009, and could be the “biggest thing since Roosevelt’s CCC” – Chris Jarvi, George McDonald, Harry Bruell. Model: National Forest Foundation Matching Awards Program (MAP) provides 1:1 matching grants to organizations implementing action-oriented, on-the-ground stewardship and citizen-based science projects that benefit America's National Forests and Grasslands. By matching NFF federal funds to non-federal dollars raised by award recipients, MAP effectively doubles the resources available to nonprofit partners for implementing these projects.

b. Program: *Internship Program for City Youth (Nature Conservancy)* – Teams of underserved youth and mentors (educators with youth development training or experience) are hired to live near and address a range of tasks and challenges on nature preserves. TNC provides ongoing support and networking opportunities to alumni groups. This feeds into a college program that employs youth at TNC in a range of disciplines including communications and marketing. “You need a continuum of support through strategic partnerships.” – Brigitte Griswold

c. Idea: *Clean Energy Corps* – Innovations in Civic Participation: (ICP) is working with a coalition of partners to advance the concept of a Clean Energy Corps (CEC) and expand “green” jobs and green service opportunities. A national Clean Energy Corps would mobilize millions of Americans to meet the dual challenges of global climate change and poverty reduction by:

- * Helping the United States transition to a clean energy economy
- * Providing low-income youth with pathways out of poverty through skills training and service
- * Offering citizens of all ages and backgrounds a means to take concrete action on climate change
- * Uniting the country in a rapid, massive volunteer mobilization to reduce global warming

As part of this initiative, ICP will conduct research on policies and programs around the world that are using youth service as a strategy to address global climate change. See the [CEC website](#) and the Clean Energy Corps [White Paper](#).

d. Note re: *New Legislation* – In April 2009, the Inslee-Sarbanes Clean Energy Service Corps was signed into law by Obama. The Clean Energy Service Corps will give training and skills in the clean energy industry to disadvantaged young Americans while improving the efficiency of low-income housing and other public facilities. The CESC Act will set up training and education programs through grants to nonprofit organizations, universities, and state and local governments that can operate clean energy projects in public spaces, create green housing for elderly and low-income people, and weatherize and restore historic structures on public lands, among other things. The CESC program will be formed within the Corporation for National and Community Service.

e. Program: *EarthCorps, Seattle, WA* – As an AmeriCorps affiliate, EarthCorps provides one-year intensive programs for young adults (age 18 to 25) to learn best practices in conservation techniques and develop skills in leading volunteers. It consists of volunteer-based and contracted restoration projects on public lands in the Puget Sound and Cascade mountains. EarthCorps alumni volunteer on

environmental restoration projects around the world. EarthCorps has begun to bring together a global community of young environmental leaders and engaged citizens working to build strong local communities that support healthy habitats. Its efforts unite best practices in environmental restoration with a community-based approach to service, education and action.

3. Mentored Research and Entrepreneurship

a. Idea: *Sustainability Entrepreneurs* – Young people work with private sector (or university) mentors to provide sustainability-related services. They develop dispositions and vocational skills to help parks and communities protect resources. One model is based on a Bush-era White House Council on the Environment initiative and its federal interagency sustainability network. The goal was to reach out across federal agencies with physical sites and connect them to schools in their regions and to the service-learning community. In most cases, young people conducted audits of natural sites, and buildings. They worked toward action plans but didn't get to the implementation phase due to challenges of working with the White House. – Dan Roth.

b. Program: *Verde* – The mission of this nonprofit organization in Portland, Oregon is to improve the economic health of disadvantaged communities by creating environmental job training, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities, fostering the connection between economic vitality and environmental protection and restoration.

Verde's two social enterprises provide low-income people with safe and secure employment, good wages, benefits, and classroom and on-the-job training. Verde Landscape provides services to wetland restoration, streamside revegetation, storm water management, urban canopy/tree planting and affordable housing projects. Verde Nursery raises plant materials for those projects. Verde also informs low-income people about the connection between environmental protection and employment and about actions that protect the environment. It educates policymakers about how environmental policies can create good jobs for low-income people.

A third social enterprise is in the works in partnership with the Native American Youth and Family Center. Verde Energy will hire, train and employ low-income Latinos and Native Americans in energy efficiency and sell these products or services to support Verde's mission.

c. Program: *Park/University Learning Community (CA State University, Channel Islands)* – Local park supers collaborate with university researchers to design curriculum and implement sustainability-related student initiatives. During four years of participation, students shift from doing typical service work to taking on increased responsibility, in partnership with park staff, for designing and conducting compelling research and ecological restoration. Some students become trusted protégés and make career connections. Note: Partners can tap into the Cooperative Ecological Studies Unit (CESU) pipeline to get federal funds to universities to work in parks. NPF could offer cost-share grants to parks to work with higher ed institutions. – Donald Rodriguez.

d. Programs: *NPS Sustainable Operations and Climate Change Office* – Climate Friendly Parks and Green Energy University Partnerships programs basically provide ecological auditing services. "We have the tools and the programs, we just need the bodies" – Shawn Norton.

e. Program: *YouthBuild USA's Green Initiative* – YouthBuild is an exemplary national leadership and employment program for unemployed and out-of-school youth age 16 to 24. Its Green Initiative gives local projects technical assistance, training, and funding to address environmental sustainability and justice issues in ways that provide youth with employment and community service opportunities.

