

# The Collaborative for Innovative Leadership

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

MAY 29, 2012

DRAFT CONCEPT

The following concept paper was prepared by the National Park Service Conservation Study Institute at the request of Director Jarvis. The proposal was developed as a concept to begin a larger discussion about how the National Park Service will explore how to accelerate the spread of ideas, encourage innovation and inspire peer-to-peer collaboration across the Service, as suggested in the Call to Action, “Destination Innovation.”

## The Collaborative for Innovative Leadership

The Collaborative will identify, connect, and assist leaders at all levels of the National Park System and partner organizations who are innovating in mission-critical arenas. Complementing existing training, development, and workforce programs, it will focus on transformative change in leadership. It will build and sustain communities of practice that connect employees across geographically dispersed sites to accelerate the exchange of knowledge, new approaches, and insights from practical experience.

By creating environments that increase the cross-fertilization of ideas, the Collaborative will model and promote 21st century skills that foster collaborative, adaptive, and resilient stewardship. A “hub and spoke” infrastructure will enlist a network of pioneering parks and programs—“innovation incubators.” An advisory team will guide the effort and will be served by the “Keystone Partners”—Learning & Development, Workplace Enrichment, Conservation Study Institute, and the Center for Park Management. The Collaborative will help realize the vision of transforming the National Park Service to meet second century challenges.

## Background

On August 25, 2011 National Park Service Director Jonathan Jarvis held a Town Hall-style meeting that launched *A Call to Action: Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement*. The report challenged the employees of the National Park Service (NPS) and our partners to put forth a second-century vision for the National Park System and take personal responsibility for advancing the mission as we mark the Service’s 100th anniversary in 2016. In particular, the report sets forth a strategy that recognizes the great work that is performed everyday across the Service while suggesting a need to focus on critical issues and opportunities that will meet the changing needs of our nation. Thirty-six actions fall within the following four themes: 1) *Connecting People to Parks*, 2) *Advancing the NPS Education Mission*, 3) *Preserving America’s Special Places and*

4) *Enhancing Professional and Organizational Excellence*. Embracing the last theme, *Enhancing Professional and Organizational Excellence*, is pivotal to forming alignment within the Service to achieve the vision set forth in the Call to Action report and will be the focus of this paper.

Director Jarvis recognizes the critical need to reawaken the National Park Service, characterized as a “sleeping giant” that *is too cautious, too resistant to change, and too reluctant to engage the challenges* that must be addressed in the 21st century. He has provided the following guidance to a small working group that has been tasked with recommending an operational strategy for the proposed Network for Innovation and Creativity (c2a #31):

- ❑ Urgently organize around the Call to Action in order for the NPS to achieve its shared vision for 2016 and our second century.
- ❑ Strategically engage in a systematic and networked approach with greater integration of parks and programs working toward a set of common goals, whereby the aggregate of those efforts are deployed more seamlessly in a collaborative relationship among parks, regions, communities and partners.
- ❑ Make the Service and our partners more aware of our exemplar, forward-thinking programs that have large-scale stewardship impacts, economic benefits and fiscal advantages—examples include but are not limited to the National Heritage Areas Program, Historic Preservation Tax Credit, and the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program.
- ❑ Find ways to break down unnecessary bureaucratic barriers and become a more flexible and nimble organization where innovation is supported and encouraged to rise and spread.
- ❑ Create environments that encourage networking, openness to new ideas, creative approaches to complex problems, and a strong defense of resources but with a willingness to find different ways to accomplish the goal.
- ❑ Learn from the work currently underway with the Network Pilot for Youth Development and move toward “organizational utility” that will provide the infrastructure to support innovation through enhanced learning exchanges, peer-to-peer networking and communities of practice.
- ❑ Look at the work being undertaken by Organizational Development, Learning and Development, the Conservation Study Institute, partner programs, and others to drive organizational shifts that promote and promulgate individual and park/program successes which can be shared across the System.

