

# National Park System Advisory Board

## Summary Report

### DEVELOPING A 21st CENTURY LEADERSHIP CULTURE

November 2012

#### Background

The Board has been focused on developing a 21st century NPS organizational culture that is adaptive, resilient, and sustainable. This culture develops leaders who are good learners, innovative, and who collaborate on solving complex system issues. They learn and gain support from each other in formally sponsored communities of practice, and they work well with multiple partners, neighboring communities and other agencies. This vision of the workforce is offered in the National Parks Second Century Commission report and recommendations. Board Member Meg Wheatley served on that Commission and chaired a committee which prepared the recommendation. Seven other Board members served on the Commission. They view their service on the Board as a continuation of active work on behalf of the National Park Service.

#### Addressing the Task

We have used a theory of culture change different than the usual: rather than filling a 'gap' between the present and the future, new organizational cultures are created by noticing who's *already practicing* attributes and behaviors of the new culture. Their work is amplified and spread through a four-stage process of: *Naming* the exemplars; *Connecting* them to each other; *Nourishing* their work with resources, ideas, time; *Illuminating* their achievements to inspire others.

#### Progress Report

The National Park Service Director's *Four Priorities* and the *Call to Action* plan created focus, coherence and direction for the NPS, and produced multiple opportunities to implement 21st century leadership practices, including:

1. *The Collaborative for Innovation*. A new organization function that brings together all players involved in leadership development and learning, pooling resources to promote: best practices for all NPS issues; communities of practice; collaborative processes and facilitation skills. Current work includes:

- a. Retooling the Superintendents Round Table—a robust community of practice.
- b. Applying learnings from just-completed one year pilot of an online network of Youth Program leaders to other potential Community of Practice participants.
- c. Supporting NPS's new initiative for Urban Parks and also the EVS process (see below).
- d. Developing multiple means to name, connect, nourish, illuminate the exemplars through-out NPS.

2. *Redesign and redirection of the Organization Development function* to support the Four Priorities and the Call to Action. The redesigned OD function has:

- a. Focused on changing leadership "from hero to host" and to learn group practice and facilitation skills that support this.

- b. Focused their consulting work on the Four Priorities: Stewardship; Workforce; Education; Relevancy.
- c. Begun in-depth work with 20 parks to address issues raised in the Employee Viewpoint Survey. This ambitious, multi-year process will use 21st c. leadership practices of inclusion, conversation, diversity and critical thinking to use survey data to resolve issues specific to each park.

### **Achieving Our Vision**

We have made great progress in embedding this approach to culture change in many senior leaders, and in the functions responsible for leadership. The Collaborative for Innovation and Change provides a clear organizational focus for the continuation of this work. Both the Collaborative and the OD function have already begun working well to support these changes and to develop 21st century leadership. We are extremely optimistic about the future of this work.

Note: In the Appendix, you will find documents that describe each of these initiatives and work in much greater detail.