4. Sustainability Innovators/Scholars

a. Idea: *Sustainability Innovators/Scholars* – Bring in youth with strong sustainability-related interests and passions. Expose them to park functions and then hire them to tackle sustainability-related challenges and outreach. Interviewee: Rolf Diamant (and others)

b. Program: *SustainUS* – This is a nonprofit organization of young people advancing sustainable development and youth empowerment in the United States through education and advocacy at the policy-making and grassroots levels. They hope to build a future in which all people recognize the interdependence of social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Its *Agents of Change* program, which is led and run by young people from a variety of backgrounds, brings North American youth to international meetings to promote youth-friendly policies related to sustainable development and climate change. There is also a leadership development and group problem-solving component. “Youth are not just future leaders, they are the current leaders,” providing logistics and content support for green policy.” – Michael Gale

c. Program: *Pacific Leadership Institute, Youth Leadership Development Model* – The main idea is to take a multi-year, multi-age approach that guides youth successfully through a tiered progression of skill development that aligns with their learning and development stages. Once youth leaders progress through the first phase, their training from point of entry and introduction through hands-on leadership, they can then proceed at different times through different levels. The training begins to take on a dynamic, multidimensional format. Youth leaders may be in different places of development, and return to earlier stages as they extend their comfort zone and learn new skills. – Nina Roberts

d. Program: *4-H Great Lakes and Natural Resources Camp at Michigan State University Extension* – This is another program mentioned as a good example of this integrated, tiered, developmental approach. It is a statewide teen leadership and environmental stewardship program offering pre-college instruction in coastal ecology, fisheries management, limnology, wildlife, forestry, and wetlands. Experiential learning also takes place through nature resource-based recreation and research-oriented field trips. Evaluation results show increases in natural resources ecological knowledge, positive changes in peer associations that support participants' interest in nature, positive post-camp resource stewardship intentions, and impacts on critical reflection regarding fisheries and wildlife-related careers. – Michael Gale

e. Program: *Environment Canada's Science Horizons Program* is a collaborative effort with Canadian universities, the private sector and other nongovernment organizations. It offers promising young scientists and post-secondary graduates hands-on experience working on environmental projects under the mentorship and coaching of experienced scientists and program managers. An early program

evaluation using a self-reporting instrument revealed that the program improved participants' chances of finding related work.

f. Program: *Chicago Zoological Society's Career Ladder*

The six rungs of the CZS's "career ladder" offer youth a progression of mentored experiences – from childhood through adulthood – with conservation-related investigations and projects. Opportunities for service corps work, scholarships, and internships have effectively engaged racially and economically diverse young people and paved the way for career opportunities in nature conservation.

5. Introductory Experiences for Underserved Communities

a. Idea: Involve underserved youth in organizing, programming, and engaging other community and family members in park visit days, events, camping, trips, and so on. The shared experience can overcome some fears and barriers and help bring the park values and mission back to communities. – Marcelo Bonta (and others, including Akiima Price)

b. Program: *Sierra Club Inner City Outings* – This community outreach program is run by trained volunteer members of the Sierra Club. They take urban youngsters into natural areas for recreational outings.

c. Program: *Outdoor Youth Connection, California State Parks* – California State Parks and the Pacific Leadership Institute run this program that engages high school youth involved in community-based organizations in first-time experiences in nature. After participating in outdoor activities, teambuilding, and leadership exercises, participants are charged with using new skills to plan and deliver two community-based projects: a service project and an outing for peers and community members. They can draw on support from regional coordinators and mini grants.

d. Idea: Bottom line is that you must meet underserved audiences on their terms, in their language, where they are at. In many cases, this means emphasizing the recreation, fun, and social components. If you choose to work with a high need population as opposed to high ability one, adding a specific life skills component makes sense. Realize and work with their cultural family legacies (e.g. as a result of having grandparents who worked in fields as slaves, some African American youth may not be socialized to want to work on, say, trail projects). – Akiima Price, Nina Roberts, and others

e. Program: *EnvironMentors* – This is an environment-based mentoring program aimed at interesting and preparing high school students in the District of Columbia for college programs and careers in science and environmental professions. Dedicated environmental professionals work as mentors to high school students to collaboratively develop experimental research projects on locally relevant environmental topics over the course of the school year. Students participate in college prep courses, paid internships, and other environmental enrichment activities as part of the program. Students who participate in the EnvironMentors Project achieve a 98% high school graduation rate, with 95% admitted to college. Systemwide, only 60% of DC public school students graduate.