## **A Call for a “Center for Innovation, Creativity and Leadership”**

**The initial call to establish a “Network for Creativity and Innovation” was spawned from the work of the Second Century Commission that stated:**

*...the National Park Service should establish a Center for Innovation to gather and share lessons learned quickly throughout the organization. Place-based education, leadership, public engagement, and collaboration should receive particular attention. The center should form communities of practice, connecting people engaged in similar work so that they can more easily share ideas and experiences. As a public-private consortium, the center could include the Park Service, universities, foundations, school systems, corporations, and professional organizations.*

*Effective leaders enlist the hearts and minds of employees and associates, create a shared vision of the future, motivate others to work toward it, and clear roadblocks from their paths. Strategic thinking, problem solving, and the ability to inspire and motivate can be taught. National Park Service leaders must be fluent in collaboration, empowerment, research-based decision-making, and systems thinking.*

Commissioners Margaret (Meg) Wheatley and Peter Senge provided great insight and suggestions for building and empowering a second-century National Park Service, emphasizing a need to institutionalize leadership throughout the NPS that intelligently responds to crises, thinks systemically, evaluates risks and makes decisions based on evidence, works collaboratively with diverse communities, maintains motivation and creativity in the face of increasing challenges, and relies on the esprit de corps that characterizes NPS resilience.

Meg, in her presentation to the National Leadership Council, and subsequently to other NPS leadership meetings suggests:

- ☐ The solutions we need are already here;
- ☐ People support what they create and act responsibly when they care;
- ☐ People are skillful and creative;
- ☐ People are motivated and ready to move forward;
- ☐ People want to find meaning in work;
- ☐ People are powerful, though they may not know this;
- ☐ Leaders are responsible to support people to realize their power.

### ***Advancing Innovation: Network Pilot for Youth Development***

In May 2011, the NPS National Leadership Council requested the Conservation Study Institute (CSI) to undertake an experimental “pilot” social media platform as a means to inform a larger initiative in the future. Youth development was intentionally targeted as a cross-cutting priority program with an engaged constituency. CSI designed the pilot to examine three key components of the Network concept—practitioners, communication tools and the support team.

**Practitioners** are the people of the NPS and their partners who use and contribute to the Network. They benefit from finding their peers and exchanging knowledge to improve practice and their performance. They participate as individuals, in groups, and as communities of practice with colleagues who share a profession or an interest in a topic important to their work. Through their active participation the Network will grow and become increasingly useful.

**Communication Tools** will support rapid and widespread exchange among practitioners by using a variety of collaboration technologies. Practitioners will make critical new connections through expanded online communities—an internet platform of blogs, discussion forums, wikis, and other tools—in addition to video conferencing, telephone, email, and face-to-face meetings.

A **Support Team** will assist people as they build and use the Network and form communities of practice. Experience from other organizations indicates that to fully leverage the impact of a network it needs to be supported and cultivated, especially in the early phases of development. The Support Team will provide technical assistance and ensure that significant new learning is highlighted for the wider NPS community.

The Youth Development Pilot was launched in August and over 100 participants are currently involved. Although the pilot is in its early stages, and is intentionally limited to this scale, several observations can be made that inform the development of an expanded Network initiative which supports implementing the Call to Action. Lessons learned include:

1. Wide-spread recruitment and voluntary participation led to more participants than anticipated;
2. The Pilot benefitted from a backbone support operation with specific skill sets (technology, data support, evaluation, facilitation, content support, and professional development) to provide structure and assistance to participants;

3. Facilitators of the community need to be “content” people as well as good facilitators. These “connectors” are critical to providing relevant information, probing questions and stimulating conversations, directing people to resources, and providing energy to the community;
4. Purpose for participation needs to have a value-added component and provide something that can’t be gained from other sources;
5. If other communities are built, there will be a need to have leaders communicate among all of the communities;
6. Need to be mindful that the platform can only take participants so far. The community will ultimately need greater resources to support more specific and technical issues.

## **The Collaborative for Innovative Leadership**

The Collaborative for Innovative Leadership is proposed to serve as the formal organizational space in the NPS to support developing and institutionalizing a 21st century leadership culture, Service-wide. The Collaborative should be imagined as a network of leadership laboratories. It will focus on ways to rapidly share knowledge, new approaches, and insights from practical experience to address critical problems and advance organizational excellence. The Collaborative will utilize both online platforms and field-based experiential learning.

The way the Collaborative works—through collaboration, horizontal communication, learning from experience, collegial interactions, and leadership that supports rather than controls—models what we want the NPS to become in the future.

