Qualitative Evaluation of the Superintendents Leadership Roundtable

A Program Conducted by the National Park Service Conservation Study Institute

A Technical Assistance Report Prepared by

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In cooperation with the National Park Service Conservation Study Institute

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The Conservation Study Institute was established by the National Park Service in 1998 to help the agency and its partners stay in touch with the evolving field of conservation, and to develop more sophisticated partnerships, new tools for community engagement, and new strategies for the twenty-first century. A partnership with academic, government, and nonprofit organizations, the Institute is dedicated to assisting the National Park Service and its partners in becoming increasingly effective and creative in meeting new challenges, and more open and responsive leaders in building collaboration and commitment for the stewardship of our national system of parks and special places. The Institute is based at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park in Woodstock, Vermont.

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THE SUPERINTENDENTS LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE PROGRAM

The Superintendents Leadership Roundtable (SLR) is a service-wide leadership development program managed by the NPS Conservation Study Institute in cooperation with Regional Directors and an advisory group of participating superintendents, and more recently with the Learning and Development Office. In 2009, at the time of the evaluation, the program served approximately 100 superintendents – reaching all seven regions and about 25% of the agency's nearly 400 field leaders. Each of the eight cohort groups of 14 park superintendents meets annually and includes a mix of geography and level of experience.

STUDY PURPOSE AND METHODS

Dr. Jennifer Jewiss from the University of Vermont worked with Institute staff, the advisory group, SLR facilitators, and others to plan the evaluation and review the findings. The purpose of this study was to gather participants' perspectives on SLR's effectiveness and how key program characteristics support leadership development, document the program design and management strategies, and identify opportunities for improving SLR. Fifty randomly selected participants were interviewed – approximately 50% of those participating in the program at the time – plus the program managers and facilitators. The confidential telephone interviews averaged 60-90 minutes in length. The findings were generated from a systematic analysis of the themes identified in the interview transcripts.

FINDINGS

Overall, program participants reported that SLR is a highly effective leadership development opportunity, as indicated in the extremely positive findings outlined below. All of the program participants who were interviewed found value in the SLR program, and many indicated that it was one of the most valuable leadership development opportunities they had experienced.

How do participants describe the key characteristics of the SLR program?

Skilled facilitation supports peer-to-peer learning
- Skilled facilitators manage the dialogue and bring extensive knowledge of the field of leadership that is used to deepen the group's analysis of case studies
- Leaders with diverse backgrounds and levels of experience come together to learn from each other and to share their varied perspectives on current leadership issues
- Peer networks are developed in the roundtable groups that can be tapped for guidance and consultation as needed over time

Valuable leadership content is shared and applied to current leadership challenges
- Leadership is the focus rather than technical and operational aspects of management
- Current leadership needs and interests are addressed – participants set the meeting agenda by developing consensus on priority discussion topics
- Pressing issues are explored in depth, often by examining case studies from participants' parks
- Leadership resources are introduced and used to offer broader perspectives on leadership from private and other public sector arenas

An effective learning environment is created
- High levels of engagement result from participants choosing to take part in the program and their continued commitment to learning as a group over time
- Leaders are able to reflect and recharge away from the day-to-day intensity of the job
- A safe learning environment allows superintendents to openly address their own concerns and limitations in a confidential setting
- Collaborative and constructively critical approaches to problem-solving enable leaders to analyze issues and devise strategies with the guidance of peers and a skilled facilitator
- Application of new knowledge and implementation of strategies are advanced, given that participants "report back" to peers on a regular basis regarding progress made on previously discussed issues
- Trust among participants increases over time, which supports deeper learning as the group convenes for successive meetings over multiple years

What leadership capacities do participants gain from the SLR program?

The knowledge and skills gained from SLR varied – as expected given the mix of participants' backgrounds and length of time in the program, along with variations in the content addressed by a given roundtable group. A broad cross-section of superintendents reported that their leadership capacities have been enhanced in several of the following ways as a result of participating in SLR:
a)   Increased knowledge of leadership concepts and models that inform practice
b)   Greater awareness of one's leadership strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement
c)   Enhanced ability to coach individual staff members and the park's management team
d)   Improved communication skills, particularly for dealing with complex and/or difficult situations
e)   Enhanced ability to develop effective relationships with surrounding communities and partner organizations
f)   Increased confidence and ability to lead at higher levels and transition into new responsibilities
g)   Greater knowledge and understanding of the Service as a whole

What limitations and challenges did participants identify?

Participation

- Interest exceeds available slots for participation
- This approach to leadership development is not suited to all learning styles
- Funding and travel logistics

Program design

- Limited full-group communication among participants of SLR groups between annual sessions

Clarity about the SLR program and support Service-wide

- Lack of clarity about the SLR program on a Service-wide level
- Uneven support for participation in the program across regions and supervisory channels

CONCLUSION

Interviewees voiced strong support for the SLR program. A superintendent from a large park, who has participated in SLR for several years, articulated a perspective shared by many:

> It's the single best opportunity for really honing in on key leadership, management, and supervisory issues that we all deal with as superintendents. It's the best forum I've seen for using case studies from our individual parks to actually work through those issues and come up with a strategy for resolving problems and issues.

An overarching recommendation was to maintain the program largely as it is currently designed, facilitated, and managed. Many hoped that the necessary resources would become available to increase the number of roundtables, so that all interested candidates could participate. Overall, interviewees see SLR as an essential resource that allows them to better address many challenging leadership issues they encounter and to steadily build their knowledge and skills as leaders over time.

I. Introduction to the SLR Program

The Superintendents Leadership Roundtable (SLR) is a service-wide leadership development program. In 2001, the NPS Conservation Study Institute initiated the SLR program and has continued to manage the program in the ensuing years in cooperation with Regional Directors and an advisory group of participating superintendents, and more recently with the Learning and Development Office. Adapted from a similar program for field leaders in the U.S. Forest Service, SLR builds field leadership competencies, addressing NPS goals for learning and development, succession planning, and workplace enrichment. The SLR program currently serves approximately 100 superintendents, reaching all seven regions and about 25% of the agency's nearly 400 field leaders. Each of the eight cohort groups of 14 park superintendents meets annually and includes a mix of geography and level of experience. Guided by facilitators with expertise in leadership development, peers learn from each other by developing strategies to address their most urgent challenges associated with ever-increasing complexity of park management. Superintendents voluntarily participate and over time, they build trust and a shared commitment to learning and integrate their knowledge into their day-to-day leadership.

II. Study Purpose and Methods

The Conservation Study Institute is committed to systematically evaluating the SLR program in order to assess its impact and identify opportunities for improvement. This evaluation was carried out under a cooperative agreement with the University of Vermont with support from the National Park Service (NPS) and the Center for Park Management. The Conservation Study Institute worked in partnership with Dr. Jennifer Jewiss, a social scientist at the University of Vermont, to evaluate the SLR program. Dr. Jewiss served as the technical expert on evaluation and conducted the qualitative evaluation of the program. Institute staff, working in collaboration with the evaluator, engaged an SLR Advisory Group of participating superintendents, the SLR facilitators, and staff from the Center for Park Management to plan the evaluation and review the findings. Engaging key program stakeholders is widely considered a best practice in the field of evaluation, as reflected in the *Guiding Principles* of the American Evaluation Association. In June of 2008, the group of program stakeholders listed above convened at the Institute to plan the evaluation. (A summary report of the meeting is on file at the Conservation Study Institute.)

As the first evaluation of the SLR program, this study is designed to focus on the core components of the program and to gather information from participants and others who are most directly involved in and knowledgeable about the program. The purpose of this evaluation study was to:

- gather participants' perspectives on SLR's effectiveness in supporting their development as leaders,

- analyze how the structure and key characteristics of the program support leadership development, and

- document the program design and management strategies currently used to deliver the program

- identify opportunities for improving the SLR program.

(The evaluation plan is included in Appendix A.) CSI and the advisory group will use the findings to improve the program's documentation and delivery and to enhance understanding of SLR across the NPS. CSI is committed to gathering ongoing feedback about the SLR program. This evaluation is intended to make a substantial contribution to this process and is designed to complement feedback gathered through other means and other evaluation efforts to be carried out in the future.

Fifty SLR participants were interviewed for this study, which represented approximately 50% of those participating in the program at the time of the interviews. Purposeful random sampling was used to select interviewees. Current participants who had attended at least two roundtable meetings to-date, and had attended at least one meeting in the last two years, were considered potential interviewees. To ensure a balance of longer-term and shorter-term participants, 25 interviewees were randomly selected from those who began participating in SLR between 2001 and 2005 along with another 25 who began participating between 2006 and 2009. (See Appendix B for the list of interviewees.) In addition, the program managers from the Conservation Study Institute and the two SLR facilitators were interviewed and asked to describe the principles that guide the design and management of the SLR program. As part of this evaluation process, the evaluator also reviewed relevant program documents and administrative records. Institute staff worked with the evaluator to document and analyze program participation in greater detail. (Statistics regarding the SLR program are on file at the Conservation Study Institute.)

Interviewees were guaranteed confidentiality so they would have the opportunity to speak candidly about their experiences with SLR, including their perceptions of the program's strengths and limitations. (See Appendix C for the Information Sheet that was sent to interviewees and Appendix D for the interview questions.) The interviews were conducted by telephone from August through November of 2009 and averaged 60-90 minutes in length. All the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the data collection. Over 1,200 pages of qualitative data were generated from the interviews. The findings presented in this report (and in a preliminary summary, which was disseminated in February of 2010) were generated from a systematic analysis of the themes identified in participants' interview transcripts. Quotes and examples from the interviews are included without identifying the individual speaker to maintain confidentiality. Some of the direct quotes from interviewees have been condensed or otherwise edited slightly to enhance the clarity and succinctness. In all such instances, care was taken to retain the original meaning and tone of the quoted material. In addition, individual names used by interviewees were omitted from the quoted material.

III. Program Design and Management Principles

Information gathered in interviews with the program managers from the Conservation Study Institute and the two SLR facilitators, along with program documents, are compiled and distilled below to document the principles that guide the design and management of the SLR program.

A. Program Design

The SLR program provides a unique venue for superintendents to work with their peers to develop more sophisticated and adaptive leadership skills. Each roundtable session functions as a "leadership laboratory" in which a cohort of superintendents comes together to examine real-time leadership challenges they are experiencing in their parks. With the guidance of a professional facilitator, the groups take a collaborative approach to problem solving. Members of each roundtable group commit to maintaining the confidentiality of their discussions and an atmosphere of mutual respect, honesty, and trust is fostered among the group.

During the first roundtable session of a new SLR group, the facilitator presents foundational leadership content. Subsequently, the facilitator offers additional leadership content as the need arises in response to the leadership challenges identified by members of the group. To enable members of newly formed roundtable groups to get to know one another and to address foundational leadership content, new groups meet twice the first year. Thereafter, groups meet once a year. (Two recent groups arranged for an additional meeting in the start-up phase to allow the first three sessions to occur at six-month intervals.)

Once the groups are established, discussion at the annual sessions begins with current practical situations and then moves into conceptual learning. This approach not only helps address a pressing issue that a participating superintendent is facing, but it also develops participants' abilities to assess situations and consider an array of possible responses. As a result, the learning is tailored to the interests of the group and is directly applicable to their work as park leaders.

The SLR program employs a continuous learning model, recognizing that leadership development is an ongoing process. Learning builds over time as participants return to their parks and apply what they learned in their annual roundtable session. As leaders encounter new situations in their current park or move into different parks, they face new challenges. The roundtables create a network of colleagues who continue to support each other via peer consultation on an ongoing basis, thus providing greater interpersonal and organizational support for individual leaders.

The SLR program is intended to complement other types of professional development opportunities that address different types of knowledge and skills that superintendents need to effectively carry out their responsibilities. Superintendents typically come to their positions with well developed management skills and technical knowledge in at least one discipline. As one moves into the role of superintendent, one's primary focus shifts from managing effective systems to leading managers and other members of the organization. Roundtable participants are introduced to the rich body of knowledge available in the field of leadership, which can be used to enhance one's leadership capacities. By developing a clearer understanding of what leadership is, how it works in practice, and the role of the leader, participants are better able to see how they can work with their staff and partners to lead effectively in a rapidly changing world. The roundtable sessions offer tools for assessing and resolving and challenges and for identifying and seizing opportunities.

The facilitators draw on a model of leadership developed by John Kotter that identifies three fundamental components of leadership: setting the direction or vision, gaining alignment with that direction from the people and processes in the organization, and creating the best possible conditions for staff and partners to help carry out that vision. Emotional intelligence is considered a core competency for effectively carrying out these three fundamental leadership responsibilities. Daniel Goleman's model of emotional intelligence includes self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social (or relationship) management. Dialogue within the roundtable sessions is designed to help superintendents build their level of self-awareness and better understand their strengths and weaknesses in terms of how they work with others. For instance, participants are encouraged to reflect on how their emotions are serving and/or impeding their effectiveness as leaders. By understanding more about "what makes them tick," superintendents gain insights and tools that enable them to be more intentional in their leadership. Through dialogue with their peers, participants also increase their awareness of the larger organization and gain practical knowledge that enables them to more effectively engage with the Service.

Fulfilling the NPS mission hinges on having the capacity to lead change and engage staff, communities, and partner organizations in supporting the agency's goals. As stated in the Second Century Commission Report (2009), the SLR program is intended to build the sort of leadership capacity that is needed to prepare the National Park Service to meet the challenges of the next century. Superintendents create the work environment for the vast majority of agency staff who are based in parks across the country, and they are often seen as the face of the NPS by communities and partner organizations. Therefore, superintendents are a key leverage point for investing in leadership. Much of the dialogue that occurs within roundtable sessions involves ways to enhance workplace climate and to engage in communities and partner organizations. Advancing Service-wide priorities, such as engaging diverse audiences and responding to challenges like climate change, will require sophisticated and adaptive leadership from superintendents across the system.

B. Program Management

The Institute has sought to manage the SLR program in alignment with the collaborative style of leadership that the roundtables intend to foster. A guiding principle of the Institute's approach is to work collaboratively with the program's facilitators, participants, and the advisory group – all of whom are seen as peers and important contributors to the program's success.

The program's design and delivery rely on collaboration between the SLR program managers and external facilitators who bring expertise in the field of leadership. As a result, the program benefits from the Institute's grounding in the Service and the facilitators' distinctive set of skills and experience. The program managers and facilitators communicate regularly to discuss implementation issues that arise, particularly as the program continues to grow and evolve with the addition of new participants and roundtable groups.

Participant recruitment and selection are carried out in partnership with the Regional Directors who supervise superintendents. The Institute provides recruitment materials to each Regional Director, who disseminates the information to superintendents throughout their region. Members of the SLR Advisory Group help with recruitment by getting the word out and encouraging interested individuals to apply. The Institute's program managers then develop a proposed slate of applicants that contains a mix of experience and geography, which is then shared with each Regional Director who suggests any final adjustments before concurring with the list of superintendents to participate from their region.

The SLR program is designed to serve superintendents' leadership development needs and the participants are seen as key partners. The Institute maintains a high degree of respect for the role that superintendents fulfill within the Service. The fact that the Institute is located in a park ensures that the staff who support the SLR program remain attuned to the responsibilities that superintendents uphold and the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis. Participants are encouraged to provide feedback on the program, and the program managers work to resolve logistical and other issues as they arise. In addition, roundtable groups are given flexibility in determining the leadership topics they consider most important to address in their annual sessions. By offering individual attention to participants and a fair amount of autonomy to the groups, the Institute strives to support the best possible environment for learning.

An SLR Advisory Group has been has been created by the Institute to provide ongoing feedback, advice, and input on strategic directions for program management. For example, the program's steady growth in recent years has raised the need to formalize program guidelines to ensure clarity and consistency in the program's delivery. The advisors offer guidance as draft guidelines are developed. Members of the SLR Advisory Group also serve as ambassadors for the program. In addition, they foster ongoing communication with the Regional Directors and others throughout the agency. The SLR Advisory Group played a key role in the design of this evaluation and has been involved in reviewing and discussing the findings. By managing the

program in partnership with the SLR Advisory Group, facilitators, and Regional Directors, the Institute seeks to mirror principles of collaborative leadership, which are at the heart of the SLR program and CSI's mission.

IV. <u>Findings from SLR Participant Interviews</u>

Overall, interviewees reported that SLR is a highly effective leadership development opportunity, as illustrated in the extremely positive findings discussed below.

A. Participants' Descriptions of the SLR Program and Its Key Characteristics

1. Participants' Descriptions of the SLR Program

Interviewees described SLR as a peer-based learning opportunity, which enables participants to address pressing leadership issues with guidance from colleagues and a skilled facilitator with expertise in leadership. Interviewees emphasized that SLR provides "a different way to learn about leadership" that offers an important complement to management training. At the outset of a roundtable session, participants identify high priority leadership development topics and the group comes to consensus on the topics to be pursued. A participant described the collaborative approach to problem-solving the following way:

> *SLR is self-directed – the group of superintendents that meet on a regular basis collaborate to decide what topics of interest or issues of concern they're going to tackle as a group. It focuses on leadership development and leadership quality. It's an opportunity for folks to bounce ideas off of each other and receive confidential and constructive feedback on how to handle certain situations that we all face as superintendents.*

Since involvement in SLR is voluntary, it is likely that individuals who continue to participate find it of benefit. This partially explains the strongly positive study findings. It is also important to note that several interviewees made a point of specifying that the roundtables serve as an essential component of leadership development that includes other opportunities such as details, acting assignments and more formal training.

