

House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands

Event: "Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands' Oversight Hearing on the 'Role of Partnerships in National Parks'"

Subcommittee Hearing

Date: Thursday, September 23, 2010

Time: 10:00 A.M.

Location: Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Testimony Submitted by: Nancy A. Chamberlain, M.S., C.P.R.P.
Associate Professor / Assistant Dean
Recreation, Parks & Leisure Studies
Northern Virginia Community College
8333 Little River Turnpike, CM342
Annandale, Virginia 22003
Office: 703-323-3230
Email: nchamberlain@nvcc.edu
Web: <http://www.nvcc.edu/rpk>

Partnership Agreement:

Location: Shenandoah National Park
Project Title: Implement Urban Youth Camping Partnership Program:
Task Agreement: J484010086
Cooperative Agreement: H4840090814
Sub-partner: Prince William County Park Authority.

Opening Remarks

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the key components of the partnership by and between the Department of the Interior, National Park Service, and Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) and Prince William County Park Authority (sub-partner).

Overview:

I am before you today due to the dedication of my students, in the Recreation, Parks & Leisure Studies (RPK) at Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA). The successful partnership with Shenandoah National Park and the National Park Service is

borne of their efforts to bring our love of the national parks, forests and public lands to the lives of youth.

The RPK Program is the only two year Associate of Science program in the Virginia Community College System in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Faculty and students in this program are uniquely dedicated, as are other academicians and students across the United States, to the study of environmental education, recreation, stewardship and sustainability in parks, forests and public lands.

The RPK students designed the “Students Encouraging Environmental Discovery” (S.E.E.D.) program in 2008 to address the disconnect between children and the environment in keeping with H.R. 3036: No Child Left Inside Act of 2008. Students were also touched by the publication of Richard Louv, “Last Child in the Woods”.

In a culminating academic assignment they were tasked to design a program that would address the lack of outdoor experiential learning opportunities for children. As a result since spring 2009, the S.E.E.D. program has delivered after-school programs in Fairfax County, Virginia’s, School Age Child Care (SACC) centers along the Route 1 corridor. RPK worked with Theresa Jefferson at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Lorton, Virginia office to deliver these after school programs to build on existing BLM programs in the local school district.

The S.E.E.D goal is to serve youth who were both socio-economically disenfranchised as well as youth who were nature disenfranchised. Youth without quality access to parks, environmental education, outdoor discovery and stewardship opportunities were determined to be at risk by the S.E.E.D. program guidelines. The summer camp program “Camp S.E.E.D.” was an outcome of the after school program allowing the RPK program to continue its outreach to youth year round.

My testimony will focus on six core areas today:

- 1) Components of Successful Partnership
- 2) Challenges in Partnership
- 3) The effect of National Park Service policy on partnership
- 4) Accomplishments of and benefits to the National Park Service, Shenandoah National Park, Northern Virginia Community College and Prince William County Park Authority by virtue of partnership
- 5) Review methodology for project determination
- 6) Recommendations for future program partnerships

1. Components of Successful Partnership

a) All partners shared the common goal in reaching urban youth and providing quality resource based education.

- b) The NPS/NOVA partnership was a Recreation, Parks & Leisure Studies student driven partnership. Shenandoah National Park was receptive to the offer of partnership. Partnership with NPS was driven by academic and service learning goals of RPK program.
- c) The operational model between the partners was mutually determined and not imposed by the goals and objectives of either partnership in isolation.
- d) Division of responsibilities outlined clearly in the Task Agreement which allowed the Shenandoah National Park staff to focus on subject matter expertise across multiple disciplines while NOVA and Prince William Park Authority staff provided daily operations and disciplinary requirements of the program.
- e) There were substantial and unique contributions made by all partners which truly supported the cooperative agreement.
- f) Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) and their sub-partner, Prince William County Park Authority, are unique partners. These agencies are programmatic partners not fund raising partners.
- g) NOVA and Prince William County Park Authority have their own infrastructure to deliver similar projects, marketing, web support, equipment, staff, registration capabilities, and therefore did not place financial burdens on the NPS partner.
- h) Each partner had different federal, state and municipal guidelines and accepted tasks and responsibilities based on bureaucratic capabilities rather than focus on restriction.
- i) Neither the NOVA or Prince William County Park Authority partners proposed long term projects nor programs that required maintenance or service by any partner beyond the program period. NOVA contributed equipment and materials necessary for the program and makes this type of equipment available to this and other programs throughout the year. NOVA uses this equipment throughout the remainder of the year to meet educational objectives. The nature of the finite program design reduced financial risk for all partners.
- j) NOVA Office of Grants Development could draw on past experience with the task agreement documents and grants forms from partnership with the Manassas Battlefield.
- k) Professionals in partner agencies had unique and unduplicated skills which contributed to the substantial and diverse offerings within the program and stood as a testament to cooperation.
- l) NOVA's Recreation, Parks & Leisure Studies program maintains a substantial volume of equipment necessary for a backpacking, camping, and hiking programs. Access to equipment made the overnight experience possible. Financial risk for equipment was transferred from the park to the program partner. The sub-partner, Prince William