The Collaborative will:

- ☐ convene and facilitate the “best thinking” on NPS related issues in order to build and sustain networks that connect practitioners across geographically dispersed sites and programs to enhance their ability to solve problems more quickly and strategically;
- ☐ accelerate dissemination of ideas and lessons learned through both face-to-face dialogue as well as various mediums; the Collaborative will develop an on-line platform that will tell the stories of NPS pioneers and share them with others in compelling ways—journalist writing and audio, video reports and podcasts, blogs and discussion forums, and a topical library that highlights current practices;
- ☐ identify road blocks that stymie innovation and creativity;
- ☐ rely on the collective intelligence of our workforce and the knowledge and insights of our network of partners; and
- ☐ challenge and inspire our leadership;

### ***Operationalizing the Collaborative***

As there is a desire to mobilize quickly, it is suggested that an advisory team be appointed and served by a dedicated staff that would focus on the development and management of the Collaborative. An appropriate “scaling up” of a backbone operation with a talented staff and advisory team to advance the Collaborative will need action. To a great extent, the Collaborative will utilize existing or redistributed resources and programs. The recommendation is to activate the current Conservation Study Institute as the hub for the Collaborative. However, the Collaborative will utilize the leadership network across the NPS to build a broad national perspective for addressing leadership challenges. As such, there may be a need to shift resources and people with appropriate competencies and skill sets to perform Collaborative functions.

Structurally, it is envisioned that the Collaborative will be a “hub and spoke” operation. At its core, an entrepreneurial staff supported by innovative leaders will guide the Collaborative program. The “spokes” will be field innovators and experiences that contribute to creating rich and inspirational learning environments. These field venues may be parks, trails, heritage areas, rivers, and potentially other protected areas in the United States and internationally—they will serve as place-based and online learning centers for the Collaborative.

As the Collaborative is developed, it will follow a similar path to that of the Youth Pilot modeling entrepreneurialism and engaging the Service so that there is ownership built into its creation. A Collaborative Organizing Committee was appointed by the Director and included members of the NPS directorate, National Park System Advisory Board, national and regional staff, superintendents, emerging leaders, partners, and select Call to Action “champions”:

### **The Collaborative Organizing Committee**

Mike Caldwell, *Deputy Regional Director, Northeast Region*  
Cassius Cash, *Superintendent, Boston National Historical Park and Boston African American NHS*  
Sarah Conlon, *Chief, Organization Development Branch, Learning & Development*  
Michael Creasey, *Superintendent, Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park/ Director, Conservation Study Institute (CSI)*  
Jonathan Doherty, *Assistant Superintendent, Chesapeake Gateways Program*  
Virginia Farley, *Program Manager, Superintendent's Leadership Roundtable, CSI*  
Mickey Fearn, *Deputy Director, Communications and Community Outreach*  
Andrew Ferrell, *Historian, National Center for Preservation Technology and Training*  
Kathy Hanson, *Chief, Learning & Development*  
Jennifer Jewiss, *NPS Partner, University of Vermont*  
Brian Joyner, *Management Assistant, Deputy Director, Communications and Community Outreach*  
Barbara Little, *Archeologist, Washington Office*  
Rebecca Stanfield McCown, *Community Engagement and Partnerships Coordinator, CSI*  
Greg Moore, *Executive Director, Golden Gate National Recreation Area Conservancy*  
Brent Mitchell, *CSI Partner, Quebec Labrador Foundation/Atlantic Center for the Environment*  
Cicely Muldoon, *Superintendent, Point Reyes National Seashore*  
Alan Ragins, *Chief, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance, Intermountain Region*  
Michael Reynolds, *Regional Director, Midwest Region (via phone)*  
Kate Richardson, *Program Director, Workplace Enrichment*  
Mary Gibson Scott, *Superintendent, Grand Tetons National Park*  
Sandy Taylor, *Superintendent, Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site and Selma to Montgomery NHT*  
Meg Wheatley, *National Park System Advisory Board Member, Leadership Committee*  
Julie Williams, *Vice President, Center for Park Management*  
  
Steven Wright, *Facilitator, Wright Collaborative LLC*

The Organizing Committee was responsible for meeting twice to test the Collaborative concept and develop an operational strategy that would add value to field operations. The first meeting was held on March 20, 2012 and the final working session was held May 29-31, 2012. The notes from these meetings as well as the Youth Program Pilot brief can be found at [www.nps.gov/csi](http://www.nps.gov/csi).