6. Other Ideas and Program Models

- a.** Idea: *Guidance Counselor Events* – Bring together high school guidance counselors to help them develop a shared vision of the park service and related careers. – Donald Rodriguez
- b.** Idea: *Sustainability Contest* – Launch a national contest on national parks and sustainability. Students create papers, YouTube presentations, and so on. Select some winning ideas for implementation. – Debra Rowe
- c.** Idea: *Alternative Spring Break* – Create an Alternative Spring Break program designed and led by students. Focus on exposure to park operations, service, civic engagement, and sustainability-related projects and workshops. Sustain enthusiasm through networking structure. – Debra Rowe
(See existing [Spring Park Break](#) program for grad students organized by the George Wright Society.)
- d.** Partner: *Outdoor Industry Association Foundation* – Sustainability and youth are hands down the two top priorities of the Outdoor Industry Association. They have lots of data on youth participation in outdoor activities, and are eager to build, extend, and share relationships with industry funders and sponsors (e.g. connecting outdoor manufacturers to parks). They have some creative ideas that might inform NPF thinking and positive publicity. Their I Will campaign, for instance, challenged members of the outdoor industry to take at least two kids outside in the next year. Secretary Salazar is using the campaign as a model, calling on every adult in America to take a child outdoors this summer as part of the White House's Summer of Service initiative. – Bryan Mahler
- e.** Idea: *Parks as Sites of Convergence* – Create opportunities for parks to be sites of convergence. They are actual sites with lots of biodiversity, beauty, and cultural symbolism. Use them as places to convene intergenerational learning experiences. What about getting 4-H and college students working in green jobs corps to meet in parks to do something new and collaborative? – Dan Roth
- f.** Idea: *Parks as Sponsors of Campus-Based Sustainable Living Festivals* – These can serve as engaging and educational events, while marketing parks and programs to young adult audiences. – Debra Rowe
- g.** Program: *More Kids in the Woods* – This program of the US Forest Service Foundation is an excellent example of the power of cost sharing. The requested funds for Forest Service More Kids in the Woods must be matched by other contributions, cash or in-kind, in a ratio of at least 1:1. The maximum amount available for a single project is \$50,000; the minimum is \$5,000.

List of interviewees

Focus Group: Four Alternative Transportation Interpreters program interns

Focus Group: Seven supervisors of Alternative Transportation Interpreters program interns

Jean Berthiaume, Harwood Union High School (VT), Social Studies Teacher; Service-learning Institute Staff

Marcelo Bonta, *Executive Director, Center for Diversity & the Environment*

Harry Bruell, *CEO & President Southwest Conservation Corps*

Douglas Cohen, *Youth Action Team contact, US Partnership for Education for Sustainable Development; Chair, Resource Council, National Youth Initiatives and Inspired Futures Campaign*

Rolf Diamant, *Superintendent, Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historic Park*

Michael Gale, *Youth Action Team, US Partnership; US Fish and Wildlife*

Brigitte Griswold, *Program Director, Youth Partnerships, Nature Conservancy Internship Program for City Youth*

Chris Jarvi, *Associate Director for Partnerships, Interpretation & Education, Volunteers and Education, NPS*

Bryan Mahler, *Senior Manager, Outdoor Industry Association Foundation*

George McDonald, *Manager, NPS Youth Programs*

Shawn Norton, *Environmental Leadership Coordinator, NPS*

Akiima Price, *Chief of Education and Programs, New York Restoration Project*

Matthew Ragan, *Upward Bound staff*

Nina Roberts, *Professor, San Francisco State University*

Christy Rocca, *Director, Crissy Field Center, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy*

Donald Rodriguez, *Associate Professor and Chair, Environmental Science and Resource Management Program, Cal State University, Channel Islands*

Dan Roth, *Youth Action Team contact, US Partnership for Education for Sustainable Development; Sustainability Coordinator, Cornell University*

Debra Rowe, *President, US Partnership for Education for Sustainable Development; Professor, Sustainable Energies and Behavioral Sciences, Oakland Community College; Senior Advisor, Second Nature*

Appendix B. Interview Guides (focus group and individual interviews)

Focus Group Guide, 9-5-08, Alternative Transportation Interpreters call

- *We are outside evaluators with the Conservation Study Institute, working with the NPF to help improve and sustain this program. This IS part of an evaluation of your program, and is definitely NOT an assessment of your performance.*
- *Main purpose today is to get your input on shaping the program goals and evaluation/measurement plans for next year.*
- *We will cover some similar ground as in your end reports. Know that we have (or will have) those in hand. Hopefully this conversational focus group format will allow us to get a richer feel for your thoughts and/or get deeper insights into some of the things you have already reported. This format also allows us to deviate from the questions if that feels right, and just follow the conversational thread where it leads. Since this conference call format may be difficult for everyone to say everything you want, please feel free to send us your thoughts by email (real time and/or within the next week) to Michael@PEERassociates.net and Daniel_Laven@nps.gov.*
- *Data from this call will be analyzed and used this fall to inform the plans for evaluating the program next year. We will create a program logic model which simply and clearly describes the activities and goals of the program. Based on that, we will create a data collection and analysis plan that makes sense in light of the on the ground realities.*
- *Your participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary. You can stop at any time (including now).*
- *Your responses are confidential in that names are never used. Quotes are used. Only evaluation staff will see raw data. The aim is to help you feel comfortable offering critical perspectives if you have them, because that is where some of the most useful learning comes from (like the way contrast between dark and light can add clarity to a photo or painting).*
- *Request permission to record, take notes, transcribe.*
- *Questions or concerns? (e.g. voluntary, confidential, purpose, use)*