Some SLR participants emphasized that the process supports park leaders as they work to advance the goals of the NPS. One interviewee explained,

> *I just pulled out my SLR notebook, and on the front cover it says, "Cultivating Leadership that is Reflective and Collaborative." The collaborative aspect fits the discussions that we have in our roundtables. And then it says, "that embraces innovation and leads change in response to new directions in conservation." We all have to lead change as superintendents. So this gives us an opportunity to look at different ways of doing that.*

Others focused on the notion that peer support under the direction of a trained facilitator "allows you to reflect on your own strengths and areas where you need improvement as a

leader." A newer member of the program described SLR as an opportunity to grow as a leader and thus strengthen the Service:

> *I would describe it as an opportunity for people in superintendent or deputy superintendent positions to get together on a regular basis and have conversations around the tools that we have to make the Park Service's mission happen. It's sharing ideas and best practices around how to lead people and how to manage change. It's an opportunity to share with peers and our facilitator what we learn in our daily experiences in our isolated areas and to get perspective on: how do I keep improving, how do I keep growing, and how do I keep making the Agency stronger?*

A superintendent from a large park, who has participated in SLR for several years, articulated a perspective shared by many:

> *It's the single best opportunity for really honing in on key leadership, management, and supervisory issues that we all deal with as superintendents. It's the best forum I've seen for using case studies from our individual parks to actually work through those issues and come up with a strategy for resolving problems and issues.*

2. Key Characteristics of the Program that Support Leadership Development

Interviewees indicated that the following features of the SLR program contribute to their learning and development as leaders.

a) Skilled facilitation supports peer-to-peer learning

Skilled facilitators manage the dialogue and bring extensive knowledge of the field of leadership that is used to deepen the group's analysis of case studies

Professional facilitation is considered essential to the effective functioning of the roundtables. The vast majority of interviewees held their group's facilitator in high regard. The two facilitators for the SLR program are close colleagues and employ similar approaches in their work with roundtable groups. Interviewees conveyed remarkably similar perspectives on the facilitation regardless of which individual works with their group. Participants often expressed great appreciation for the multifaceted skills and knowledge of the facilitators. In addition to facilitating the dialogue and managing the meeting agenda, the facilitators bring extensive knowledge of the field of leadership that informs the issues addressed in the roundtables.

The facilitators were credited with effectively managing the meeting, including setting the appropriate tone and initiating the discussion:

> *From the moment that we walk in the door, the facilitator is very adept at getting the group to reconnect, develop that atmosphere of trust in which we can talk candidly, and then moving us to identify topics that we want to have considered for discussion.*

Interviewees often emphasized the importance of having an experienced facilitator to "keep the discussion on track" and ensure that all members of the group have an opportunity to speak. As one participant stated, "In any group, you'll have people that are extroverts or want to talk a lot, and there are others that will hang back a little bit and maybe need to be brought out." Interviewees appreciated the facilitator's ability to foster more balanced and inclusive participation among the group.

Several individuals acknowledged the added challenge of facilitating a group of leaders who are accustomed to being in charge. As one participant put it, "You put a bunch of superintendents in a room and it's like herding trout." Another explained that "the facilitator has the job of herding all of us cats" given that "superintendents tend to be fairly independent thinkers."

Many participants identified the benefits of having a facilitator who is also experienced in counseling and coaching professionals working in organizational change. This complementary set of skills and knowledge enables the facilitator to help participants explore leadership issues more deeply, particularly regarding the dynamics of human behavior that play out in organizational settings. Interviewees often appreciated the facilitator's ability to examine the emotions and interpersonal dynamics that are involved. "He can cut through to some of the emotion behind decisions and bring that to the forefront in a tactful way, something that the particular manager was so involved in it that he couldn't see." A fellow participant recognized the importance of addressing some of these deeper and more challenging aspects:

> *When you get to difficult moments, the facilitator has the skills and acumen to take us through those places. A group will sometimes dive under the surface, get to a challenging place and come right back up. Our facilitator has the ability to say, "Well, wait, what about that? Where are you going with that? How does that affect your life, your judgment, the way you perform*?"

Thought-provoking questions of this nature were often useful for participants who were wrestling with a particular leadership challenge. Many interviewees appreciated the degree to which the facilitator helped them think more deeply about a given issue and identify an appropriate course of action:

> *I found that the facilitator was very good in saying, "Okay, have you thought about this? Have you thought about that?" – not telling me what to do, but putting those questions out there that made me think and figure out what I needed to do. I have found it very useful to be able to talk about leadership issues with somebody like him who does this for a living.*

Both facilitators possess extensive knowledge of the fields of leadership and organizational development. Participants appreciated the ways in which the facilitator's expertise informs a wide array of topics discussed in the roundtables.

> *I'm frequently wowed by the facilitator's depth of knowledge in leadership. We might be talking about something that's deeply embodied in Park Service culture, and he can pull*

out a nice pearl of wisdom and drop it out there. And all of a sudden, we have this whole different level on which to discuss this issue for our Parks.

The facilitators present some foundational leadership content the first time a new roundtable group meets to establish a common base of understanding and a starting point for the discussion. As members of a roundtable identify particular areas of interest, the group often requests that the facilitator share additional leadership resources at subsequent meetings. One interviewee explained,

The facilitator has considerable understanding of how leaders think – and how to help leaders be better thinkers. He has provided access to all sorts of suggested readings, so he goes beyond just being a facilitator. There's a bit of a teacher/guide aspect to it.

Both facilitators were seen as bringing a breadth of knowledge about leadership and its applications in the public and private sector. Participants frequently found this "bigger picture" perspective helpful in expanding their understanding of important leadership concepts and strategies. At the same time, the facilitators' familiarity with government agencies and the particular challenges that public sector leaders face was also seen as a major asset.

It's very valuable working with a facilitator who spends a lot of time with government management teams. For one, it's very different. The government is not a private business. Many of the services that we provide to people, you can't just decide not to do them because they're not profitable. Our lives are proscribed by a number of legal and mission driven responsibilities. There's not as much flexibility in terms of team changing in the government. A lot of times, you have to make the best of the people you've got. You have to invest in those people and try to make a difference. The facilitator understands the public accountability side, which is not part of working in the private sector. He understands that we're constantly being scrutinized and folks want six different things from us that are all at odds with each other.

The fact that both facilitators work with the U.S. Forest Service and other SLR groups was seen as an added benefit. One interviewee noted, "We just didn't start from scratch; he has an appreciation for the work we do."

Given that the facilitators play multiple roles in the course of a roundtable session, several interviewees spoke to the importance of the facilitator's ability to "switch gears" as needed:

He functions in a variety of capacities, and I like that he's able to move in and out of defined roles very easily. That's difficult to find in somebody. He can be a taskmaster in keeping us on track and getting us through the work of the day – but he also is a great teacher. With his understanding of different organizational models and team leadership and coaching employees, he comes to the meetings with [informational materials] to share and discuss that are always relevant to the topics of the day. When we are talking about leadership, coaching, or how to make our organization more effective, he readily provides us with tools.

Leaders with diverse backgrounds and levels of experience come together to learn from each other and to share their varied perspectives on current leadership issues

The diversity of perspectives among the members of a roundtable group was widely identified as essential to the effectiveness of SLR. Many interviewees viewed the opportunity to learn from a diverse group of peers to be one of the most valuable aspects of the program. Some considered this aspect of SLR to be unique, as described in the following comment: "The groups are mixed in every way possible: gender, background, ethnicity, and experience in the Service. It is the only place where this dynamic occurs." Another participant explained how the diversity within the group contributed to his learning:

> It's an opportunity to learn from each other. The group is comprised of a variety of individuals from new superintendents to more seasoned superintendents, small parks, big parks – so you get a broad perspective and quite a large variety of personality types. To me, it provides a much better way of learning directly from people that have the experience. You're able to convey the issue that you have and get feedback directly from somebody that's had experience in dealing with that. It's unlike a traditional classroom with talking heads; here's your notebook; follow along. It's a conversation in a room of peers that you get to know over time.

Several participants indicated that the geographic reach of the roundtables provides a means of connecting with colleagues from all over the country "who have different experiences that all are tied to a common mission – but also have similar issues that they're dealing with."

Less experienced superintendents were especially grateful for the opportunity to learn from longer serving superintendents. The comments of a newer superintendent conveyed a sentiment expressed by many: "We had so much to learn, and they had so much experience to offer. That was incredibly important for my development as a leader to interface with them and to hear what they had to say." Early and even mid-career superintendents appreciated the opportunity to interact with leaders who, as one interviewee put it, "are almost walking icons." Some found particular value in learning from the challenges that seasoned superintendents had overcome in the course of their careers:

> I am probably the most junior superintendent in my SLR. I love that. I feel like I've got an opportunity to learn from some folks who are sage. People have been very candid. I love it when a seasoned superintendent is willing to share a mistake they made. You learn more from what people did wrong than what they do right. That's been very helpful to say, "Note to self: don't do that." … I speak up – but I do a lot of listening. Right now, I am getting more than I'm giving. But maybe one day I'll be that sage guy and some of my experiences will be helpful to a new person coming in.

Many interviewees indicated that the success of a roundtable is highly dependent on the participation of senior park leaders who share the lessons they have learned over many years of service and in high ranking leadership roles.

The contributions of newer superintendents were also valued by many of the longer term superintendents. A highly experienced superintendent who has participated in SLR for several years came to the following conclusion: "SLR has something to offer every superintendent. The new superintendents learn from the older superintendents and the older superintendents, quite honestly, learn from the newer superintendents. The information goes both ways." A park leader who "had been in for a while" found that the newer superintendents in her roundtable helped her "to think anew about things that we sometimes take for granted and to make sure that we're not getting stale." A similar sentiment was expressed by another senior leader: "We sometimes need some rejuvenation. Those who are coming up as younger superintendents offer that refreshing perspective that you see with people who are in new positions. That's really beneficial to the whole group."

Younger leaders sometimes contributed helpful perspectives on the use of technology that informed and inspired at least a few of the older superintendents who had been less enthusiastic about the use of technology. For example, one superintendent became convinced of the benefits of developing a Facebook page for her park. Younger superintendents were also credited with helping to bridge generation gaps that some of the colleagues had encountered:

> *Younger superintendents are generally more in tune with a younger generation that we're bringing up into the National Park Service. And you can pick up on things that are important to a different age group as opposed to my age group. We've had this discussion – "Can anybody tell me how to deal with a Generation X?" And we'll have that dialogue. So I can take that perspective when I go back to my home unit. When I'm dealing with a partner or an employee of a certain age and I can recall those conversations. Okay, now I understand where [that younger partner or employee] is coming from. Seeing that in a diverse group like SLR has been very helpful.*

Many interviewees emphasized that the leadership responsibilities of a superintendent require continuous learning. Regardless of one's age or length of time serving as a superintendent, the dynamics of the roundtable enable participants to learn from the variety of knowledge and experience present in the group. A longer-term superintendent illustrated how he and other members of his group find themselves alternating between teaching and learning depending on the topic at hand:

> *I'm close to retirement, but that doesn't mean that I'm not getting a lot out of it for this current job. You go into this group as a participant and a teacher and a coach, probably no matter what position you're in. At various times, you're going to be in each role. Maybe your background was law enforcement – and I have none of that. You're a new superintendent. I'm going to learn more from you than you're going to learn from me. Or I'm going to learn different things from you than you're going to learn from me. Each person brings something to the group.*

Peer networks are developed in the roundtable groups that can be tapped for guidance and consultation as needed over time

The networking that originates in the facilitated roundtable session extends into the breaks and evenings during the group's annual face-to-face meeting. A participant offered the following description of how her group maximizes the use of their time together:

> *You have lunch or dinner and you continue the dialogue that had started [in the facilitated session]. That time is critical because you have smaller group discussions. Everybody goes off in groups of 3 or 4. I'm in an urban park, so my issues are a little different than [a rural park]. Whatever the topic is, I may have lunch or dinner with the folks who are more in an urban setting to talk about that. Those after-hours discussions allow you to bring up the individual examples that are tied to the bigger topic that we were talking about in the larger group discussion.*

Another participant explained that he views his annual roundtable as starting "the moment you set foot in the hotel and come in contact with one of your fellow roundtable members and start that communication. You are mentally exercising nonstop for that entire week."

Most participants reported having some level of contact with at least a few roundtable colleagues throughout the year. Some participants had minimal contact with fellow group members in between the annual face-to-face sessions. However, individuals for whom this was the case often referenced a sense of reassurance they felt from knowing that – if the need arose – they could pick up the phone or send an email and access the guidance and support of their roundtable colleagues. Others found tremendous benefit in communicating with roundtable colleagues on a regular basis. Many appreciated the comfort level that results from the relationships that have been developed: "They already know me. They already know the issues I'm dealing with. It's like you pick up the conversation where you left off after the last meeting or call."

This strong sense of connection to peers across the agency created a welcome contrast, as illustrated in the following two examples:

> *We are sounding boards for each other. And that's a really valuable asset because when you're a superintendent, you sometimes feel isolated. You know other superintendents, but you never really get to know them on a level that you feel comfortable talking about problem areas.*

> *As superintendents we're pretty isolated, both geographically and in a bureaucratic sense. Roundtable is the one place where you feel part of a larger group of people who understand the issues you're grappling with. It has given me a cohort in the National Park Service that I didn't have before.*

Newer superintendents found this support network to be particularly important as they encountered the reality that it can be "lonely at the top." A deputy superintendent who moved into a superintendent role explained, "It got lonely really fast. I was able to call and email some

of my SLR members and got some advice that really helped me make some decisions." A number of interviewees noted that guidance from seasoned colleagues is essential given that superintendents are expected to act fairly autonomously and independently: "As in any organization, there is hesitancy to go to your boss with questions very often."

Roundtable members often tapped their SLR network for consultation and guidance on particular park projects or issues. SLR members bring a wide array of professional experience to the group. For instance, a superintendent explained that "there are a couple of people in our group that are very astute when it comes to the political arena." She greatly appreciated the opportunity to seek their guidance when confronted with sensitive political issues. Another recalled how helpful it was to learn from a colleague's experience with the Federal Advisory Committee Act. In addition, superintendents who came from certain disciplinary backgrounds – such as law enforcement, facility management, administration, or planning – were often tapped for guidance when relevant topics arose:

> *There's a lot of technical expertise in the group and we're able to tap into that. One of the benefits of SLR is that you get to know some sharp people who deal with complex issues and you can use that to your advantage when you run into similar issues.*

As a result, participants were able to draw on the experience of their SLR colleagues to help round out their own knowledge and better address new and challenging issues.

In addition to serving as sounding boards and sharing professional knowledge, SLR participants often provide each other with emotional support and encouragement:

> *We've had a lot of our SLR superintendents achieve great things. When they're winning, you want to make sure that they know you're supporting them. And especially when they're not winning, if they're going through a tough time, you want them to know you're there. If one of our SLR superintendents is going through a rough patch, I'm usually on email saying, "Hey, do you need help?" That has been a secondary back up that I don't think any of us anticipated.*

Several interviewees expressed particular gratitude for the support of their roundtable colleagues after moving into new positions:

> *I had come from a very supported personal and professional environment in [one part of the country], and I moved out to a fairly remote, rural location [in another part of the country]. There were not the support mechanisms that I had created in [my previous location]. So on all fronts of my life I was diminished in my capability to cope. SLR was a nice lifeline for my professional side, but it also leant support for my personal side.*

The continuity of relationships with members of one's roundtable helped counterbalance some of the other shifts that come with position changes.

On a much broader level, a number of interviewees indicated that they feel a connection to the wider circle of SLR members who participate in other roundtables. Despite a lack prior of interaction, for some, the sense of common experience and interest in leadership

development helps create a bond with other program participants. When serving alongside fellow SLR participants on other NPS committees, several interviewees found that they were able to build on their mutual connection to the program in a way that enhanced the productivity of their work on committees and workgroups. For example, a few SLR members from different roundtables reported that they had drawn key concepts from their common understanding of leadership to advance the work of a committee on which they served.

b) Valuable leadership content is shared and applied to current leadership challenges

Leadership is the focus rather than technical and operational aspects of management

Participants distinguished the leadership focus of the SLR program from the more technical and operational knowledge that they attribute to the field of management. (Although SLR participants often tapped the technical expertise of fellow roundtable members, as discussed above, technical and operational discussions tended to occur outside the facilitated group sessions.) However, some interviewees indicated that there is not universal understanding and/or agreement across the Service regarding the distinction between leadership and management:

> *Unfortunately, the Park Service sometimes uses the two words "leadership" and "management" interchangeably, and I think of them as really different things. … I think of management as the mechanics of how we go about achieving goals and objectives. Leadership is broader, perhaps more philosophical. I'm not sure we always distinguish them that way in the Park Service. For me, the roundtable is about leadership.*

A fellow participant offered her observations on the difference between these two broad types of skills required of superintendents:

> *We're all good managers. You wouldn't have gotten here if you weren't a good manager. We're able to manage the programs, manage the day-to-day stuff, manage the budget and procurement, grind through the deadlines – that is definitely managing. A leader is a person who can create the vision and the direction to take that particular park into the future, gathering the folks who are part of this journey together and helping them understand how they can help build that vision and all move forward together in that direction.*

Many interviewees emphasized that management fundamentals are covered in other settings, particularly in training courses offered by the Service. They stressed the importance of recognizing that SLR is not "a silver bullet" that addresses all the professional development needs of a superintendent. The following comments further illustrate this contrast:

> *First-time, early career superintendents need training on personnel actions, how concessions work, how contracting works – what are the nuts and bolts you need to know about laws, statutes, regulations, and policies to keep your park out of trouble. Those are things SLR will never be. SLR serves a different role…. As federal employees, we*

sometimes undervalue the leadership responsibilities that we have. It's easy to get caught up in the bureaucracy of federal programs and not carve out the time for the leadership it takes to grow people, to grow an organization. SLR provides an opportunity to think about leadership with peers and to find ways to put leadership into practice.