- 1) *What do you see as the top one or two most important goals of the program? (Additional prompts: Who is most impacted by this program – short term and longer term? How well were the goals of the program communicated to you and/or through you to park visitors or staff?)*
- 2) *What is one example of a situation where you felt you had the greatest success in achieving the goals of the program? (Additional prompts: Was this a rare or common event? How often did similar situations occur? What are you most proud of regarding your work this summer?)*
- 3) *What do you see as the biggest “missed opportunity” or disconnect between the stated goals of the program and the way it was actually implemented on the ground? (Additional prompts: If you were in charge, what would you do differently? Which group do you think is best situated to improve the program by changing how they do or think about things: the Foundation, local park staff, or the interpreters? How so? What would be a really cool and important – but maybe unrealistically optimistic - thing this program could do in an ideal, best case scenario?)*
- 4) *What, if anything, happened as a result of your participation in the program that you did not intend or expect, and that might inform the program or evaluation design? (Additional prompts: What surprised you most about the program, the Foundation, or the park staff or visitors?)*
- 5) *Is there anything else you would like to share with us? (Additional prompts: Summary thoughts? Anything we missed? Parting shots?)*

**THANK
YOU!!!**

Focus Group Guide, 9-19-08, Alternative Transportation Interpreters program

- *We are outside evaluators with the Conservation Study Institute, working with the NPF to help improve and sustain this program. This IS part of an evaluation of your program, and is definitely NOT an assessment of anyone's individual performance.*
- *Main purpose today is to get your input on shaping the program goals and evaluation/measurement plans for next year.*
- *We have end reports from interpreters, and have talked to a couple of them in a focus group. Hopefully this conversational focus group format will allow us to get a richer feel for your thoughts and/or get deeper insights into some of the things may have been already reported. This format also allows us to deviate from the questions if that feels right, and just follow the conversational thread where it leads. Since this conference call format may be difficult for everyone to say everything you want, please feel free to send us your thoughts by email (real time and/or within the next week) to Michael@PEERassociates.net and Daniel_Laven@nps.gov.*
- *Data from this call will be analyzed and used this fall to inform the plans for evaluating the program next year. We will create a program logic model which simply and clearly describes the activities and goals of the program. Based on that, we will create a data collection and analysis plan that makes sense in light of the on the ground realities.*
- *Your participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary. You can stop at any time (including now).*
- *Your responses are confidential in that names are never used. Quotes are used. Only evaluation staff will see raw data. The aim is to help you feel comfortable offering critical perspectives if you have them, because that is where some of the most useful learning comes from (like the way contrast between dark and light can add clarity to a photo or painting).*
- *Request permission to record, take notes, transcribe.*
- *Questions or concerns? (e.g. voluntary, confidential, purpose, use)*

- 1) *What do you see as the top one or two most important goals of the program? (Additional prompts: Who is most impacted by this program – short term and longer term? How well were the goals of the program communicated to you and/or through you to interpreters or park visitors?)*
- 2) *What is one example of a situation where you felt the program had the greatest success in achieving its goals? (Additional prompts: Was this a rare or common event? How often did similar situations occur? What are you most proud of regarding the program's work this summer?)*
- 3) *What do you see as the biggest "missed opportunity" or disconnect between the stated goals of the program and the way it was actually implemented on the ground? (Additional prompts: If you were in charge of redesigning the program, what would you do differently? Which group do you think is best situated to improve the program by changing how they do or think about things: the Foundation, local park staff, or the interpreters? How so? What would be a really important – but maybe unrealistically optimistic - thing this program could achieve in an ideal, best case scenario? What percent of the interpreter's time do you think was spent working directly toward the goals of the program? What percent on tasks that were basically unrelated to the goals of the program?)*
- 4) *What, if anything, happened as a result of the program that you did not intend or expect, and that might inform the program or evaluation design? (Additional prompts: What surprised you most about the program, the Foundation, the interpreters, or the park staff or visitors?)*
- 5) *What would be the single most important characteristic for selecting the ideal interpreter for this program in your park? (Additional prompts: Any comments on or insights into the selection process?)*
- 6) *Is there anything else you would like to share with us? (Additional prompts: Summary thoughts? Anything we missed? Parting shots?)*

**THANK
YOU!!!**

NPF SYP Needs Assessment Interview Guide, Spring 09

- THANK YOU for your time!
- We are evaluators with Shelburne Farms and the NPS Conservation Study Institute, working with the NPF to identify the best way they can support college age youth working on sustainability projects in parks and related protected areas.
- The main purpose today is to tap your creativity and experience during this early design stage of the project.
- A secondary purpose is to identify other people or organizations we should talk to during this needs assessment.
- Brief background: With support from a major funder, NPF previously administered a program that placed college age youth in parks as interpretive rangers focusing on alternative transportation. That program is coming to an end in its current form, and the Foundation is exploring options for what's next. All options are on the table. NPF wants to continue to serve that age group, they suspect that looking at conservation and sustainability more broadly than just alternative transportation is a good idea, and they really care about program models that can eventually sustain themselves. But how?
- Data from several interviews like this will be analyzed and combined with a review of literature to set the stage for a design charette this summer to lay out the details of the programming that NPF will pursue in this arena.
- We are very interested in your candid and critical perspectives if you have them, because that is where some of the most useful learning comes from (like the way contrast between dark and light can add clarity to a photo or painting). To that end, if you want any or all of your comments to remain confidential, please don't hesitate to let us know. Only evaluation staff will see raw data. We often use quotes in our reports, and usually do not identify the speaker, ESPECIALLY if there is any risk of negative outfall.
- Of course, your participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary. You can stop at any time (including now).
- Request permission to record, take notes, transcribe.
- Questions or concerns? (e.g. voluntary, confidential, purpose, use)

- 1) **Please help me understand a little about the context in which you and your organization work. Specifically ...** (Additional prompts: What does sustainability mean for your park or organization? What are your programmatic goals with respect to sustainability? In what ways do you or your organization work with college age youth? What are your programmatic goals with respect to that audience? Have you ever worked with NPF before? If so, what was that like?)
- 2) **What are your favorite programs (in or outside parks, in or outside your organization) that serve college age youth and/or address environmental sustainability issues?** (Additional prompts: What do you like about them? Have you ever imagined a program along these lines that should exist but doesn't yet? If so, in an ideal world, what are the key features of this program-to-be? As you heard about the background of this NPF project, did anything immediately jump to your mind in terms of a potential program model or solution?)
- 3) **What needs do college age youth have that parks or other protected lands are particularly well-suited to meet?** (Additional prompts: What about ten or twenty years from now? What are some needs of this audience that are important but that parks should not even try to meet, for whatever reason? How might NPF help you meet your college age youth programming goals?)
- 4) **What environmental sustainability needs do parks/protected lands have that college age youth are particularly well-suited to help address?** (Additional prompts: Think in terms of needs across many parks. What about other park needs that are not about environmental sustainability? What does ANY program working in parks in the next couple years or decades need to pay attention to? How might NPF help you meet your sustainability goals?)
- 5) **What are the biggest barriers to engaging college age youth in environmental sustainability efforts in parks?** (Additional prompts: What's driving these barriers? Have you seen or imagined any creative or innovative approaches to dealing with these barriers?)
- 6) **In your experience, what program models have you seen that are best able to sustain themselves financially and institutionally?** (Additional prompts: What made them sustainable? What were their "best practices" or "active ingredients?")
- 7) **Who else should we talk to?** (Additional prompts: Maybe someone surprising, or outside the box? How, if at all, might you be interested in participating further in developing this program idea?)
- 8) **Is there anything else you would like to share with us?** (Additional prompts: Summary thoughts? Single most important thing we should think about? Anything we missed? Parting shots?)

THANKS!!

Appendix C. Notes from National Park Foundation Design Charette

on

“Engaging Young Adults in a Sustainable³ Future: Strategies for National Parks and Other Special Places”

Convened by the National Park Foundation in partnership with
the NPS Conservation Study Institute and Shelburne Farms

December 10, 2009

Washington, DC

Purpose

NPF convened this meeting to share, discuss, and build on recent evaluation findings and charette participant expertise in order to inform its strategy for supporting young adults age 18 to 25 in working on environmental sustainability with parks.

Participants

Guest experts and NPF staff: Eugenie Bostrom, Harry Bruell, Diane Chalfant, Chris Fanning (morning only), Matt Ferris, Carolyn Hill, Mark Kornmann, George McDonald, Ernesto Pepito, Patti Reilly, Don Rodriguez, Woody Smeck

Conservation Study Institute and Shelburne Farms project team: Nora Mitchell, Megan Camp, Michael Duffin, Eve Pranis, Daniel Laven

Summary

Charette participants explored the context surrounding this program design initiative, looked broadly at existing knowledge and data, and used the expertise gathered in the room to filter and focus the range of strategic options facing NPF. By the end of the six-hour conversation, the group converged with a fairly clear consensus on a set of key guiding principles for NPF to consider as it continues exploring potential next steps. These guiding principles could attract partners, funders, and/or grantees with promising and innovative program designs that embody the best practices identified through this evaluation.

Narrative Synthesis of Themes and Key Elements from the Conversation

Setting the Stage

NPF Rationale

Mark Kornmann’s compelling reason for convening the charette was to tap into ideas, experiences, and

³ *Note on terminology: Three dimensions of the term sustainability are relevant to this initiative. Program sustainability refers to the staying power of programs, which depends on design components such as the nature and extent of partnerships. Environmental (natural and cultural) and community sustainability reflect program content.*

unique perspectives that emerged as the group explored how to best fill an NPF programming niche for young adults age 18 to 25. The goal was not to design a program nor grapple with logistics. Mark made clear that innovation – not business as usual – is what he seeks. With that lens, he began 18 months ago to look at NPF grants and their impact. In an effort to better align with NPS, he and Diane continue the conversation. As a result, he’s clarified NPF’s top priorities: Engagement and relevance in the domains of youth, community, and conservation. Says Mark, “This is not about funding buses to bring kids to parks, but about what happens while they’re there. How can we make it relevant so they’ll want to come back? How do we engage underserved audiences to develop future stewards?”