Current leadership needs and interests are addressed – participants set the meeting agenda by developing consensus on priority discussion topics

SLR is seen as an important complement to technical training that covers fundamentals and the "nuts and bolts" of predetermined topics. The agenda is tailored to the needs and interests identified by the group. A participant explained that members of his roundtable "come up with a number of topics that are timely or critical to what we're doing" in our parks. The topics may address service-wide initiatives or focus on issues that are "local or unique to what a particular superintendent is dealing with." This approach to setting the meeting agenda is designed to address the current leadership needs and interests of the group:

Almost everything that we put up on the [flipchart] comes from dealing with a problem. It's not that we come together and say, "I'd like to share a successful partnership that we have." It's getting at those things that we're struggling with – the leadership challenges that we have.

The groups often use a "dot voting" process and/or consensus-building discussion to prioritize topics "that people feel are the highest priority and would best benefit the group as a whole." A long-time SLR member described how her group develops the agenda early on the first day:

We put together a list of topics, and then we refine and prioritize them so we end up with probably half a dozen. They're usually situational or issue driven. Then we deal with those topics one by one. So that's really different than a class or training where the whole meeting is set up; speakers come and speakers go and there are activities and time slots allocated to certain topics. Our SLR agenda is self-directed from the group, and it's not put together until the first day of the session. It helps us get to talking about what matters most to the group at the time. We're not talking about something that somebody else thinks is beneficial to us. We're talking about things that matter to us as a group.

Another interviewee shared a similar perspective:

One hundred percent of it is directly relevant to my job. All of the participants are people who are in the same job working for the same organization. While the specific examples, of course, do vary, we all deal with regional offices; we all deal with the same administrative systems; we all deal with the same budget process; and we all deal with the same HR system. And we're all in this position where we're the person at the tip of the organization with that job title. It's usually very timely to things that I'm facing. Because it's a group of superintendents that identify the issues that we want to talk about, the huge value is that it's 100 percent applicable – as opposed to other people coming in from a different place in the organization from a hypothetical [perspective]

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and saying, "You ought to know this, so we're going to talk to you about it." Because it may not be something that I feel is directly relevant at the time, it's of less value. Since the agendas of the SLR are generated by people who sit in the same place – as superintendents – it's highly applicable.

Participants appreciated that, by design, SLR is fully grounded in the realities of what the particular group of superintendents is dealing with in their parks at the moment. As several interviewees pointed out, this approach requires a skilled and knowledgeable facilitator who can help the group navigate the democratic agenda-setting process and respond in the moment to the selected topics. In addition, the quality of the learning hinges on the active participation of the roundtable members and the thoughtfulness of their contributions. "I do not look at SLR as training. I think of it as professional development. There's nobody standing in front of the class; there's no lecturing. It's what I and my colleagues bring to the table." A number of interviewees suggested that this approach is well suited to the topic of leadership as well as the professional development needs of those who have advanced to the level of the superintendency.

Pressing issues are explored in depth, often by examining case studies from participants' parks

As mentioned above, the agenda items often originate from a situation that a member of the group is wrestling with and a case study approach is used to explore the issue in depth. Many interviewees found tremendous value in the use of real-world case studies:

A lot of times when you go to trainings, they place a scenario in front of you and say, "This and this happened; how would you deal with it?" But with the SLR, we don't deal with such-and-such <u>might</u> have happened. We're talking about issues that have truly happened to us and how we dealt with them. You are talking about real things – discussing exactly what happened and not sugarcoating it.

Facilitated discussion with the individual who has offered to share his/her own experience as a case study enables the group to consider the situation in great detail:

It's the ability to listen to situations that folks may be in – that may be keeping them up at night. I glean from what someone else has experienced and discusses in such detail in a group setting with a good facilitator. That experience is more relevant to me as a leader than a leadership book. You can't have a discussion with the author of a leadership book when you have additional questions – SLR provides that element.

The roundtable process enables the participant who raised the issue to speak to the many variables and contextual factors necessary for the group to fully understand the case and delve deeply into the analysis.

Participants reported that they learned a lot from working with their fellow superintendents "to pick apart case studies in a spirit of growth, development, and learning." As one interviewee stated, it helps "prevent us from stepping into a bear trap somebody else

has already stepped into. It's enlightening to look back and critique it – if you were able to go back in time, what would you have done differently?" A long-serving superintendent explained that although the cases tend to originate from a situation in a single park, there is an "immediate ability to transfer that knowledge because all of us know how that topic might apply to us." A similar perspective is evident in the comments of another participant:

> *From every case study that has been examined, I have learned something. The details of the situation may not directly apply to something that I'm in the middle of, but the framework and the tools and techniques – to use the analogies – it helps build my toolbox. It gives me a larger palette to work from. It gives me a wider range of things to try when I'm faced with things.*

Leadership resources are introduced and used to offer broader perspectives on leadership from private and other public sector arenas

Participants appreciated the wealth of informational resources that the facilitators share with their roundtables:

> *The facilitator provides us with resources, whether it's a primer on leadership, a recent study on challenges in the workplace, or even a contact individual to talk to – that's invaluable. He has access to a suite of documents and books that we don't get through our everyday work channels.*

The facilitators frequently draw direct connections between the issues raised by participants and relevant resources from the fields of leadership and organizational development. By "peppering in bits of wisdom," leadership concepts, models, and tools are integrated into the discussion. When appropriate, the facilitators share this type of information in "real time" through informal and impromptu presentations. One interviewee explained, "We do a case study, and then we have the facilitator generalize the themes. He draws on research or writings to take a specific situation and apply it to [other] situations we might be in. We all learn from that." Accessible leadership materials are often disseminated to the group – sometimes in the midst of the annual session:

> *The facilitator brings his computer. As our conversations are unfolding, he'll think of resources that would be pertinent to share with us. He goes into [his computer] and pulls out stuff. It's wonderful to get handouts that are pertinent to what we're discussing. He'll use the printer at the hotel and bring them in the next day so it's pretty immediate – which is really effective – because if I received it when I got home, then I'm already back in the deeper water paddling hard to keep my head up and it's hard to read those things. Whereas if I can read it on the plane, or if I can read it in my hotel room that night, I'm really in the conversation.*

Some interviewees suggested that even when they were already familiar with a particular leadership concept or model, they benefitted from a "refresher" presentation that deepened their understanding of the material and prompted them to consider new ways of applying the concepts to enhance the functioning of their organizations.

Participants were frequently impressed by their facilitator's ability to call up illustrative examples to share with the group in the midst of the dialogue.

> *Our facilitator does a really good job of reading what's going on in the discussion and what more formal learning opportunity might fit there. He always has a concrete example to illustrate whatever point he's talking about. So you have an opportunity to see how this unfolded in the Forest Service and what the ramifications were. It's not just conceptual or philosophical. It's the applied nature that he's able to illustrate so well for us. It's so much easier to understand and remember those things when you see a direct application to another organization similar to your own.*

Participants appreciated the "bigger picture perspective" that the facilitators offered relative to leadership and organizational development, including their knowledge of "more cutting edge techniques being discussed in corporate America or other agencies." The roundtables also benefitted from the facilitators' years of direct experience in working with leaders of other public sector organizations. As one interviewee noted, "It can be refreshing to hear examples germane to the topic that are <u>not</u> from the Park Service. That can be very helpful because we can get myopic."

Leadership Topics Addressed in Various Roundtables
A partial list of topics mentioned by interviewees

Leadership styles
"Getting up on the balcony" to gain perspective
Self-assessment tools, such as 360 evaluations
Running more productive meetings
Personality types and interpersonal dynamics
Dealing with difficult employees
Problem-solving tools and approaches
Shadow leadership
Understanding conflict and using it as a tool
Management versus leadership
Building an effective management team
Balancing work and personal life
Emotional intelligence
Self-awareness
Leading in crisis situations
Time management
Making judgment calls
Priority-setting
Crafting an organizational vision
Transitioning into a new leadership position
Leading organizational change

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c) An effective learning environment is created

High levels of engagement result from participants choosing to take part in the program and their continued commitment to learning as a group over time

Participation in SLR is voluntary, and many interviewees pointed to the benefits of learning alongside others who sought out this leadership development opportunity.

You've got to be ready to be a part of the SLR. If somebody's not interested or invested, it's not going to be a success for the person – and it won't be a success for the group. The people who are in SLR want to be in it, and that's very beneficial. They're not doing it because they have to or because it's part of a mandatory program. … We've got some fantastic folks in our group. They tend to be people who are trying to better themselves in order to do a better job of managing resources – natural, cultural, and personnel resources.

Interviewees often described themselves and their roundtable colleagues as not only willing but eager to participate: "There is an anticipation and excitement that brings us together, because everybody in my SLR sees the value in coming together once a year for three days." Another participant explained that given the fact that a superintendent chooses to apply to the program, "you're already saying, 'I want to share. I want to be in this open forum.'" Even those who indicated that they may not talk nearly as much as some other members of the group often benefitted greatly from watching and listening: "I learn a lot from watching other people. For me to be able to sit there and listen to senior superintendents' issues and strategies is really valuable – it is a big part of how I learn."

The voluntary nature of the program also was considered key to maintaining the quality of participation over time. As one superintendent noted, "It's clear up front that if it doesn't click for you, you can get out. You have that opportunity." Another explained, "You can vote with your feet – which is a good thing." Several interviewees reported that fellow roundtable members kept close tabs on the group's productivity to ensure maximum use of the available time:

We have one member who's always cracking the whip. We kid her all the time. If she doesn't feel like we're being productive enough in our eight hours, she'll say, "Tonight, we need to have a session about such and such." We always give her a hard time, but we love it because it's part of the group dynamic to make sure we feel 100 percent comfortable with the results.

Participants often referenced the responsibility that members of the group hold – individually and collectively – for ensuring that the annual roundtable session is productive and meets their needs as leaders. A long serving superintendent linked this responsibility to the issues that individual participants raise during the agenda-setting discussion on the first morning of the roundtable: "What would you like to talk about while you're here so that when you get on the plane and fly back home on Friday, you felt like your questions were answered?"

Many participants expressed a commitment to continuous learning about leadership, as illustrated in the following comments from three interviewees:

For me, SLR has reinforced the concept of a life-long learner. How do I get better at communicating? How do I get better at – fill in the blank? It spurs in me the constant interest in being better at what I do.

As long as we continue to discuss things that are relevant to the group, it doesn't matter where you are in your career. We all face challenges at different points in our careers, and there are opportunities for continuous learning.

You don't stop learning. You have to continue to learn and change and strive to be better – and that's what the SLR does. I can't imagine thinking to myself, "I don't need this any more – I know all the answers." I want to continue to participate in SLR; I want to continue to improve on my leadership skills and abilities.

Some raised concerns about the possibility that participants would be required to exit the program after a certain period of time, amounting to a graduation process: "I hope that we don't graduate from the program, because we shouldn't stop learning." She pointed to the continually evolving field of leadership that the SLR facilitator shares with the group and added, "It's a growth process throughout your career." Another superintendent envisioned the process of learning about leadership – and implementing lessons learned in his park – as an ongoing journey:

The SLR experience is that partner that's walking alongside you giving you advice as you go. You're thinking: so-and-so was going through this, I recall, at a meeting a couple of years ago. I could call him up and chat with him to get advice about that – so it's always there. And I've never had that experience with any training because you don't really do much talking at training; training is more about listening and this is more about sharing and discussing and participating. Maybe that's the difference.

Leaders are able to reflect and recharge away from the day-to-day intensity of the job

Many interviewees referred to the intensity of the superintendent's job, explaining that the workload is heavy and the expectations are high:

It is a very stressful, demanding job. It spills out into your home life, too, because you may leave the park physically at the end of your day, but there are always evening meetings. Most of the time, there's some work you have to bring home and you're doing memos at night at the house – so it takes up such a big portion of our lives.

Other participants acknowledged that the demands of the job are often hard on family members, particularly when moving to a position in another park: "The attitude about service in this agency often is one of adventure – and sometimes the adventure wears thin when it's hard on the people around you." Superintendents in parks located in small communities occasionally noted that the visibility of the position also can contribute to a feeling of being on duty at all times: "In a community like this, everyone knows who you are. Eventually you relax,

but you still have that feeling of being a public figure." As another interviewee explained, "You're always in the fish bowl."

Spending three days per year at a roundtable session allowed superintendents to step out of the day-to-day demands of the role for a short period of time to reflect on how they are handling their leadership role. Many interviewees contrasted the time they spend in their roundtable meeting with other professional travel they do throughout the year: "Usually, if we're stepping away from the park, it's to step into another project like a taskforce." A fellow participant described how refreshing the SLR experience is for her:

> I look at SLR as a refuge. I come back refreshed. We're not at training. We don't have to come up with a product. I don't have to manage anyone while I'm there. I don't have to worry about somebody needing my attention immediately – although that doesn't mean I won't answer my phone. By removing us from our normal work setting and not having the typical expectations that we have on other travel experiences, such as meetings with agendas, with outcomes, with to-do lists … I find that very refreshing. That makes it a refuge.

This sentiment was echoed in the comments of others: "When I go, I feel like I can take a deep sigh. I can relax because this is the one week out of the whole year that you can get something out of it but not have to present or perform."

Participants valued the time that SLR provides to not only explore the topic of leadership in general but to focus on their own leadership in particular:

> We get so hung up in daily management that it's easy for us to lose sight of the fact that leadership is really critical to what we do. Roundtable gives us an opportunity to pull back and to really take a look at ourselves as National Park Service leaders. It gives us time to do a lot of self-analysis and self-reflection. It's a retreat, but it's very much of a brain drain – in a really good way – because it's the time to download all of the things that have been building up over the course of a year that for some reason aren't quite worked out or might not be headed in the right direction. It's the one time of year that is solely for us leaders.

As one superintendent explained, at the office "it's go, go, go all the time" responding to a steady influx of information and questions that come through email, cell phones, meetings, and interactions with staff and partners. "Spending three or four days that is all about [us as leaders] is something we value," because when superintendents return to their parks, the focus is on meeting everybody else's needs.

Several participants used an analogy from the literature on leadership to describe the perspective they gain by stepping away from the typical pace of work in their parks to engage into dialogue and reflection with their roundtable colleagues:

> You're running around managing your programs and maybe not leading as much as you should. You have to consider yourself as being out on the dance floor with a hundred

other people. SLR gives you the opportunity to step up into the balcony with a few others and look down on the dance floor and really take a look at what's going on with your park and your programs.

Others explained that their discussions with roundtable colleagues help check their thinking – especially when they are in the midst of controversy – which results in their feeling more focused and energized as leaders:

There are times as a superintendent, when you're getting beat up left and right – and there was nothing you did – it's just the nature of your position. You go to SLR to get revitalized, to ground truth yourself and what you've been doing and the issues at your park. I always get reenergized and refocused, and I walk away with some precious nugget that's going to help me grow and learn in the coming year.

A fellow participant described the sense of reconnection that she derives from her interactions with roundtable colleagues: "SLR is an important tool that I have. It's a way to reconnect annually to <u>why</u> I do what I do, and to reconnect to people who care as much as I do."

Increased resilience was identified as an important capacity that some derived from their participation in SLR. One interviewee drew a connection between his experience in SLR and a component of the Senior Executive Service Competencies:

When it comes to leading change, under the core qualifications there's a quality of resilience which says, "deals effectively with pressure, remains optimistic and persistent even under adversity and recovers quickly from setbacks." Knowing that other people are going through the same thing really enhances your resilience and your ability to deal with pressure and setbacks and stress. We're social animals. We readily borrow ideas from each other. I think people forget how much we imitate each other – that's how we learn.

In addition, some acknowledged that hearing about the challenges that another member of the group was facing enabled them to reconsider their own situation and decide that perhaps it was not all that bad by comparison.

A commitment to supporting one's roundtable colleagues was expressed by many. In some instances, the support provided to members of the group was seen as restorative:

SLR is a place where we can learn from each other, let things out, help each other, and sometimes even heal each other. It's an environment where people can be nurtured by their peers. It gives us the energy to go back and do what we need to do.

The caring nature of the relationships among some SLR participants took the form of close professional friendships. Some suggested that members of the group had become "like family" whose support and encouragement helped bolster their capacity to meet the demands of the job.