Timeliness

Diane Chalfant cited a host of political and other forces that make this NPF initiative timely. For instance, Ken Salazar, DOI secretary, is excited about the potential of parks (“America’s backyards”) to employ youth, connect with communities, restore the environment, and reflect America’s demographics. He’s also created an Office of Youth in Natural Resources. At the park service level, the *Second Century* report, the *I&E Renaissance Action Plan*, and National Education Council discussions align with many of NPF’s strategic and program goals, such as cultivating informed and engaged citizens and stewards. Finally, NPS faces a large scale turnover of park service personnel in coming years. It may be an ideal time, in advance of training new staff, to introduce a new cross-cutting initiative that will entail some culture shifts.

Charette participant perspectives

In addition to a general interest in a cross-program exchange and participating in shaping an exciting new initiative, participants came to the table with a variety of lenses and interests. These included reaching urban underserved populations, seeing youth as engaged and empowered resources, discussing how a constellation of best practices make effective programs, designing programs that go deep and reach all park sectors, establishing a continuum of youth experiences, building capacity for nonprofit youth-serving organizations that offer vocational opportunities to disadvantaged groups, exploring how to best capture and share innovations, discussing the value of public/private partnerships, and convening communities of learning around innovation and practice.

NPF Strategic Role

Key questions for discussion: What is the highest leverage role for NPF to play in order to move this agenda forward? Consider available evaluation evidence, insights from today, and opportunities and operational realities of parks and NPF.

This section synthesizes comments organized under key themes from the discussion.

Supporting local experiences with a national platform

Charette participants agreed that NPF should use its unique position to express universal ideas and principles at a national level, but enable programs to carry out and customize them to meet location-specific needs and circumstances. This means connecting local work into a larger mosaic rather than implementing a top-down, one-size-fits-all plan.

Pilot projects at the local level make sense, among other reasons, because that is where youth engagement occurs. It means moving beyond park issues to engage youth in issues relevant to their families and communities. Identifying and cultivating the right community relationships will help facilitate this. In some cases, parks may bring in a diverse group of young adults from around the country, engage them in relevant experiences that connect them to something larger, and then send them back to share or employ new skills and understanding in service to their communities. (The Outdoor Foundation is planning a national event that achieves a similar goal.)

The group discussed the need for NPF to help make the principles, goals, and collective impacts of these programs visible nationally. This should include supporting development of various media products created by and/or featuring voices of young adult participants who tell their stories. By doing this and branding the program with language that embodies core principles, NPF communications can appeal to funders, raise local and national awareness of park relevance, and send an internal message about what's valued.

Enabling and building capacity

Charette participants concur that NPF is uniquely positioned to support parks (and nonprofit partners) to develop, evaluate, and sustain innovative, locally relevant programs based on best practice principles.

One means of doing this is by developing a grant and RFP process that serve an important educational role. Charette participants also recognized that NPF can play an important role in helping parks respond to areas where they're not as effective as they'd like to be. For instance, mentoring young adults and employing youth development principles are not necessarily strong suits for parks, yet they are key components of effective youth programs. NPF can help NPS and grantees fill this gap by funding park staff trainings or funding and laying the groundwork for partnerships with appropriate nonprofits or experts. For instance, Santa Monica Mountains partnered with Outward Bound, LA, People for Parks, and local park and recreation districts.

Sharing knowledge: Facilitating communities of practice

Participants underscored the importance of creating opportunities for learning communities among programs (and within NPS) for developing a resilient organization that enables all to grow. NPF is in a position to invest in infrastructure to support communities of interest that develop as park units opt into different program areas.

We touched on some structures for enabling this type of learning and innovation transfer. Past examples include the Mosaic Conference and bringing PARK teachers together to discuss successes and roadblocks. Other suggested venues were conferences and academies, blogs, web sites with access for youth program staff, web casts, cross-program visits, academic papers, youth-to-youth events, wiki communities, and working with and through professional development programs in NPS units.

Key Idea: As NPF enables learning communities and generates evaluation findings, a rich knowledge based will emerge. NPF and local programs need to own that knowledge and learning and use it to inform professional development and otherwise help programs develop and remain effective.

Sharing knowledge: Scaling up/replication

This discussion centered around the idea that NPF, NPS, and program staff need to be intentional about scaling up and replicating effective aspects of programs. Participating players need to understand what this process might look like for different components at different points in the life of a program. It is important to recognize that scalability doesn't necessarily imply replicating one model. Rather, by creating communities that exchange promising practices, NPF and program managers can explore what scalability looks like when promising practices are applied to unique local circumstances and transferred and adapted to other contexts.