A safe learning environment allows superintendents to openly address their own concerns and limitations in a confidential setting

The confidentiality maintained within roundtables is viewed as essential to their success:

> *One of the things that makes this work is the commitment and clarity around confidentiality. That was important to establish in the first session – and we remind ourselves all the time that there's a "cone of silence." That ground rule makes it a safe learning environment.*

A fellow participant explained, "This is one of the few times when we as superintendents are together in a very open situation where we can drop our guard and talk about what we're holding inside." Along with the confidentiality afforded to members of the group, the identity of individuals involved in a particular situation under discussion are also safeguarded. An interviewee described how her roundtable handles this issue: "A basic rule of the roundtable is that we never mention a person by name. We'll just say, 'I know of a situation where such-and-such' [is occurring] … and go through the description of the situation."

The relatively small size of the agency, with its strong communication "grapevine" that extends across the country, was seen as a prime reason why the commitment to confidentiality is crucial:

> *The confidentiality is critical because even though the National Park Service has 20,000 plus employees, we find that it's a very small family of 20,000 – and the grapevine is quick to push information out. There are times when we as superintendents deal with very sensitive issues. To be able to drill down and get to the real crux of the issue, sometimes you have to share what your vulnerabilities are. And that becomes a very touchy subject. Knowing that I can share something that is potentially vulnerable, personally or professionally – and knowing that it's not going to get out to the broader Service – makes a big difference because I can now open up and honestly talk about whatever the issues are and get counsel from the 13 other people who are in my group. I am convinced we have never had a breach of that confidence – and that gives me all the more confidence in sharing and getting to a more meaningful level in the discussions with our group.*

The level of confidentiality upheld by roundtable members stood in contrast to experiences that some had experienced in other NPS meetings: "You can have a meeting and say, 'This is confidential and nothing will go outside of these doors' – and within minutes, people on the other side of the country know what's occurred because of this very strong grapevine." Others pointed to the highly political nature of the Service as a primary reason why roundtable discussions need to remain confidential.

Interviewees often described their experiences with the agency's culture as they emphasized the importance of maintaining confidentiality within the roundtables:

> When I became a superintendent, it seemed that it was a zero sum game – you never admitted a weakness to another superintendent. It could be used against you. You played everything really close. Maybe you developed one friendship with another superintendent where you could discuss a few things, but not really in depth. Through the roundtables, we've gotten beyond those barriers. When somebody is having a problem, the atmosphere is trusting enough that you can get into a frank discussion about it.

Several participants noted that this aspect of the NPS culture may be changing somewhat over time. However, they indicated that the nature of the position – including superintendents' responsibilities to staff and surrounding communities – creates a continued need for this type of safe, confidential learning environment as is evident in the following statements from two interviewees:

> When you're a superintendent, there's a lot of pressure on you to be right all the time – and any time you make mistakes, they're very visible. As part of that, you [develop] a purposeful air that you know where you're going, you know what you want to do, you know how to get there – and the whole time, in your gut [you're thinking], I'm not sure what I'm doing. This gives us the opportunity to open up and talk about some concerns and issues that we wouldn't normally feel comfortable talking about.

> We're not in a position to make ourselves vulnerable in any way, shape, or form. We are the "top dogs" of our units. The buck stops with us. We have to make the difficult decisions and, many times, make some people unhappy internally or externally because of all the factors that are involved with a particular situation.

Another superintendent, explained that "people come to you for answers and decisions, so there aren't many places where you can openly display your weaknesses." SLR is seen as a "safe haven" to discuss "the pressures that are preying on you."

The safety of the group enabled some participants to explore new ways of looking at issues they were wrestling with and identify a broader range of possible responses:

> I was dealing with an issue at my park that was torturous for me personally. I was able to be honest about the situation with my peers. It was a safe environment to talk about how it was affecting the team of people that worked at the park. We can openly discuss something and not worry that it's going to be interpreted the wrong way. The ability to be able to talk about it was so beneficial – that helped me keep it all in perspective. Sometimes you're too close to the situation. When we're given the opportunity to lay it out there, it helps you calm down and look at it more objectively.

For others, the safety of the group allowed them to "step outside their comfort zone" and their customary ways of looking at situations. Some participants suggested that as a result of "letting

their guard down," they were they able to see a challenging situation in a new light and identify more effective ways of addressing it.

A number of interviewees linked confidentiality to increased learning. Some described their roundtable as a safe place to admit what they don't know and need or want to learn. The dynamics of the roundtable were compared to other meetings and typical training environments where "nobody would want to raise their hand and admit they don't know something." Members of various groups indicated that "a great number of us feel comfortable admitting when we don't know something." Once participants acknowledged their need to learn more about a particular topic, fellow superintendents and/or the facilitator often shared their knowledge and recommended resources to assist with that learning process.

Collaborative and constructively critical approaches to problem-solving enable leaders to analyze issues and devise strategies with the guidance of peers and a skilled facilitator

As the group begins to address a particular issue raised by a participant, the first task is to develop a solid understanding of the matter, including the participant's perspectives on the history and context: "Someone will share a situation that is going on – then, there'll be a whole series of questions from people trying to understand and make sure they have a comprehensive view." The facilitator often takes a lead role in eliciting further information from the speaker:

> *The facilitator asks, "What is this issue about? Where did it come from? Let's talk about it." He develops a framework for the conversation – first, describing the issue more thoroughly. He's trained in eliciting responses from people. There are certain things he'll pick up on because he's trained in doing this. You start with a level of frustration in your voice; he picks up on it. He can hear it: "Tell me more about that." He'll ask question after question and bring you further and further out.*

The facilitator ensures that the issue is understood in sufficient detail, and then asks the speaker what type of input he/she would like from the group:

> *It's always at the lead of the person who brought the issue to the table to describe what they want the result to be. [If the person says,] "I'm looking for tangible examples of how to solve this problem," then we as a team are unleashed and the facilitator will say, "Okay, who has had experience with this? What do you think would help this person in this situation?" It progresses like that for all the topics.*

Several interviewees emphasized that the facilitator ensures that the process is carried out in a manner that is "respectful of what that person wants" in terms of feedback from others. In some cases, participants noted, the facilitator will "just keep asking people questions until they've figured it out themselves."

This collaborative approach involves the whole group in defining and analyzing the problem, before seeking solutions:

Instead of jumping in and trying to fix something, we listen quite a bit as part of the initial discussion. We try not to be Mr. Fixit: "Well, If I was in that situation, I would do this" … which doesn't necessarily get to the root of the issue. We ask questions and analyze the situation. I think it's very effective.

At the request of the participant who raised the issue for discussion, "we work together as a collaborative group along with the facilitator to come up with other ways that a fellow superintendent's leadership challenge might be tackled in a positive way." The resulting discussion can take the form of brainstorming: "'Here are some things that I've tried in my park.' Or, the facilitator may say, 'I have some information here that might be helpful to you as we look at this.'"

When appropriate, roundtable colleagues offer constructively critical feedback. Interviewees noted that, if necessary, participants provide support by helping a peer see how he/she could have handled a situation more effectively. As one superintendent explained, "A lot of times you network with someone that you're comfortable with, and they'll tell you what you want to hear. This provides a different environment. You may not hear what you want to hear." Another interviewee added, "We're giving back to one another, [in part by] asking the difficult questions."

Interviewees noted the practical outcomes of analyzing issues and devising response strategies in this sort of a facilitated group setting. For one, the facilitator often urges the individual who raised the issue to articulate the course of action he/she intends to take as a result of the group discussion:

The facilitator [challenges] each of us as participants to really step up and decide what we're going to do as leaders. He asks, "What do you plan to do? What's the leadership choice you're going to make here?" He doesn't imply there's a right or wrong answer – but I really think it's good that he doesn't just allow this to remain at the conceptual or theoretical level. He recognizes that leadership is often about making tough choices, and one of the things he does well as a facilitator is force us to that point of choosing: "What are you going to do to help move this issue forward?"

Many interviewees emphasized that the effectiveness of this means of problem-solving. Some also considered the efficiency of the learning that occurs in such a highly interactive process:

It's a professionally efficient model. It's intensely interactive, which to me is the most efficient learning style there is. It's all-day everyday thinking on your feet, engaging your head and your skills in how you help someone else solve a problem. This is the only place I know where you are part of the team that works with somebody who's trying to solve an issue. There's a whole different level when you're looking at someone across the table who you respect as a peer superintendent who is struggling with something. You're sitting there trying to think – what have I learned? How can I help them? That's a whole

different world. We're mentoring and coaching [each other] with a facilitator there teaching us how to do it well.

In addition to helping address the issue raised for discussion, participants appreciated the preparation this experience provides for challenges they may encounter in the future: "The opportunity to hear how other superintendents employ particular strategies or tried to resolve issues. It gives me a bank of other people's experiences to draw from." Another interviewee recognized that the depth of understanding that occurs in roundtable discussions enables "you to move into your job with much more intimate knowledge about how you are going to handle situations."

Application of new knowledge and implementation of strategies are advanced, given that participants "report back" to peers on a regular basis regarding progress made on previously discussed issues

Participants reported that they to keep track of the larger issues that roundtable colleagues are facing in their parks. "When we're talking about a situation, we're dealing with real life stories – so it sticks. When you come back to the next session, you go around the table … and you get the rest of the story."

Every time we meet, there's a question that starts us all off. How are you doing? How is your staff doing? Most of us keep track of each other's parks, because [through the annual roundtable sessions] we're all there with you. Has that resolved? Every time we get together that pulse is taken. Where have you progressed? Where have things been difficult? Those are the questions we ask ourselves when we sit down. The SLR team checks back with you, so you have this feedback loop over time.

In addition to following up with each other at the next annual roundtable, some interviewees indicated that they tend to "check up on one another as to how we're doing with addressing certain issues" during the group's quarterly phone calls, in one-one-one phone conversations, and at other NPS meetings. "If we're going to a conference, we try to get together. We often celebrate what's working and get updates on what didn't work. Sometimes it's a continuation of helping resolve a specific issue someone."

A number of interviewees outlined how they apply newly acquired skills and concepts between annual sessions:

We'll go through a session where we learn some new techniques or models that the facilitator brings to us. I then go back and attempt to use those. As a lifelong learner, you want to try something, step back, evaluate it, refine it, and improve it. The following year, we come back and get some feedback.

Some participants contrasted this approach to successive learning over multiple years with a typical "one shot" class:

The continuity of being with the same group and going through these learning situations together year after year, [means that] we're building on the learning. With a standard

class, you go to class and then you're done. You don't see those people again. You're on your own for applying it.

In the words of one interviewee, "For me personally, SLR is a continual loop of learning and growing."

The opportunity for roundtable members to "test new theories and techniques" back in their parks, provided fodder for subsequent learning among the group:

Once a year may be the right frequency for getting a booster shot of discussing leadership issues, because you go back [to your park] and practice. A year later you come back and report to the group. It's a great way to learn about human reaction. If the group recommends a direction to try or something to practice, they really want to know what was said: "How did you say it? How did they react to it? Did you follow up on it, or did you just say it one time and figure that everything's going to be fine from then on out?" The discussions become really in-depth.

Follow-up discussions based on one participant's implementation efforts enabled the lessons learned to be shared for the benefit of the full group.

The facilitator reminds us that we said certain things in the last session. We go over the commitments that we made to each other or to ourselves and go around the room. We're tasked with reporting on things that we said we were going to do back in our parks.

In addition to following up on the progress that individuals made regarding previously discussed issues, some interviewees pointed to an expectation of broader growth and development:

The advantage is the continual renewal each year of those leadership techniques and relationships. It's not a one-time class; it's a continual maturing of your skill set. You can count on the continuity from year to year and your growth and development with the same group of people. Otherwise, you go to a class, you check the box, and maybe you're not even necessarily holding yourself accountable for whether you achieved something [as a result]. In SLR, there's an expectation that you are going to grow over time. An interesting group dynamic happens when somebody hasn't grown. At some point in the conversation, the group may self-manage. It becomes a two-way conversation within the group [regarding how best to move forward].

On a few occasions, after a group had offered substantial guidance to an individual regarding a given challenge, roundtable colleagues signaled to a participant that he/she may need to take more responsibility for developing the leadership capacities necessary to address the issue at hand.

Trust among participants increases over time, which supports deeper learning as the group convenes for successive meetings over multiple years

The dynamics within roundtables appear to evolve over time. Many interviewees emphasized the importance of having substantial amounts of time to get to know each other well:

One of the factors that helps to make the dynamic occur is time. If the people don't have time to get to know one another, there's no way we're going to be able to have serious discussions. As human beings, there are certain things we have to do to make us feel comfortable and allow us to move on to the next level – and the Leadership Roundtable provides that mechanism. It's one of the only Park Service trainings where a lot of attention has been given to this.

As participants got to know each other better, many experienced greater openness and trust among the group: "You know you'll see each other once a year, and you get that comfort level of being able to talk about whatever you need to talk about."

Interviewees observed how relationships developed and strengthened over the course of multiple meetings, as described in the following account:

You have to do some trust building, some getting to know one another, in the very beginning as the group comes together. After it gets to a certain point, it hits a critical mass. Then, everybody sighs and feels more comfortable letting things out. I remember in our first meeting, one of the superintendents in our group was very guarded. And by the end of the week, the dynamic was seriously changing. A relationship was starting to form amongst all of us. By the second time we came together, we were in a different mode. There was a huge difference from the first go-around. Most of the guards were dropped, and we were quickly able to get into discussions about much more serious things and heavier stuff that people were carrying around. It was very interesting, because I watched how this particular superintendent has come around. In the first week, I wasn't sure he was going to stay with us. I wasn't sure if he wanted to venture into this realm – but by the second time we came together, I think he recognized its value and was even waiting to talk about something.

A number of participants pointed to the momentum that was created by having two meetings in the first year: "It really helped that we met twice in the first year, because we needed to do that to build up a little steam in the program."

Interviewees also witnessed "an evolution of the topics" that their groups addressed over the years:

Initially, we focused on basic issues within our parks that were difficult to deal with as leaders. Over the years, we've focused more on where we're at as leaders. We're dealing with issues on a more personal level – issues like change, where I see myself going as a leader, what are the challenges that I see in myself, what are the improvements that I

need to make. How can I change my approach in park leadership to build a more effective and open organization? As we've spent more time together, we've even gotten into issues such as balancing personal life with work life. As we've gone through the years [and developed] a rising comfort level, we've gotten deeper in our topics.

Some participants noted a direct link between the degree of trust developed within the groups and the deeper learning and development that results: "You get to know people better as the years go by, and there is a big sense of trust amongst everyone. That fosters effective self-reflection and [enables us to share] constructive criticism." Annual roundtable sessions provided a rare opportunity to engage in such open and honest dialogue:

> *As superintendents, we play a diplomatic role in the public eye and with our staff. When we get together in our groups, that goes out the window. There's a high level of trust, so we're able to really express our fears, our concerns, our thoughts openly. And quite honestly, our thoughts sometimes change because we've heard feedback from other people.*

A fellow superintendent even described a cumulative impact that she has observed in her roundtable: "By years four and five of our group, the relationships were built to such a great degree that we're now benefiting exponentially from each other's experiences."

B. Leadership Capacities Gained from the SLR Program

All interviewees found value in the SLR program, and many indicated that it was one of the most valuable leadership development opportunities they had experienced. The particular knowledge and skills gained from participating in the program varied from one individual to the next – as expected given the mix of participants' backgrounds and length of time in the program, along with variations in the specific content addressed by a given roundtable group. Nonetheless, a broad cross-section of superintendents reported that their leadership capacities have been enhanced in several of the following ways as a result of participating in SLR:

1. Increased Knowledge of Leadership Concepts and Models that Inform Practice

Many interviewees reported that they had used selected leadership materials introduced by the facilitator or roundtable colleagues to improve their leadership of their parks. Some kept a notebook of resources received through the SLR program accessible for ease of reference:

> *I came [to my current position] armed with a book of all the materials that had been provided during that first SLR. I use those even today as a resource when I'm feeling stuck on something. I refer to things that get me back on track in terms of how to lead or how to improve a situation.*

[See page 19 for a listing of some of the topics discussed in roundtables.]

A number of participants described how they had applied particular concepts and models, as illustrated in the following two examples:

One of the things that I immediately used when I got back [from my roundtable meeting] is the decision process – defining the problem, problem analysis, and then you go into decision-making, implementation, and adjusting. So many times we're guilty of not getting down to what the real problem is. … We're starting a general management plan. We've done our internal and external scoping, and we're at the point right now where we're acknowledging some of the decision points. So I immediately went back to the decision model that the facilitator shared with us. I'm a person who likes to get things fixed quickly and move on. It's made me aware that before I go into fix-it mode, I need to be sure I know what I'm fixing.

We learned the concept of shadow power. I brought that straight back to this office. I've been through a lot of leadership training, and I'd never heard it explained that way. I didn't even know what it was, and I was surrounded by it in this park. Shadow power is [held by] a person on your staff who garners a lot of power from their peers, the community, or the larger region – and they are not on your side as a new incoming leader. Winning their support is critical for you to have a team that's going to stand behind you and move forward. The shadow power [discussion] taught me that you want them as close to you as possible, so you can understand when and how they're going to sabotage you – or you win them over. It takes a while, and now we have a tremendously successful leadership team with very high performers. That was a three-year long result of understanding shadow power.

In other cases, the use of knowledge gained through SLR was less immediate. Several superintendents indicated that certain concepts initially struck them as simply interesting pieces of information. However, they later identified ways in which they could apply the concept to inform changes they needed to make in their parks.

For some, exposure to new leadership content fostered a desire for additional learning and piqued their interest in the field of leadership:

There's a wonderful leadership blog in a magazine for government executives. I read that because it's very short, pithy, and full of all sorts of wonderful knowledge. I probably wouldn't be even vaguely interested in reading that if I weren't in roundtable. I try to [pull up the blog] at least once a week and read something short, because now leadership is part of my makeup.

Several others found that they were intrigued by a particular topic, such as emotional intelligence, and sought additional resources to further inform their understanding of how it could enhance their leadership.

In addition, a number of participants shared these newly acquired resources with their staff, particularly members of their management team, as indicated in the following example:

A lot of those reference materials I brought back to the leadership team in my park –

models for communication, decision-making, and group dynamics. It really has helped a great deal. … Now, members of the management team are thinking, "How can we share resources? What benefit will that give to the park as a whole?" That's been a real mind shift.

Some SLR participants realized that they often weave references to various leadership concepts into conversations with colleagues: "In talking with my management team and other superintendents, I often find myself prefacing a comment with, 'As we discussed at roundtable ….' People are impressed by the depth of learning and the focus that we're bringing towards leadership."

2. Greater Awareness of One's Leadership Strengths, Challenges, and Areas for Improvement

Many interviewees indicated that their participation in the program had significantly enhanced their self-awareness. As one participant stated, "I understand myself better as a result of SLR." In particular, superintendents often credited the program with giving them a better understanding of how they are perceived by others and how their actions contribute to certain challenges.

Let's say you've been having an issue of some kind. You explain it, and as is human nature, we explain it in a way that makes us look best. And the facilitator probes and prods us to show that maybe we're not the hero in this film. Things that we do have an effect that we don't necessarily want, and it's not necessarily the fault of that other person. It may well come from us – and we may be the ones that need to change. It's tough stuff sometimes.

Another superintendent described how a roundtable discussion prompted a clear realization of her role in a particular difficulty she encountered in the park:

One time, our facilitator looked at me and he said, "When are you going to own up to your responsibility in that decision?" Having somebody ask me that got me out of this denial that it wasn't me, it was all them. So I often reflect back to that session and think, okay, maybe I need to own up to what I did or didn't do. That was a huge flash for me.

This sort of in-depth analysis helped increase self-awareness and, in turn, enhanced some participants' abilities to regulate their reactions in the midst of future challenges.

Roundtable sessions often examined leadership styles, including the benefits and drawbacks associated with various approaches. Some groups elected to use the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) as a self-assessment tool. Participants from those groups often gained a much better understanding of themselves and "where other people are coming from." As one superintendent explained, the "MBTI work has real value in giving you an appreciation for who's around the table and how things are being interpreted."

Greater awareness of one's leadership tendencies enabled some participants to change course when needed. In the words of one superintendent, "SLR showed me the mirror."

Members of her roundtable shared the following observation with her: "As a very gentle person, you don't come across as someone who takes control of anything – so your staff never feels really reassured that you're in charge." Her SLR colleagues helped her see that "part of your job as a leader is that you need to reassure your team that you're competent." She explained that she was working to adapt "so my team sees the behaviors that make them feel comfortable. SLR taught me a lot of that."

A fellow superintendent described how awareness of personality types and preferences gave her important insights that informed interactions with a member of her management team:

I've found myself going back to those Myers-Briggs documents over and over to work on developing some of my non-preferred zone. I have been trying to be empathic and compassionate and all those things that I would not have done if we hadn't had those tests. There's one person on the management team who is exactly opposite of me – he's a "feeling introvert." Had it not been for my participation in roundtable, I probably would have totally steamrollered him. It really has been helpful to understand that introverts process information differently. Because of roundtable, I knew what was going on and I was able to take action – which is not to say I've been totally successful in the whole deal, but I'm better than I would have been.

Another leader described how this sort of self-assessment positioned her to better manage high stakes negotiations with a powerful partner agency:

One of the things I've learned from SLR is how I am wired – I tend to sit back and process and then come up with responses. That's just how I work. I really had to change that around when meeting with [this partner agency] – because if I didn't respond to them quickly, there could have been some poor results for [my park]. I was able to recognize that I couldn't fall back into my regular self and sit and think about this. I had to let them know right up front that we were going to have some hard discussions now. I wouldn't have been able to do that if I hadn't had that intensive understanding of who I am as a leader. That was a big "aha moment" for me.

Some interviewees stated that enhanced self-awareness was the most important benefit they derived from their participation in SLR. For instance, several superintendents suggested that SLR had helped them grow into their potential as leaders. Roundtable discussions enabled some to identify their greatest strengths and interests, which helped determine what directions would be most rewarding to pursue in terms of their future endeavors as leaders.

3. Enhanced Ability to Coach Individual Staff Members and the Park's Management Team

Many participants adopted coaching techniques modeled by the facilitator in their interactions with individual staff.

There's nothing more rewarding than having a staff member that you've been sharing this leadership information with say, "I'm thinking about something and I want to run it

*by you." Normally, I'd say, "'Oh no, don't do that" or "yeah, you should move forward."
[Instead,] I'll step back. I'll ask some questions. I'll do what [our facilitator] has done with
us.*

A fellow participant noted that a coaching approach may run counter to one's instincts but
provides a greater benefit in the long run:

*As superintendents, if somebody comes to us with a problem, we tend to want to solve it
for them. It's much better to ask them questions and try to help them come up with a
solution to the problem. That's how a person grows. In the past, I didn't necessarily know
the questions to ask, or how deeply to delve.*

Another superintendent concluded, "I manage people better since I've been in the roundtable.
It really gets down to the relationships, and I think I'm a far better supervisor than I was
before." In addition, several interviewees have applied these acquired techniques to their
mentoring of colleagues in other sites.

A number of participants described how they had learned more effective strategies for
working with their management teams:

*Everyone does management team meetings. Typically, they're weekly meetings and we
go around the table. Here's what I did this week: I did X amount of widgets and ordered
this and installed that. That's managing. People roll their eyes; they aren't enthused.
During one of the roundtables, we talked about a book, <u>Death by Meeting</u>. I bought
several copies, gave them to the division chiefs and now our meetings are run a lot more
effectively. Basically, we have a park-wide topic that we talk about during an hour
meeting. We're moving toward leadership. We still submit the what'd-you-do-this-week
information prior to the meeting. If anything needs to be talked about, it's talked about.
Then, we move right to that topic and solve something for the park in that hour meeting.
Everyone leaves saying, "That was an effective meeting." They're charged up; they're
feeling part of a team. Just doing that type of meeting versus the old style meeting, I saw
a complete change in the staff. It's phenomenal. And without that SLR experience, I still
would have been going around the table.*

Several interviewees indicated that the performance of their management team had risen
significantly after applying strategies discussed in their roundtables.

*When I walk in the door, everybody wants a piece of me because they have a problem
they want me to fix instantaneously. I heard some of the senior superintendents say that
when the division chiefs came in with an issue and wanted them to resolve it, they'd say,
"Let's bring that to a meeting with all the division chiefs." As the superintendent, they
would say, "Here's a problem that's been brought to my attention. I'm going to leave the
room and I want you, the management team, to discuss various ways of addressing this.
When I come back, I want to hear what you've come up with." Usually, when one
division chief is coming up with an issue, it has connections to other divisions.
Sometimes, they don't want you to talk about that with anybody else. They're hoping
they can work out some smooth little deal that will give them some advantage over the*

other divisions. By doing this, it lets everybody know you're not going to play that game. There is more open dialogue and team solutions to issues. It also teaches them not to come trotting to my door expecting an immediate answer. I started implementing that back in my park, and it changed the dynamics very quickly.

These two examples illustrate how some ideas gleaned from roundtable discussions significantly improved communication patterns within participants' parks.

One superintendent reflected on how she had decided to include park managers in the hiring of a new member of the management team:

We have a critical vacancy right now. I decided that we're going to fly some people in and the entire management team is going to interview them – so it's our decision, not just my decision. It's definitely because of SLR. That's not something I would have even considered 10 years ago. … If you're going to have a management team, how is it that one person gets to make all the decisions about hiring? Everybody needs to be involved. In the Park Service, there has been all this discussion about teamwork, but when I looked at my work unit, it was incredibly hierarchical. In SLR, we were able to talk about teamwork in a way that makes it possible to model different ways of doing things.

Another superintendent described a major, multiyear organizational change effort that was informed in part by the knowledge and skills gained through her roundtable:

After I got here, it was really apparent that some kind of strategic organizational change was required – personnel structure, finances – you name it. There were all these things that needed fixing, but how do you go about doing it? People had worked together for 15 years, and everything was entrenched. The SLR helped to inform the process in which that change occurred. We had to figure out the range of commitment to change: Who on my team wanted to see change? Who was going to be resistant to change? How to bring them along. In some ways, it involved our partners and their willingness to change. We had to identify the steps that were necessary to get alignment in the organization. We slowly moved toward what the region recognizes as a very successful organization. I would attribute part of that to the work that was done through the SLR.

4. Improved Communication Skills, Particularly for Dealing with Complex and/or Difficult Situations

Participants often credited their SLR experience with enhancing their communication skills:

Our group has looked at the different ways that people communicate, how we communicate, and the reactions we get from people. I've paid a lot of attention to communication as a tool – insuring that I constantly work to improve my communication methods, so that I'm clear that what I'm saying is in fact what people have heard.

Many interviewees cited a greater ability to listen well and "ask the right questions" to gain a deeper understanding of complex issues before acting. The ability to "slow down" and engage

in more active listening was mentioned often.

Several participants reflected on the fact that they have become more comfortable in dealing with sensitive discussions, including those that involve disagreement:

I'm more open to being challenged on decisions I'm making – or on the decision-making process. I'm much more comfortable in my skin now. Just because I'm the superintendent doesn't mean I don't have faults and biases. I believe my staff feel comfortable saying, "I don't agree." Or, "I'm having a hard time seeing this, could you tell me again what you were thinking?" It's really great.

The following comment offers another instance in which these enhanced communication skills are being put into practice:

Now, when I'm confronted with a personnel issue and I have two opposing points of view from people that I respect on my management team, I can sit down with both folks and get their honest assessments. It's almost like they can talk to each other through me, and sometimes they reach their own decisions without me having to do it for them. I've seen our roundtable facilitator and other [members of the group] do it. It's a very powerful thing.

Others observed that they are now better able to address difficult issues by "recognizing the sensitivity of them, but communicating in a more direct way" than they had previously.

Some interviewees noted improvements in their ability to communicate diplomatically, particularly when dealing with highly charged political issues that involve the NPS leadership, the media, and/or members of Congress:

I have a better understanding of communication at different levels: When to call, when to email, when to go down there in person – the importance of all the different communication styles, and when you use what most effectively. That was part of a roundtable session, which you'd think was basic – but when you're a superintendent for the first time, knowing how to get heard effectively is very important. I learned a lot from that, and I've been using it ever since.

This superintendent referred to this learning as "a refinement of communication skills" that enabled her to communicate "more carefully and correctly."

A few superintendents alluded to controversies they had experienced and appreciated how the SLR program helped position them to respond more appropriately:

I've been in a few controversies over the past year or two where I've had to stand up to some powerful people. SLR [has helped me learn to] stay calm and think before acting. Trying to see something from someone else's perspective has enabled me to communicate my feelings and thoughts on the situation diplomatically and to leave those meetings feeling like my integrity is intact. I wouldn't have done as good a job at that if it weren't for the roundtable.

Another interviewee said, "I've learned now how to [raise critical questions] in a larger group without it being offensive or putting people in a defensive situation." Many participants felt that, when necessary, they were better able to deliver information in constructively critical ways.

The roundtable facilitators were credited with modeling effective communication strategies. As one participant declared, "I've learned a great deal about facilitating meetings just by observing our facilitator. … It's a really handy tool for superintendents to have." Others appreciated that the communications skills they were developing in their roundtable meetings enabled them to more effectively use technical knowledge received in supervisory and management trainings:

> *It's one thing to have the technical skills – the nuts and bolts of how you do X, Y and Z. But SLR helps you think through the practical process: How do you apply the nuts and bolts in a compassionate yet direct, consistent, and fair manner? How does that really play out on the ground – [when you're] sitting across the table from an employee?*

In some instances, roundtable discussions were viewed as "picking up where training leaves off" by enhancing the communication skills necessary to more effectively act on that knowledge.

5. Enhanced Ability to Develop Effective Relationships with Surrounding Communities and Partner Organizations

Some participants gained a greater appreciation for the possibilities and potential value of partnerships based on discussions with their peers. For instance, one superintendent decided to more thoroughly identify the stakeholders in the surrounding communities and analyze the various stakes involved – for both the park and its stakeholders. Another recalled,

> *Getting out in the community is something that I really stalled on as a new superintendent. I was being challenged [by members of my roundtable] to take an account of what partnerships I had out there. I've been able to forge relationships that weren't there in the past, and I definitely can thank the superintendents who were out there doing it already for encouragement.*

A senior superintendent reflected on how her involvement in the program led her to become more intentional and proactive regarding her communication with surrounding communities:

> *I require that we communicate with our neighboring communities before we make significant changes to the way we do things that would impact them. … Would I have done that years ago? I don't think so. I don't think I would have seen as much value as I see now. Part of that's from interaction with the facilitator and other SLR participants as they've talked about how they've dealt with sticky issues. We need to recognize that we're not an island, and we've got park neighbors and communities adjacent to us. In order for us to be successful, we need to make sure that we're keeping them informed.*

She outlined how the park was engaging in dialogue with a wide array of area stakeholders to consider how best to implement an upcoming policy change that was required to protect the park's natural resources.

Other interviewees drew on the experiences of fellow roundtable members to devise more effective strategies for engaging partners and surrounding communities. By listening to other superintendents and learning from their successes and challenges, participants were able to make some adjustments in how they interacted with their partners and communities.

> *Our friends group has been struggling for quite a while, and I realized that they kept saying, "It's the National Park Service." And I had to turn it around and say, "No, you're a partner. It's 50/50 here. It's your Friends group assisting us, and we're here to support you in any way we can." And it worked out really well. … But be careful what you ask for! The members took it to heart, and now I have two huge proposals that they would like to work on. All of a sudden, they want to start fundraising for a new building that we need. … So I got what I wanted, and I think they got what they wanted. And I can attribute that to what I've learned about leadership from the SLR – it was [a matter of] leading instead of managing them.*

In the words of one interviewee, "SLR gave me the confidence to use my creativity to expand our partnerships and build community outreach, whereas before I used more traditional government-ese ways of building partnerships." A fellow participant shared a specific way in which peers provided the impetus for a more creative approach to community outreach:

> *The community that I'm associated with sometimes has a love-hate relationship with the park. People in my roundtable suggested I start writing an article, maybe on a monthly basis… Most people in the community read the local newspaper, and the response I received was tremendous: "Oh, I saw your article." That helped open up understanding of why we did things a certain way. That has been tremendously helpful for setting the record straight and squelching rumors. It's something I could implement very easily, it didn't cost anything, and it has been successful.*

Given the remarkable results achieved from an easily implemented approach, the superintendent "continually thanked the individuals who suggested it."

Several roundtable members indicated that they have used their enhanced communication skills and understanding of group dynamics to inform their interactions with current and potential partner organizations, as illustrated in the following two examples:

> *I always need help in judging a group and [determining] how to deal with them. And that's exactly the type of thing that comes up in the roundtable – how to read a group [and determine] what they want from the park or from the National Park Service. I've been paying more attention to how they ask questions and where they choose to ask questions. [Do they ask questions] one-on-one? Or, who is it in front of? Those kinds of things have been very helpful.*

I've been able to use techniques and models that the facilitator has shared with us when interacting with partner organizations and local jurisdictions. They may have a very specific issue, and it's [a matter of] listening to what they think the issue is and asking questions: "What is it that you would like to work with us to do?" It's provided me a little more patience in working with partner groups, but yet still feel like I'm not compromising what we need to do.

6. Increased Confidence and Ability to Lead at Higher Levels and Transition into New Responsibilities

The skills, knowledge, and peer support acquired through the SLR program helped bolster participants' confidence in their ability to lead at a higher level than they had previously:

It boosts confidence because you've got people in the SLR who you respect and who know what it takes to do your job as superintendent. Often, we're our own worst critics, but we make each other stop and reflect back on the positive things that we have done, because rarely will we take the time to do that ourselves.

A cross-section of superintendents with wide-ranging experience levels gained greater confidence through their participation in the program. A newer superintendent shared the following perspective:

SLR has been one of the foundational training programs that has launched me as a superintendent. Because I had such a good foundation, I'm doing a great job. If my foundation had been shaky, I'm not so sure I would have had the confidence. As women, I think we second-guess ourselves – and the SLR has allowed me to eliminate a lot of that second-guessing, to be really purposeful in what I do, and to ensure that the intent is clear.