Idea: Offer special replicator grants or tiered grants that offer more money for bringing other programs into the fold. This should also appeal to NPF funders.

Embedding evaluation

Charette participants concurred that evaluation needs to help drive this initiative. If NPF and NPS value outcomes such as engagement and empowerment, they need to help programs consider sources of evidence and develop indicators up front. NPF can also help identify common threads among programs and facilitate development of cross-program evaluation tools and processes. The initiative also offers a great opportunity for longitudinal evaluation.

Synergy: NPF initiatives, NPS operations, partners

NPF is ready to contribute to a culture shift in the park service that moves beyond "business as usual" and help parks overcome stumbling blocks to becoming more relevant and innovative. Charette participants pointed out that at the local level, this could entail using its resources and branding to help parks create an invitation and introduction to local communities, funders, and partners. The trend of increasing alignment between NPS operational and training needs and opportunities and NPF strategic approaches should continue.

Spectrum of participation

NPF has an opportunity to situate this initiative as part of a multi-pronged approach that dovetails with other NPS and partner programs to create a spectrum of program opportunities for youth. Diane calls these "stewardship" paths, envisioning multiple opportunities to participate from ages 5 to 25. NPF's initiatives for young adults might have tiers or a continuum of participation. Programs at the entry level could hook large numbers of participants. Along the continuum, program options would be more complex and long term and engage participants more deeply. NPF's charge: Consider the investment strategy for addressing a spectrum from breadth to depth, and identify a knowledge base and partners at each level so it can begin to link programs in strategic ways.

This new initiative is filling a programming niche for young adults age 18 to 25. Some questions emerged about whether, given the design principles and research on youth impact, this should focus on younger age ranges. Mark sees this as part of a continuum of programs in NPF and NPS, but feels a need to fill that age-range niche. When this program is successful, it might make sense to consider more explicitly connecting to the programs for younger ages. For now, the 18 to 25 age range is the biggest gap in the continuum.

Selling the concept to NPS

“If people don’t get it in the park service, it won’t happen,” said one charette participant. This initiative needs to be seen as more than just a program within NPS but as a cross-cutting effort in which youth are viewed as our greatest natural resources. That means being deliberate about involving a range of park divisions and disciplines, leveraging synergy within different sectors, and demonstrating how young adults can become a means to deliver on existing mission, tasks, and goals. As an example, park units may buy in to a work-based model because of its bottom line implications. But may invest more deeply once they see the other impacts. Films and other products in which youth discuss the impact of their experiences can play a key role, as can detailing impacts on different sectors and partners. Youth products can also give park units feedback on best practices.

Key Idea: NPF should send a signal about the value of youth voice and engagement, cross-sector partnerships, and community involvement by publicly celebrating and rewarding successful programs. It should also collaborate with park operations on mechanisms for sharing models and successes.

Wrap up idea: Consider developing a communication piece coming out of this charette that highlights these discussions and asking for other comments from NPF, NPS, and partner representatives.

Leveraging funding resources

NPF has the capacity to leverage national funding resources in the service of this youth initiative. Mark noted a few opportunities and tensions in this arena. He believes that by being proactive and focusing funders on NPF priorities, he has been able to engage them for the longer term. (Some untapped sources, such as foundation funds for civic engagement, would dovetail well with this project.) Because a majority of funders are individuals who don’t want to fund what the government is already funding, he underscored the need to pitch programs that are innovative or otherwise enhance efforts to yield bigger impacts and new models.

Another tension is that not all national funders focus locally. So NPF needs to consider how to share and translate local success to larger scales. A related need at the local level is engaging young people in telling their stories and otherwise making programs visible for existing and potential funders.

Program Design: Best Practices and Ideas

Key questions for discussion: Which practices show up most strongly in participants’ experiences? What are the program design implications that follow from your experiences and best practices?

This section synthesizes comments organized under key themes from the discussion.

Engagement, confidence, and efficacy: Rethinking indicators

Parks tend to be mission driven and task oriented, but it’s important to remember that key outcomes of youth engagement programs include increasing young adults’ engagement, confidence, and sense of efficacy. If NPF and NPS value these types of youth outcomes, rather than just numbers of trails created, for instance, programs need to be intentional about clarifying indicators up front. Some may be challenging. NPF, NPS, and park units should keep these things in mind: There may be some cross-program indicators and others unique to particular initiatives. Consider using multiple sources of

evidence, especially in programs of longer duration. Involve partners, other stakeholders, and evaluators, when appropriate. The kinds of changes dreamed about here will require parallel changes in the NPS culture, and probably training and support to help facilitate such changes.

Cultivate partnerships for program sustainability, traction, and resilience

Involving multiple partners can lead to program traction, resilience, and sustainability, especially when community-based nonprofit boards are involved. (This is also true at the NPF strategy level.) In one example (Cuyahoga Valley), when the budget got tight, the broad ownership felt by many stakeholders kept the park from pulling out. Youth programs, especially those that involve local partner organizations, create opportunities for parks to have more seamless edges as they integrate with communities. This all assumes that top brass in parks have a vested interest in communities.

Recruitment paths/partners

Programs must have a mechanism by which young adults can feed in, ideally through partner organizations or other park programs. Given that NPF is focusing on an age group that's underrepresented in NPS programs, it's important to try to identify partners with the wherewithal and capacity to help recruit and get the word out. The program design might also capitalize on partners in those networks (e.g., guidance counselors, university deans). We need to consider what the right networks are.

Engage youth in raising program visibility

Visible branding and products are an important tool for recruiting young adults and getting partners on board. This is most powerful – and potentially cost effective – if it engages young people in sharing experiences via media outreach and face-to-face contact. And it supports the best practice of reflection. “This type of memory sharing with peers could be viral.”

Capitalize on bridging to “after grant” paths; consider unlikely partners

We need to consider where this age group will be heading. They may not work with NPS, but might work in communities or industry. Is there a potential network of partners that share a goal of an empowered citizenry? What about industries that focus on the environment?

Idea: Perhaps NPF should convene regional meetings with such organizations and companies. What are their needs? What are they doing? Corporate funders like to see these types of questions built into the initial design.

Cultivate a culture that values and acts on youth perspectives

The group agreed that valuing youth perspectives is powerful, assuming that it's authentic and not just tokenism. It should also happen at the macro and micro levels. It means that youth input is valued, respected, and used. Ideally, it becomes part of the structure and culture of an organization and how it makes decisions. This benefits parks as well as participants. On participant noted: “It's huge to have young adults in planning and development meetings. Their points of view and perspectives contribute to an enriched discussion, makes all park staff better, and results in more inclusive, relevant, meaningful program design.” *Youth on Boards* has an effective national model. In other charette examples, youth approached funders or conferenced with political leaders on climate issues. Mark says that an advisory group for each of NPF's three focus areas will include or represent youth voices.

Grant idea: Fund external organizations doing relevant projects

Some organizations have programs that may not fit neatly into NPF/NPS boxes. For example, NPF could have a grant program that would support a largely Hispanic community college with a film documentation class around conservation. They make films, then show them in communities. A grant would enable them to fund the back end and NPF/NPS could set them on specific projects.

Grant idea: Parks collaborate with a higher education partner and local NGO or nonprofit

The grant would require a curriculum element, collaboration between an instructor and superintendent on learning outcomes, a service/community involvement, and an evaluation component. "Three years of funding may well get such a program institutionalized."

Idea: Branding to secure private sector funds

Consider a branding initiative such as "one percent for the future/planet." Invite private companies to donate one percent of profits. Each selects a park youth program to fund based on emphasis/interests.

Idea: Work-based models

These can contribute to program sustainability because they have double bottom line, supporting park or community projects and bringing in income. Young people are seen as resources and they see tangible results that contribute to something bigger than themselves. This also happens when youth serve as summer interns or do park-based service-learning.

Idea: Program design principles

Consider employing the "circle of courage" model and principles from the book *Reclaiming at Risk Youth*. To engage young people in a community, they first have to belong, then develop mastery, then independence, then generosity.

Appendix D. Charette Agenda and Participant List

**Engaging Young Adults in a Sustainable Future:
Strategies for National Parks and Other Special Places
Design Charette - December 10, 2009
Draft Agenda, v3f**

Primary purpose/frame of the meeting:

Share, discuss, and build upon recent evaluation findings and charette participant expertise in order to inform NPF strategy for supporting college age young adults working on environmental sustainability with parks.

Wednesday, December 9, 5:30 p.m.

1) Informal dinner

- Acadiana Restaurant, 901 New York Ave NW # 200A, (202) 408-8848

Thursday, December 10, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m., (breaks and working lunch inserted as needed):
Meeting will be at the National Wildlife Federation office, 901 E St, NW, Suite 400, (202) 354-6482

2) Get oriented

- Welcome
- Introductions
- Mark Kornmann: NPF review of strategic, political, and funding context for the project
- Diane Chalfant: Review of the strategic, and political context for this project from the NPS perspective
- Project team: Brief summary of project and players to date
- Clarify intended outcomes for today's charette, i.e. to converge on the top program design ideas that NPF can run with and take to the next step
- Review/revise agenda as needed

3) Role of NPF

- Review *NPF Strategy Level* theory of change synthesized from front end evaluation interviews and literature review. Does it make sense to you? What resonates with your experience? What's missing?
- Whole group discussion: What is the highest leverage role for NPF to play in order to move this agenda forward in light of the available evaluation evidence, insights from today's discussion, and the opportunities and operational realities of parks and NPF?

4) Best practices dialogue

- Review *Program Design Level* theory of change synthesized from front end evaluation interviews and literature review. Does it make sense to you? What's missing?
- Hear from each guest expert about how the practices described in the data do and do not resonate with your own experience

5) Synthesis

- Explore the program design implications that follow from these data
- Closing thoughts and advice from each participant
- Identify patterns, themes in our discussion and advice

**Engaging Young Adults in a Sustainable Future:
Strategies for National Parks and Other Special Places
Design Charette**

Participant List, v2c

for December 10, 2009 meeting with/for the National Park Foundation (NPF)

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