Several interviewees noted that they have exceeded their earlier expectations of what they could accomplish in leading their current parks: "SLR has given me the skills to take the park I'm currently at further than I thought I could have taken it through teamwork development, sharing the vision, and different techniques that I've learned from my peers in SLR."

This added level of confidence was seen as particularly important for many of those who were weighing the possibility of moving into a position of greater responsibility:

SLR reinforced that I could in fact step up to a larger superintendency. It helped me understand that I did have the skills, knowledge, and abilities to be successful in this position. Reaffirming my confidence, reaffirming my skills, helping me know that I had a safety net of people who were going to insure that I could be successful.

As another participant explained, "It has helped build confidence in applying for positions of greater complexity. You're learning leadership techniques, but in addition to that, you've got a cadre of friends and colleagues and people that support you. They're almost like cheerleaders." One interviewee added a bit of levity in describing the realization that he might be just as

capable as some of his roundtable colleagues: "I said, 'If these guys can do it, I can do it.' They're bright, but each one of them has their own little idiosyncrasies – we all do." Recognizing that senior leaders had progressed through a similar career trajectory helped give him the confidence to take on a new position with a higher degree of responsibility. In addition, some participants reported that SLR helped them effectively navigate the transition from one park to another: "SLR raised my awareness about how to transition – how to leave one place so that hopefully you're setting up the staff and partners up and the new person coming in for success."

Interviewees drew courage from the examples set by their colleagues, particularly those who had successfully tackled difficult issues confronting their parks.

> *I've taken a lot of courage from other superintendents who have tackled some pretty sticky wickets. I'm thinking, okay, I'm a superintendent; they're a superintendent. People don't look at our grades. They don't look at our experience. They look at our title and what we represent, so I need to get out there and field some of these issues as well.*

Another participant reported, "the opportunity to interact with a group of peers and exchange ideas has served as a useful reminder of my leadership responsibilities and inspires me to develop the courage to deal with difficult situations."

In addition, many participants serve as members of regional and national committees. Several pointed to specific ways in which their involvement in SLR empowered them to assert greater leadership on regional and national levels.

> *The SLR experience continues to give me confidence and leadership skills to improve what I do on a regional level. Oftentimes, I will see a void – and due to the confidence and development of additional skills, I am prepared to step up and take a leadership role in the region to get some initiatives moving.*

> *Since joining the SLR, I have become more involved with regional committees and task forces – and then from there, jumped up to more of a national level. I think the organizational skills that I've learned in the SLR are what made me effective [and enabled me] to move up in my leadership. Without knowing how you operate in those settings, which I learned from SLR, I don't think I would have gotten to that level.*

A number of SLR participants serve on their regional leadership councils and observed a degree of cross-fertilization. Members of a given roundtable sometimes compared notes and shared lessons learned about what was working on their respective regional leadership councils. In addition, when a council included members of different roundtables, they sometimes drew on similar knowledge and skills gained through SLR to enhance the working of the council.

Beyond the defined responsibilities that participants held in the parks and on regional or national committees, several interviewees described how they have come to see their roles as leaders in broader terms. For instance, a participant noted feeling more "empowered" to bring issues to the attention of "people in the agency who are above me, that I used to be

intimidated by." Others have initiated discussion among colleagues about how they contribute to larger-scale change in the agency:

> *What are our roles in terms of building alignment within the larger organization? When we hear people saying "The Park Service ought to do that, or the Park Service ought to do this," there are people in the SLR who are saying, "We are the Park Service. So if you're saying the Park Service ought to do this, let's have a conversation about what can we do to affect that." If we see that there's an opportunity or an issue or something that should be addressed on a regional or national scale, then we have a responsibility to try to address that.*

One superintendent articulated how her perspective as a leader has shifted: "SLR has really opened up a new world to me as far as being not only a leader in the park but wanting to mentor new superintendents and provide leadership in the region and nationwide."

7. Greater Knowledge and Understanding of the Service as a Whole

Learning more about parks of different sizes and types increased appreciation for the ways in which various issues might affect other units in the national park system. As one interviewee explained, "It gives you perspective on what everybody else is going through. The larger parks get a better understanding of what the smaller parks are going through, and the smaller parks hear the perspective coming from the larger parks." Thus, in addition to the leadership skills and confidence that SLR participants bring to their work on regional and national committees, they also bring a broader perspective on the Service as a result of the diversity of parks represented in their roundtables:

> *I serve on a national workgroup. SLR really opens up the opportunity for me to be able to speak to issues in multiple parks. I can speak not just to [my park's] experience, but to the experiences of those in smaller parks. I can bring forward the needs of those parks, which is a benefit to those units, and I think to the national program as well. Too often, the biggest parks have the loudest voice and get their needs met – and the smaller units' needs aren't heard because they don't have that type of advocacy and forum.*

A similar observation was shared by a fellow participant:

> *I've served on three or four national taskforces and several within the region. It's helped me to be able to get out of my own thinking about a subject and bring in a broader perspective. It's an opportunity for me to get broader input on strategies or policies that may be coming out and to help influence them at a very early stage. … Too often, some small select group of people were designated to create some kind of national policy or process. SLRs provide an opportunity to realize how [policies and processes] impact different sized parks or different communities within the Service.*

Roundtable discussions sometimes led to greater understanding of decisions being made at the national level and consideration of how service-wide initiatives could be addressed in individual parks.

We spend time sharing knowledge among ourselves about Park Service processes, such as reporting requirements. It's a big system. And it's really hard to develop tools that are going to work perfectly for everybody. So no park fits exactly. In our roundtable, there is a nice mix of big parks and little parks and eastern parks and western parks, so we're able to pool our knowledge. Those discussions are incredibly helpful.

Others noted that conversations among members of the group often help fill in some of the gaps in the communication that occur in a large and widely dispersed system, such as between the Washington office and the field.

A number of interviewees indicated that the geographic diversity of roundtable participants fostered information sharing across regions: "Comparing notes has been really valuable. It's been enlightening to get a feel for how different regions of our organization apply policy."

Having a cross-representation from all the regions, I became aware of how different our regions are. That cross-country perspective of the SLR is invaluable. For every technical initiative we've had to deal with, like the scorecard, every region approached it differently and every region had different insights about why they were applying it the way they were. As a team of folks, we could better understand where our leadership is at.

As another interviewee explained, "We're getting more of a national view of some topics. It has been invaluable to hear how other regions handle and address a particular issue. We're taking examples back to our own region to talk about."

Many interviewees gained a "bigger picture" perspective through interactions with roundtable colleagues who work in other parks and regions:

Because you're in touch with the whole country – hearing what's happening at the field level and in regional offices across the country – it gives you a sense of one Service. It's an opportunity to stay in touch with "the big Park Service" instead of being here in [this park] and this region and feeling like all I really know is what's going on here.

Others echoed the benefit of "knowing what the larger organization is doing" and having a better sense of how their efforts in a given park "fit into the rest of the organization."

The Park Service is a loosely affiliated confederation of units within a larger agency, and my park has its own culture [based on] its own experience. The differences between parks are sometimes substantial, but it's really [a matter of] scope and scale. There's a lot of commonality. So there's an ability to affiliate superintendents with one another through these experiences that are common despite this great diversity. It's invaluable to talk with folks and understand, how is it that we are one agency? How is it that we share one mission and all these common values within a context of so much complexity across a large geographic scale, and a large scope of diversity from natural to cultural to historic?

Dialogue on these topics that occurred within roundtables provided an opportunity for participants to enhance their connection to the broader scope and mission of the Service. Many interviewees referenced how regionally focused the Service is, and they were grateful that SLR enables them to connect with peers from other regions: "There's not a lot of opportunities for interaction between your colleagues across the country even though we're a National Park Service. It is really valuable that it is a national program."

C. Limitations and Challenges Identified by Participants

Study participants did not identify major limitations associated with the program's structure or implementation. The following issues were identified as challenges for the sustainability of SLR and for realizing the program's full potential for building NPS leadership capacity.

1) Participation

a) Interest exceeds available slots for participation

Interviewees often indicated that the number of superintendents who have expressed interest in becoming a member of a roundtable exceeds the spaces available for participation. Over the years, the number of applicants has been greater than the number of openings for new participants. As a result, some applicants have not been accepted. Some interviewees reported that either they or their colleagues were not selected the first time they applied, but were admitted after applying a second time. Current roundtable members indicated that they know of colleagues who would like to participate and are eagerly awaiting the next call for applications. Many interviewees recognized that SLR's capacity, like that of many programs, is limited by the available resources. However, some expressed the hope that over the coming years capacity could be expanded to include a greater number of superintendents who would like participate.

b) This approach to leadership development is not suited to all learning styles

Participants recognized that this type of professional development is not suited to all learning styles and is not of interest to all superintendents. Interviewees often observed that government agencies are generally more accustomed to "one-size-fits-all" approaches to professional development. Therefore, they emphasized that participation in the SLR program should remain voluntary.

c) Funding and travel logistics

Participants indicated that budgetary constraints and travel ceilings created challenges, particularly for superintendents from smaller parks. Several interviewees expressed concern that travel costs could hinder participation on the part of superintendents from smaller parks. Scheduling dates and locations that work for the widely disbursed group of participants and the

facilitator sometimes posed difficulties. One facilitator has set limits on the geographic scope of his travel for roundtable sessions, which has created uneven travel requirements for participants. On a broader scale, interviewees often raised concern about the lack of secure funding for the program.

2) Program Design

a) Limited full-group communication within roundtables between annual sessions

Participants from some groups appreciated the opportunity to talk informally with their fellow roundtable members via periodic conference calls to share updates and stay connected to roundtable colleagues. However, many interviewees did not find sufficient value in the conference calls as they currently function. Some acknowledged that they were unclear about the purpose of the calls. Others noted the challenge of engaging in meaningful discussion via conference call as compared to the face-to-face interaction that occurs in the actual roundtable sessions.

3) Clarity about the SLR program and Support Service-wide

a) Lack of clarity about the SLR program on a Service-wide level

Understanding of the program appears to have improved somewhat in the past couple of years. However, interviewees identified a need to ensure that all superintendents, their supervisors, and other stakeholders are given a clear representation of the SLR program, including its goals and its applicability for superintendents at all experience levels. Many acknowledged the difficulty of describing a program of this nature, particularly in comparison to training that is more structured and familiar to individuals throughout the Service. A number of interviewees recalled having a limited or even somewhat inaccurate understanding of the program until they took part in their first roundtable session.

b) Uneven support for participation in the program across regions and supervisory channels

Interviewees reported considerable variation in the levels of support that potential applicants and roundtable members received from their supervisors regarding participation in the program. For instance, some supervisors actively encouraged superintendents to apply to the program, while others did not. In addition, several superintendents indicated that the level of support they received for participating in the program sometimes shifted in accordance with changes in supervisors.

D. Suggestions for Enhancing the SLR Program

Interviewees were asked to offer suggestions to enhance the SLR program. The following list summarizes the collective perspectives of study participants at the time of the interviews. These suggestions are meant to serve as a compilation of ideas to be considered and to inform the program's development over the coming years. It should be noted that a few of these suggestions were already being implemented at the time this final report was released.

1) Participation

a) Articulate clearer guidelines for participation

Providing applicants and new members with further information about how roundtables function, as discussed above, was seen as an important step in clarifying what individuals are expected to contribute to the group. The level of openness and participatory nature of the process were identified as two areas to be highlighted upfront. Some interviewees suggested that the Institute ensure that all senior superintendents know they are welcome to apply and describe some of the important ways they may be able to contribute to the group. Several participants advised that the selection process be made more transparent. It was also recommended that the Institute emphasize that participants have the option to bow out at any time if they find that the program is not aligned with their current needs or interests and outline the appropriate process for doing so. In addition, interviewees suggested specifying the eligibility criteria so as to avoid uncertainty regarding the implications of a participant moving out of a superintendency into another type of position.

2) Program Design

a) Support more substantial interaction among the full group of roundtable members throughout the year to extend learning and information-sharing

Although most interviewees communicate with one or more of their roundtable colleagues between annual sessions, many expressed a desire to engage in substantial discussion with the larger group at a few points during the year. A number of interviewees expressed interest in and felt that they would benefit from participating in face-to-face roundtable sessions twice a year. At the same time, they often acknowledged that this would not be feasible under the existing time and budgetary constraints faced by the participants, facilitators, and program managers alike. Many interviewees recommended that the purpose of the periodic conference calls be revisited to consider how they could best serve the needs and interests of the groups. Active facilitation of the conference calls was often identified as a way to enhance their value and increase participation, thus enabling them to serve as learning opportunities and more effectively bridge the time between annual face-to-face sessions. Several interviewees raised the possibility of extending the roundtable facilitator's role to include facilitation of two or three conference calls throughout the year. Doing so would support more substantive

information-sharing and provide an opportunity for groups to address particular leadership topics of their choosing. Deeper dialogue on more personal or confidential issues was not seen as being appropriate or feasible for this mode of communication. However, some noted that facilitated conference calls would allow groups to address a content area that could not be accommodated within the time available for the annual session. For instance, a selected leadership concept or model could be presented and discussed, or the group could explore opportunities for leading change in regard to a Service-wide issue or initiative. In addition, a few participants suggested exploring other technological options, such as video conferencing.

b) Ensure that the facilitation strikes the right balance in a couple of key areas

As discussed earlier, the facilitators were widely praised for the knowledge and skills they bring to the roundtables. Nonetheless, there were a couple of ways in which some participants felt the facilitation of their group could be honed. A number of interviewees indicated that they had observed instances in which they felt that the facilitator "pushed too far" when probing issues regarding a challenge faced by a member of the group. Interviewees emphasized that this dynamic occurred infrequently but suggested that the facilitators maintain a high level of awareness and sensitivity to ensure that they strike the right balance in this regard. Another question of balance arose regarding the amount of time and attention devoted to a given topic of discussion. For instance, a number of participants suggested that the facilitator play a more assertive role in moving the discussion forward when an individual talks at length, thus creating a more equal opportunity for participation among the group and ensuring that everyone's interests are getting met.

c) Promote the option for roundtables to organize readings and/or presentations that support leadership dialogue to be explored during a portion of their annual session

In advance of their annual roundtable session, some groups have identified a particular leadership topic they would like to explore through readings, presentations, or case studies during a portion of the meeting. In some instances, groups have arranged for a presentation and discussion with a nearby park manager or an outside speaker. Other times, they have identified a book or article as optional reading to inform the discussion. Participants pointed to the benefits of this approach for more established groups that had previously addressed a variety of foundational leadership issues in their first few years together. Members of groups that had taken this approach often felt that it enriched the discussion and enhanced their learning about a leadership issue of particular interest. A number of interviewees from other groups expressed a desire to try something of this sort in their roundtables. As a result, many suggested that the Institute promote the option for established roundtables to identify in advance a case study that will serve as a focus for part of the annual session. Those who spoke about their interest in this approach generally viewed it as an occasional complement to the peer-to-peer dialogue at the heart of the SLR program and an added opportunity for addressing issues that participants are wrestling with in their own parks.

3) Clarity about the SLR program

a) Clarify SLR's purpose and how it functions to promote greater understanding across the Service

Although understanding of the SLR program appears to have improved recently, interviewees identified a continued need to enhance understanding across the Service. In particular, they emphasized the importance of ensuring that all superintendents, their supervisors, and other stakeholders are given a clear representation of the SLR program – including what SLR is and is not, and how it fits into a "bigger picture" of leadership development. Further clarity about the program's goals and its applicability for superintendents across all experience levels was often requested. It was recommended that the Institute provide more detailed information about how the roundtables function, especially for applicants and new participants. Several interviewees commented that the findings from this qualitative evaluation of the program may contribute to that effort. In addition to enhancing the written materials describing the program, a number of participants suggested that current roundtable members increasingly serve as spokespeople for program. For example, one interviewee suggested that short video clips of participants talking about their perspective on the program could provide a highly effective communication strategy. In addition, several participants expressed interest in hearing the perspectives of Regional Directors who support the program and their reasons for doing so. They felt that this would provide an important perspective on the program's benefits.

4) Program management and funding

a) Secure funding to ensure the program's continuation

Participants often expressed concern that funding for the SLR program has been somewhat tenuous. Given the tremendous value that many derive from their participation, interviewees strongly advocated for the Service to provide secure and sustainable funding to ensure the program's continuation. Many suggested that financial support for the program be provided at the national level while maintaining the Institute's role as program manager. Some hoped that eventually support for the travels costs incurred by participants from smaller parks would be built into the budget to ensure that superintendents from those sites are equally able to participate. Others remarked that SLR now has an established track record in building the leadership capacity of superintendents. As the agency looks to improve leadership Service-wide, many considered SLR to be an essential investment that delivers great value for the cost. Some noted how favorably the program's costs and benefits compare to other high quality leadership development opportunities available through academic institutions and other organizations across the country.

b) Ensure continuity in the program management as the program grows

As SLR grows, many raised concerns about the possibility that the management of the program would be centralized. The Institute's unique vantage point was seen as vital for sustaining a

leadership development program of this nature. Superintendents identified the Institute's grounding in a working park – and its focus on advancing innovation and collaboration – as essential for supporting this form of professional development for field leaders. If the management function were to change hands, participants worried that essential characteristics of the program and its distinction from technical training would get lost in the transition and thereby dilute the effectiveness. Most interviewees felt that the level of care and attention that the Institute devotes to the program would be difficult to achieve elsewhere. As a result, participants were eager to solidify support for the Institute's continued management of the program. In addition, members of the advisory group that the Institute has engaged are ready and willing to offer increased support and guidance as the program grows and charts its future.

c) Expand the number of roundtables as resources allow

Interviewees advocated for increasing the number of roundtables to accommodate all superintendents who would like to participate. They were pleased to see the steady growth that has occurred over the years and hoped it would continue. Participants often indicated that they know of a number of other colleagues who would like to join the SLR program, and they felt strongly that their peers be afforded the opportunity to participate.

E. Suggestions for Adapting Key Characteristics of the SLR Program to Support Leadership Dialogues on Priority Topics

Participants also were asked to consider how the strengths and core principles of the SLR program might be adapted to support leadership development more widely in the Service. Many SLR participants indicated that they would like to see a parallel leadership roundtable program developed for division chiefs and other managers. They emphasized the important leadership roles that members of a park's management team play in their current positions and the benefits of enhancing the leadership capacities of those who often advance into a superintendency.

Interviewees were also enthusiastic about the possibility of the Institute orchestrating facilitated leadership dialogues on high priority national topics that apply the leadership framework used in the SLR program. A number of interviewees had either participated in or heard about a pilot test of this new approach: a September 2008 dialogue entitled the *Leadership Challenges of Climate Change for the National Park Service*, which was convened in partnership with the Institute at the Golden Gate, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the Golden Gate Parks Conservancy, and the Center for Park Management. (See Appendix E for further discussion on this pilot dialogue and feedback from attendees.)

Interviewees who were not familiar with the September 2008 pilot were given a brief description of the approach and asked to weigh the potential for facilitated dialogues of this nature to advance their leadership on various high priority issues. In addition to the general format described above, it was explained that the dialogues would bring together

superintendents from multiple regions to explore potential leadership responses to the selected topic and consider the actions they believe would be most appropriate to take in their sites. A leadership dialogue would differ from the SLR program in several important ways. The topical focus of the leadership dialogue would be identified in advance. In addition, a number of other factors would need to be considered, including length, participation, and the level of confidentiality. Nearly all the interviewees strongly endorsed the idea and most expressed their eagerness to participate in opportunities of this sort. Interviewees suggested that dialogues on a given topic be held in multiple locations across the country to increase accessibility and opportunities for participation. Given the broader applicability of the topics to be discussed, interviewees pointed to the benefit of including leaders from other federal agencies such as the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service.

A number of superintendents suggested that these sorts of facilitated leadership dialogues have the potential to generate "traction" on challenging topics. This approach was seen as a promising mechanism for "getting beyond the buzzwords" to delve more deeply into issues and devise feasible leadership strategies for addressing Service-wide priorities. To accomplish this, interviewees stressed the importance of designing leadership dialogues to produce actionable strategies versus "talk for talk's sake" or "another meeting that results in a report that sits on a shelf." They emphasized the need to include high level decision-makers to ensure that the discussion is informed by their knowledge of the challenges and opportunities that have been identified and to support implementation of the best ideas generated in the dialogue. Another suggestion for maximizing the impact of the dialogues was to gather and disseminate information on the resulting actions that were taken in individual parks and/or on a national scale.

Interviewees were asked what topics they would most like to see addressed in facilitated leadership dialogues. By far, the two leading suggestions were:
- climate change
- relevancy (engaging more diverse and younger audiences).

Other topics that were mentioned repeatedly included:
- streamlining administrative processes
- workforce development
- building effective relationships with partners and surrounding communities
- sustainability of park operations
- changing communications technologies
- ocean stewardship
- exploring the future of the National Park Service in light of the recommendations of the Second Century Commission Report.

Although the above topics were singled out, interviewees often indicated that facilitated dialogues could be effective for addressing nearly any complex and challenging leadership issue that superintendents are facing in their parks.

V. <u>Conclusion</u>

The SLR program currently serves approximately 100 superintendents, reaching all seven regions and about 25% of the agency's 400 field leaders. Each of the eight cohort groups of 14 park superintendents meets annually and includes a mix of geography and level of experience. The purpose of this qualitative evaluation was to gather participants' perspectives on SLR's effectiveness in supporting their development as leaders, analyze how the structure and key characteristics of the program support leadership development, document the program design and management strategies currently used to deliver the program, and identify opportunities for improving the SLR program.

Interviewees voiced strong support for the SLR program. Many indicated that it was one of the most valuable leadership development opportunities they had experienced. The particular knowledge and skills gained from participating in the program varied from one individual to the next – as expected given the mix of participants' backgrounds and length of time in the program, along with variations in the specific content addressed by a given roundtable group. Nonetheless, a broad cross-section of superintendents reported that their leadership capacities were enhanced in several of the following ways as a result of participating in SLR:

a) Increased knowledge of leadership concepts and models that inform practice

b) Greater awareness of one's leaderships strengths, challenges, and areas for Improvement

c) Enhanced ability to coach individual staff members and the park's management team

d) Improved communication skills, particularly for dealing with complex and/or difficult situations

e) Enhanced ability to develop effective relationships with surrounding communities and partner organizations

f) Increased confidence and ability to lead at higher levels and transition into new responsibilities

g) Greater knowledge and understanding of the Service as a whole

An overarching recommendation was to maintain the program by and large as it is currently designed, facilitated, and managed. Some specific ways to enhance the delivery of SLR were identified, but interviewees indicated that on the whole the program is working well as is. Many hoped that the necessary resources would become available to increase the number of roundtables, so that all interested candidates could participate. Overall, interviewees see SLR as an essential resource that allows them to better address many challenging leadership issues they encounter and to steadily build their knowledge and skills as leaders over time.

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APPENDIX A		
SLR Evaluation Plan		
FOCUS AREAS	**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**	**DATA SOURCES**
1. Program Design, Description, and Participation	Program Design and Description o How is the SLR program (as it currently operates) best <u>described</u> – according to program participants, facilitators, managers and other key stakeholders? o What are the <u>key components</u> of the SLR program? o What <u>outcomes</u> is SLR designed to produce? o What <u>approaches</u> are used to bring about the desired outcomes (program theory/logic model)? Program Participation o What are the <u>characteristics of SLR participants</u> (gender, age, race/ethnicity, length of time in Service/as superintendent, number of superintendencies held during participation in SLR)? o How has the <u>number of participants</u> grown over time? o What <u>percentage of eligible superintendents</u> are currently participating in SLR, and to what degree are the participants <u>representative</u> of the eligible population? o What is SLR's reach in terms of the <u>number and size of park units managed</u> by participating leaders (aggregate and range of unit staff and budgets), and how have participants' responsibilities changed over time? o What is the <u>continuation rate</u> of participants, and what percentage drop out for reasons other than retirement or disqualifying promotion?	• Program Documents • Administrative Data • June Meeting Report • 10-Year Review Report • Interviews with program: o participants o facilitators o managers o advisors <u>Note</u>: Park staff, partners, and community members are all key stakeholders of the SLR program. However, this study is designed to gather information from those who are more directly involved with and/or knowledgeable about SLR and thus can speak about the program's characteristics and contributions in greater depth.

2. **Program Management**	What <u>program management strategies</u> does CSI use to deliver the program?
	   • participant recruitment and selection
	   • group formation
	   • interaction with the facilitators
	   • policy development
	   • addressing implementation issues
	
	How do CSI's interactions with the <u>SLR Advisory Group</u> support the delivery of the program?
	
	How does CSI's consultation with <u>Regional Directors</u> inform the selection of applicants?
	
	How is the program currently <u>funded</u>?
	
	What are the major <u>benefits and drawbacks</u> of how the program is currently managed?
	
	In what ways does the program support the <u>Institute's mission</u>?
		• Interviews
		• Program Documents
		• June Meeting Report
		• 10-Year Review Report
		
		<u>Note</u>: certain aspects of the data generated – particularly regarding program management and program participation – will be distilled into introductory/descriptive portions of the final report vs. analyzed thematically.

3. **Complement to Other Professional Development Opportunities**	In what ways does SLR complement other management and leadership development opportunities available to park leaders?
	   • How do participants perceive SLR's <u>fit/placement</u> within the spectrum of professional development opportunities available through NPS?
	   • How do participants <u>compare</u> SLR with professional development opportunities offered inside and outside of NPS?
	   • At what <u>stage(s) in one's career path</u> do participants feel that SLR is best suited to supporting the development of park leaders?
		• Interviews
		• Program Documents
		• June Meeting Report
		• 10-Year Review Report

4. **Piloted Program Modifications**	**Climate change dialogue:** • What <u>new information and insights</u> on leadership challenges and opportunities did participants take away from the dialogue on climate change? • What <u>actions</u> were participants inspired to take as a result of the dialogue on climate change? • How might this piloted approach be <u>improved</u> upon to enhance future dialogues on climate change? • What <u>other conservation leadership topics</u> could be addressed most productively in facilitated discussions of this sort? **Meeting frequency for Roundtable start-up:** What <u>meeting frequency</u> do the facilitators and program managers recommend for the start-up phase (first 2 years) of a roundtable?	• Follow-up participant questionnaire • Supplemental questions for interviewees who participated in the dialogue on climate change • Interviews with facilitators & managers • Group 6 participant questionnaire

5. Leadership Development Outcomes & Other Program Benefits	Participant perspectives: • What new <u>knowledge</u> do participants attribute to their participation? • What new or improved <u>skills</u> do participants attribute to their participation? • How has participation in SLR enabled participants to: o <u>serve as better leaders</u> in meeting challenges and seizing opportunities that arise <u>in their parks and in the Service</u>? o contribute greater leadership to their <u>work with partners and communities</u>? • Has participation in SLR prompted participants to <u>pursue additional opportunities</u> to enhance their/their staff's leadership? If so, how? • In what ways does the <u>informal SLR network</u> benefit participants through contact with fellow participants and other CSI resources? • How does the <u>professional facilitation</u> of the roundtables contribute to the knowledge and skills participants gain? Program managers and facilitators: • What do the program managers and facilitators perceive to be the <u>primary benefits</u> of the program? Alignment with leadership competencies: • How do the leadership development capacities attributed to SLR <u>align</u> <u>with relevant leadership competencies identified for park leaders</u>?	• Interviews • Program documents • June Meeting Report • 10-Year Review Report

6.	Limitations and Challenges	What are the major <u>limitations/weaknesses</u> of the program's:
		    o design?
		    o management?
		    o facilitation?
		
		What are the primary <u>challenges</u> that the SLR program experiences in terms of:
		  • funding and other forms of support within the agency?
		  • organizational placement/alignment?
		  • sustainability?
		
		What are the primary <u>barriers to participation</u>?
		  • How might those barriers be addressed?
		
		What aspects of the current program design and/or delivery would participants like to see <u>improved</u>?
			• Interviews
			• Program documents
			• June Meeting Report
			• 10-Year Review Report

7.	Suggestions for Enhancing SLR	<u>With the existing level of resources</u>:
		  • How might the delivery of the SLR program be <u>improved</u>?
		  • How might the design or delivery of the SLR program be <u>enhanced or expanded</u> in the next 3-5 years?
		
		<u>If additional resources were available</u>:
		  • How could the SLR program be <u>changed or expanded</u> to maximize its impact?
		  • Are topically oriented roundtable dialogues, addressing high priority conservation and park management topics, seen as valuable leadership development opportunities for NPS?
		  • How might a <u>network</u> be developed across the SLR groups, and what are the potential benefits thereof?
			• Interviews
			• 10-Year Review Report

APPENDIX B

SLR Program Managers, Facilitators, and Participants Interviewed

The Conservation Study Institute and Dr. Jewiss thank the following interviewees for their contributions to this study. SLR participant interviewees were randomly selected, and this listing includes each participant's location at the time that interviewees were selected during the summer of 2009.

Bartling, Mai-Liis (Golden Gate NRA)

Billings, Kathy (Pecos NHP)

Bogle, Martha (Shenandoah NHP)

Bond, Stanley (Kennesaw Mountain NB Park)

Boyko, Betty (Fort Scott NHS)

Broadbent, Erin (Kings Mountain NMP)

Caldwell, Mike (Valley Forge NHP)

Campbell, Colin (Yellowstone NP)

Carey, Brian (Glen Canyon NRA & Rainbow Bridge NM)

Cartwright, Chas (Glacier NP)

Chavez, Walter (San Juan NHS)

Clark, Carol (Canaveral NS)

Cook, Linda (Weir Farm NHS)

Cranfield, Charles (Guilford Courthouse NMP)

Creachbaum, Sarah (Haleakala NP)

Creasey, Michael (Lowell NHP)

Duncan, Dennis (SLR Facilitator)

Engler, Mark (Homestead NM)

Farley, Virginia (SLR Program Manager – CSI)

Frank, Mitzi (Fort Laramie NHS)

Frias Sauter, Marie (Fort Union NM)

Gates, Laura (Cane River Creole NHP)

Gustin, Karen (Olympic NP)

Hazelwood, Gayle (National Capital Parks-East)

Jenkins, Chip (North Cascades National Park Complex)

Kicklighter, Trish (Assateague Island NS)

Leavitt, Joshua (SLR Facilitator)

Lehnertz, Chris (Yellowstone NP)

Light, Catherine (Chamizal NM)

McGuinness, Sean (Fire Island NS)

Milestone, Jim (Whiskeytown NHP)

Mills, Dave (Alaska Regional Office)

Mitchell, Nora (SLR Program Manager – CSI)

Neighbor, Doug (Craters of the Moon NM & P)

Northup, Jim (Pictured Rocks NL)

Orcutt, Tina (Women's Rights NHP)

Ott-Jones, Cindy (Lake Meredith NRA)

Pardue, Scott (De Soto NM)

Quijano-West, Michael (Springfield Armory NHS)

Richardson, Kate (San Francisco Maritime NHP)

Rotegard, Laura (Grant-Kohrs Ranch NHS)

Schramm, Dennis (Mojave NP)

Schreier, Cheryl (Herbert Hoover NHS)

Sidles, Darla (Saguaro NP)

Skinner, Nancy (Navajo NM)

Spencer, Cliff (Petrified NF)

Stransky, Blanca (Agate Fossil Beds NM)

Suess, Todd (Jewel Caves NM)

Syzmanski, David (Lewis & Clark NHP)

Trail, Susan (Monacacy NB)

Vietzke, Gay (Fort McHenry & Hampton NHS)

West, Barb (Chaco Culture NHP)

Whitworth, Jock (Zion NP)

Workman, Tom (Cabrillo NM)

APPENDIX C

Information Sheet for Interviewees

Project Title:

A Qualitative Evaluation of the Superintendents Leadership Roundtable Program

To inform the management of the Superintendents Leadership Roundtable (SLR), the **Conservation Study Institute (CSI) is undertaking an evaluation of the program**. This evaluation project is being conducted under a cooperative agreement between the University of Vermont and the CSI with funding from a Centennial Project, carried out with matching funds from the Center for Park Management and the National Park Service.

At the request of the CSI, Dr. Jennifer Jewiss from the University of Vermont is conducting this qualitative (interview-based) evaluation of the SLR program. The **purpose** of this study is to analyze and document the SLR program and to assess its effectiveness in supporting the development of participating NPS leaders. As the first evaluation of the SLR program, this study is designed to focus on the program's core components and to systematically gather information from participants and others who are most directly involved with the program – the SLR facilitators and program managers. It is expected that approximately 50 SLR participants will be interviewed, along with the two program managers and two facilitators. Current participants who have taken part in at least two roundtable meetings to-date, and have attended at least one meeting in the last two years, were considered as potential interviewees. In order to ensure that the pool of interviewees includes a balance of longer-term and shorter-term program participants, 25 interviewees were randomly selected from current participants who began participating in the SLR program between 2001 and 2005; another 25 interviewees were randomly selected from those who began participating between 2006 and 2009. In addition, relevant program documents and administrative records will be reviewed and summarized along with other descriptive information about the program.

The final report will feature a detailed narrative analysis of interviewees' perspectives on SLR's strengths, challenges, and opportunities for enhancing the program. The CSI and an advisory group of participating superintendents plan to use the **findings** to improve the program's documentation and delivery and to enhance understanding of SLR across the NPS. Findings from this study will be presented in written reports and may be included in peer-reviewed journal articles. Excerpts may be used in publications, presentations, and informational materials disseminated by the CSI.

You are being invited to take part in this study due to your involvement with the SLR program. Dr. Jewiss is **interested in hearing your perspectives** on the SLR program, including:
- The program's design, facilitation, and management
- The program's strengths and the ways in which SLR has helped participants serve as more effective leaders

- The limitations and challenges of the program
- Suggestions for enhancing the program

The interviews are designed to be conversational in nature. They will follow a semi-structured format using a series of open-ended questions on the topics listed above. Interviews with program participants are expected to last **approximately one hour and no longer than 1½ hours**. The program managers and facilitators may be asked to participate in more than one interview of this length. About 54 people are expected to be interviewed and the responses will be combined for the analysis. **Quotes and examples will be included in reports on the study's findings but will <u>not</u> be attributed to an individual interviewee.** Quotes and examples from the program managers and facilitators will not include reference to the speaker's vantage point relative to his/her involvement in the program so as to maintain a comparable level of confidentiality. **A list of the interviewees will be included in an appendix of the report.** A draft of the findings will be disseminated to interviewees for review and comment before the report is finalized.

Your **participation is voluntary** and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or prejudice. If you have any questions during the interview, please feel free to ask. If there are any questions you do not wish to answer, please say so. There are no anticipated risks or any costs associated with participation in this study. No compensation is provided to you for participating in this study.

Dr. Jewiss is requesting your **permission to tape record** the interview for note-taking purposes. The digital audio files will be transcribed and all interview data will be kept **confidential**. Once the study has been completed, the digital audio files will be deleted. If at any time during the interview you would like the tape recorder to be turned off, please say so.

<u>Contact Information</u>

You may contact Dr. Jewiss, the researcher in charge of this study, at 802-656-2711 for more information about this project. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project or for more information on how to proceed should you believe that you have been injured as a result of your participation in this study you should contact Nancy Stalnaker, Director of the Research Protections Office at the University of Vermont, at 802-656-5040.

Principal Investigator:	Jennifer Jewiss, Ed.D.
	Department of Education
	204B Mann Hall
	University of Vermont
	Burlington VT 05405
	Jennifer.Jewiss@uvm.edu
	802-656-2711
Project Sponsor:	National Park Service and the Center for Park Management

APPENDIX D

SLR Participant Interview Guide

1. If you were talking with an NPS colleague – let's say, a new superintendent who was curious about the SLR program – how would you **describe what SLR is**?

I'm interested in hearing about the role that you feel SLR has played in your professional development as a leader.

2. What new **knowledge** do you feel you've gained from your participation in SLR?

3. What new or improved leadership **skills** do you feel you've gained from your participation in SLR?

4. I'm wondering if there are any **examples** you can share that illustrate ways in which you feel you've become a better park leader as a result of the knowledge and skills gained through SLR. For instance, how have you been able to **better address challenges or seize opportunities** due to your participation in SLR?
   - Within your park?
   - In the National Park Service?
   - In your work with partners and communities?

5. From your perspective, how does the **professional facilitation** of the roundtables contribute to the knowledge and skills that participants gain?

6. From your perspective, what are the **critical ingredients or key components** of the SLR program?

7. Has participation in SLR prompted you to **pursue additional opportunities** to:
   - Enhance your leadership development?
   - Support leadership development among your staff?
   If so, how?

8. To what degree and in what ways have you benefitted from the **informal network** among:
   - SLR participants?
   - Contact with other CSI resources?

9. Have your **position or primary responsibilities changed** during the time that you've been in SLR? If so, please describe the changes and any important ways that your participation in SLR influenced your thinking or actions relative to these changes.

I'd liked to hear your thoughts on how SLR compares with other professional development opportunities that are available both within and beyond NPS.

10. Based on your experience, how does SLR **compare** to other leadership development courses or programs available **within** NPS?

11. How would you **compare** SLR to other leadership development courses or programs offered by entities **outside of NPS** that you've participated in?

12. At what **stage** – or stages – in one's career path do you feel that SLR is best suited to supporting the development of park leaders?

13. I'd be interested in hearing about any communication you've had with your **Regional Director or Deputy Regional Director** about the SLR program.

We've discussed, among other things, the major benefits of the SLR program. Unless there is anything else you'd like to add regarding benefits of the program, I'd like to move on to discuss your perspectives on the management of the program.

14. From your perspective, what are the **limitations or weakness of the SLR program**?
    - In terms of the program design and facilitation?

15. What do you perceive to be the **barriers to superintendents participating** in SLR, if any?
    - How would you like to see those barriers addressed?

16. If the **existing level of resources** (funding, staffing, etc.) were to remain the same, are there any ways in which you would like to see the SLR program **changed or improved**? Please explain.

17. If **additional resources** were available, how would you like to see the SLR program **enhanced or expanded**, if at all, in the next 3-5 years?
    - How might the program's impact be maximized to provide greater benefit for the Service?

18. Would you like to see a national **network** developed across the SLR groups?
    - If so, please comment on the potential benefits of such a network and how it might be orchestrated.

19. The idea of convening **roundtable-type leadership dialogues on high priority conservation and/or park management topics** has been raised as an additional opportunity that CSI might pursue. Do you think it would be beneficial to offer roundtable-type dialogues on priority topics?
    - For participants in the Climate Change Dialogue: To what extent and in what ways was the approach used in the climate change dialogue helpful in offering an

opportunity to examine complicated issues and consider actions participants might take? Please comment on the aspects that you found most helpful, as well as those you'd suggest modifying.

- If so, what topics would you like to see addressed?
- What suggestions would you offer regarding the design and delivery of topically-oriented leadership dialogues?

Next, I'd like to talk about the management of the program.

20. What do you see as the **major benefits and/or drawbacks of how the program is managed** by CSI – for example, participant recruitment and selection, ongoing communication to keep groups up and running, and program direction?

- From your perspective, are there particular **strengths** that CSI brings to the management of SLR? If so, please describe.
- Are there any **limitations or weaknesses** you've observed in terms of how CSI manages the program? If so, please describe.
- What do you perceive to be the primary advantages and disadvantages of the program being managed by the **Institute rather than another entity** within NPS?
- What suggestions do you have for **enhancing management** of the program over the next couple of years?

21. That covers all the specific questions that I have. In closing, is there anything else you'd like to add regarding your perspectives on the SLR program?

Additional Questions for SLR Advisors:

Given your service as a member of the SLR Advisory Group, I'd like to take a few minutes to talk about the work of that group.

22. How would you **describe** the role of the SLR Advisory Group to-date?

23. What do you feel has **worked well/not well** in terms of the Advisory Group's work to-date?

24. What suggestions would you offer for **enhancing** the work of the Advisory Group over the next couple of years?

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Facilitator Interview Guide

1. I'm interested in hearing how you describe the SLR program. For instance, when you're talking with a new group of SLR participants – how do you **describe what the SLR program is**?

2. How would you describe the primary **goals** of the SLR program?

3. How would you describe your **role as a facilitator** of the roundtables?
   - From your perspective, how does the professional facilitation of the roundtables contribute to the leadership development process?

I'd like to get your perspectives on the role that the SLR program plays in the professional development of park leaders.

4. In general, what types of **knowledge** do you think participants gain from SLR?

5. What new or improved leadership **skills** do you think participants gain from SLR?

6. What do you see as the **critical ingredients or key components** of the SLR program?
   - How would describe the primary **approaches** that the program uses?

7. From your perspective, how has participation in SLR enabled participants to:
   - **Serve as better leaders** in meeting challenges and seizing opportunities that arise **in their parks and in the National Park Service**?
   - Contribute greater leadership to their work **with partners and local communities**?

8. Are you aware of instances in which SLR participants have benefitted from:
   - An **informal network** among participants in other roundtable groups?
   - Contact with **other CSI resources**?
   If so, please describe.

9. Are you aware of instances in which involvement in SLR has prompted participants to **pursue additional opportunities** to:
   - Enhance their leadership?
   - Support leadership development among their staff?
   If so, please describe.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on how SLR compares with other professional development opportunities that are available to superintendents.

10. From your perspective, how does SLR **compare** to other leadership development courses or programs available **within** NPS?

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11. How would you **compare** SLR to leadership development courses or programs offered by entities **outside of NPS** that superintendents have participated in?

12. At what **stage** – or stages – in one's career path do you feel that SLR is best suited to supporting the development of park leaders?

We've discussed, among other things, the major benefits of the SLR program. Unless there is anything else you'd like to add regarding benefits of the program, I'd like to move on to discuss your perspectives on the management of the program.

13. What do you see as the **major benefits and drawbacks of how the program is managed** by CSI – for example, participant recruitment and selection, the ongoing communication needed to keep groups up and running, and program direction?
    - From your perspective, what **strengths** have you observed in the management of SLR?
    - What **limitations or weaknesses** have you observed in the management of SLR?
    - What do you perceive to be the primary advantages and disadvantages of the program being managed by the **Institute rather than another entity** within NPS?
    - What suggestions do you have for **enhancing management** of the program over the next couple of years?

Next, I'd like to get your thoughts on other limitations, weaknesses, and challenges – as well as changes you might like to see in the program in the next few years.

14. From your perspective, what are the **limitations or weaknesses of the SLR program**?
    - What challenges have you encountered in terms of the program design and/or facilitation?

15. What do you perceive to be the **barriers to superintendents participating** in SLR?
    - How significant do you feel the barriers are?
    - How would you like to see those barriers addressed?

16. If the **existing level of resources** (funding, staffing, etc.) were to remain the same, are there ways in which you would like to see the SLR program **changed or improved**? Please explain.

17. If **additional resources** were available, how would you like to see the SLR program **enhanced or expanded**, if at all, in the next 3-5 years?
    - How might the program's impact be maximized to provide greater benefit for the Service?

18. Do you think it would be beneficial to develop a national **network** across the SLR groups?

- If so, please comment on the potential benefits of such a network and how it might function
- Given that your leadership development work extends beyond the NPS, I'd be interested in hearing your thoughts on the benefits of such networks how they can contribute to leadership development in complex organizational settings.

19. The idea of convening **roundtable-type leadership dialogues on high priority conservation and/or park management topics** has been raised as an additional opportunity that CSI might pursue, along the lines of the leadership dialogue on climate change. Do you think it would be beneficial to offer roundtable-type dialogues on priority topics?
   - If so, what topics would you most like to see addressed?
   - What suggestions would you offer regarding the design and delivery of topically oriented leadership dialogues?

20. That covers all the specific questions that I have. In closing, is there anything else you'd like to add regarding your perspectives on the SLR program?

Program Manager Interview Guide

1. If you were talking with an NPS colleague – let's say, a new superintendent who was curious about the SLR program – how would you **describe what SLR is**?

2. How would you describe the primary **goals** of the SLR program?

3. From your perspective, how does the SLR program support the **Institute's mission**?

I'm interested in hearing your perspectives on the role that the SLR program plays in the professional development of park leaders.

4. In general, what types of **knowledge** do you think participants gain from SLR?

5. What new or improved leadership **skills** do you think participants gain from SLR?

6. What do you see as the **critical ingredients or key components** of the SLR program?
   - How would describe the primary **approaches** that the program uses?
   - How does the **professional facilitation** of roundtables contribute to the knowledge and skills gained?

7. From your perspective, to what degree and in what ways have SLR participants benefitted from:
   - An **informal network** among SLR participants?
   - Contact with **other CSI resources**?

8. Are you aware of instances in which involvement in SLR has prompted participants to **pursue additional opportunities** to:
   - Enhance their leadership?
   - Support leadership development among their staff?
   If so, please describe.

I'd liked to hear your thoughts on how SLR compares with other professional development opportunities that are available to superintendents.

9. From your perspective, how does SLR **compare** to other leadership development courses or programs available <u>**within**</u> **NPS**?

10. How would you **compare** SLR to leadership development courses or programs offered by entities <u>**outside**</u> **of NPS** that superintendents have participated in?

11. At what **stage** – or stages – in one's career path do you feel that SLR is best suited to supporting the development of park leaders?

We've discussed, among other things, the major benefits of the SLR program. Unless there is anything else you'd like to add regarding benefits of the program, I'd like to move on to talk about the management of the program.

12. How would you describe the **program management strategies** that CSI uses to relative to:
    - Participant recruitment and selection?
    - Group formation?
    - Interaction with the facilitators?
    - Policy development?
    - Addressing implementation issues?

13. How would you **describe** the role of the SLR Advisory Group to-date?
    - What do you feel has **worked well/not well** in terms of the Advisory Group's work to-date?
    - Are there ways in which you would like to see the work of the Advisory Group **enhanced** over the next couple of years? If so, please describe.

14. I'm interested in hearing about CSI's interactions with **Regional Directors**. Please describe how the Institute interacts with Regional Directors regarding the SLR program.
    - How does CSI's consultations with Regional Directors inform the selection of applicants?
    - To what degree do you feel that these interactions with Regional Directors enhance their knowledge and support of the program?

15. What do you see as the **major benefits and drawbacks** of the Institute's management of the program thus far?
    - From your perspective, what particular **strengths** does CSI brings to the management of SLR?
    - What **limitations or weaknesses** do you see in the management of SLR?
    - In what ways would you like to see the **management** of the program enhanced over the next couple of years?
    - What do you perceive to be the primary advantages and disadvantages of the program being managed by the **Institute rather than another entity** within NPS?

Now, I'd like to get your thoughts on any limitations or weaknesses in other aspects of the SLR program – as well as any changes you'd like to see in the program in the next few years.

16. From your perspective, what are the **limitations or weaknesses of the SLR program**?
    - In terms of the program design and facilitation?

17. What do you perceive to be the **barriers to superintendents participating** in SLR?
    - How significant do you feel the barriers are?
    - How would you like to see those barriers addressed?

18. What are the **primary challenges that the SLR program has experienced** in terms of:
    - Funding and other forms of support within the agency?
    - Organizational placement/alignment?
    - Sustainability?

    How would you like to see these challenges addressed?

19. If the **existing level of resources** were to remain the same, are there ways in which you would like to see the SLR program **changed or improved**? Please explain.

20. If **additional resources** were available, how would you like to see the SLR program **enhanced or expanded**, if at all, in the next 3-5 years?
    - How might the program's impact be maximized to provide greater benefit for the Service?

21. Do you think it would be beneficial to develop a national **network** across the SLR groups?
    - If so, please comment on the potential benefits of such a network and how it might function.

22. The idea of convening **roundtable-type leadership dialogues on high priority conservation and/or park management topics** has been raised as an additional opportunity that CSI might pursue, along the lines of the leadership dialogue on climate change. Do you think it would be beneficial to offer roundtable-type dialogues on priority topics?
    - If so, what topics would you most like to see addressed?
    - What suggestions would you offer regarding the design and delivery of topically oriented leadership dialogues?

23. That covers all the specific questions that I have. In closing, is there anything else you'd like to add regarding your perspectives on the SLR program?

APPENDIX E

A Pilot Leadership Dialogue:
Leadership Challenges of Climate Change for the National Park Service

On September 11-12, 2008, the Conservation Study Institute convened a dialogue entitled the *Leadership Challenges of Climate Change for the National Park Service* in partnership with the Institute at the Golden Gate, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the Golden Gate Parks Conservancy, and the Center for Park Management. Approximately 20 NPS leaders and partners, including 10 superintendents, met at Cavallo Point within Fort Baker (part of the Golden Gate NRA). Foundational presentations by Bruce Riordan, an expert on climate change, and Jon Jarvis, the Pacific West Regional Director at the time, created a common understanding for the discussion and initiated reflection on the potential roles that individual park leaders and the national park system can play in addressing the issue of climate change. Dennis Duncan, an SLR facilitator, facilitated dialogue among the group for the remainder of the two-day gathering.

Participants in this event generally considered it a successful pilot test of a facilitated leadership dialogue that linked a high priority national topic (in this case climate change) with facilitated "roundtable" style dialogue. A number of interviewees for the SLR evaluation had either participated in or heard about this pilot. A confidential follow-up questionnaire was sent to attendees. According to the questionnaire responses received from eleven attendees (and additional feedback offered by a few interviewees who had participated), attendees felt that the format worked well, and some emphasized the importance of the foundational presentations and professional facilitation. The comments of one participant summarized a perspective shared by others:

> *Great format: outside, knowledgeable speaker followed by senior management perspective, followed by extremely well facilitated dialogue with a reasonably sized group that engaged all participants. All components to success.*

Participants offered the following reflections on the insights and inspiration they derived from the leadership dialogue:

> *Key points I took away: Climate change is real, and there is an urgency to act now. There is an important window of time for effective action, and we are in that time now. A big challenge is convincing others – while not alienating them – and collectively identifying opportunities for effective action. It is similar to – albeit bigger than – many other leadership challenges.*

> *The importance of parks was more apparent after this dialog. I realize that parks are an important part of how our culture will handle this crisis.*

The discussion made the need for action more apparent. Although our park is already taking actions on climate change, I realize that we need to move these efforts up a notch.

Our parks can be teaching places. The science of climate change is important, and we can facilitate the "translation" of the science into terminology and applications that make it accessible.

I now carry a higher level of awareness with me on a daily basis that causes me to evaluate park programs and operations in a slightly different way and to challenge park staff to engage on this issue at different levels.

Climate change has a lot of emotion attached to it, and working with that emotion in a constructive way is important. It takes the same emotional intelligence as any other leadership challenge or situation demanding change. It can't be about stopping the future, but rather through right action enabling and facilitating a different, more sustainable future.

Our potential among federal agencies or any other organization to connect people to fundamental values of the nation – honor, sacrifice, democracy, civil rights – is limitless. These are all values that connect to climate change. We can begin to make those connections.

Several superintendents indicated that they had increased their park's involvement in the Climate Friendly Parks initiative as a result of the leadership dialogue. Based on their experience with this pilot and their belief in the value of this approach, participants recommended that the length of the dialogue be extended to allow for further discussion and deeper exploration of potential steps that participating leaders might take back in their parks.