County Partner has a similar challenge with respect to gear to facilitate overnight experiences. Having camping gear available to families made the cost of enrolling their child in the program more cost effective. Lack of access to gear would have been a barrier to both programming and participation.

m) Grant funding from NPS partner made programming available off site from partner's agency location. New geography and new experiences for staff and participants were afforded.

n) Grant funding from NPS partner made intense day-long ranger programs available.

o) NPS partner had developed new programs that integrated technology with resource investigations using hand-held GPS units not available to NOVA or Prince William County Park Authority partners. NPS staff served as subject matter experts and trained staff and participants with GPS units.

p) NPS partner designed programs specific to the destination demonstrating subject matter expertise which was invaluable to the partners. The customized Junior Ranger programs booklets were a great hit with participants.

q) NPS partner made Flip-Video cameras available to the participants so they could document their experiences at the park and throughout the week at other NPS locations. This was a fabulous mechanism to hold the participants attention and gave them ownership in an end product. The goal is to use these videos to create marketing materials and historical documentation of program success.

r) The NPS partner had radio communication in the park thus affording emergency communication. Cell phones were insufficient methods of communication in park due to connectivity challenges. Radio communication was a substantial part of the Emergency Action Planning for the partners when taking children into the wilderness.

2) Challenges in Partnership

a) Legal/bureaucratic requirements were very time consuming and took away from program development.

b) All cooperative agreements, task agreements and memorandums of understanding need to be in place no later than January in order to implement operations in mid-June.

c) Funding notification needs to be released no later than January 31 in order to implement operations in mid-June.

d) Cooperative agreement process between NPS and NOVA (mutual constraints) was too time consuming (3 - 4 months). Delays consumed valuable programming time and compromised contracting, employee and volunteer screening schedules and program marketing demands. The time to negotiate the cooperative agreement between NPS and

NOVA stands in stark contrast to the one month it took to negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding between NOVA and Prince William County Park Authority.

e) Date of funding notification in March, 2009 in combination with the final Task Agreement completion (June, 2009) came much too late to deliver the program as originally designed requiring major structural program changes as NOVA was not willing to commit funds without the agreement in place and a promise of funding.

f) Date of funding notification came to both NOVA and sub-partners much after summer program marketing materials had been prepared and distributed in mid-February. One solution discussed for FY2011 is to market the CAMP S.E.E.D. program without regard to the availability of funding and to operate as a full-cost recovery program. In the event grant funding was to become available, scholarships would be made available and publicized in web based format.

g) It proves to be difficult to celebrate the partnership with the NPS in printed and static marketing materials in advance of funding notification. Clarification of partnership outside the scope of grant funding could be better defined.

h) Most Ranger programs are for limited time periods of 1 – 3 hours. Partners have expressed concern that without future funding, access to day-long intensive Ranger programs like CAMP S.E.E.D. will not be sustainable in future years.

3) The effect of National Park Service policy on partnership

a) The NOVA partner's understanding of NPS transition toward centralization of agreement approval through regional offices seemed to create a set of unknowns regarding time required to approve the partnership, coordinate task agreement and cooperative agreement documentation and method/mechanism of distributing grant funds.

b) The learning curve for the NPS in regard to partnership and resulting new policies may create administrative delays.

c) The learning curve for future partners is steep and can lead unnecessarily to frustration with the timing of programs and program marketing (see Recommendation's section regarding partner training).

4) Accomplishments of and benefits to the National Park Service, Shenandoah National Park, Northern Virginia Community College and Prince William County Park Authority by virtue of partnership

a) Partnership delivered successful resource based learning evidenced by the completion of the Junior Ranger program and the Leave No Trace Awareness program by participants promoting environmental awareness and lasting concepts of stewardship in the participants.

- b) Created sustainable constituencies between partner agencies.
- c) Created connections between partner agencies and participants and their families which have resulted in repeat visits to Shenandoah National Park since program completion.
- d) Participants visited multiple national park sites; Prince William Forest Park, Antietam National Battlefield, Great Falls National Park and Shenandoah National Park and one municipal park, Locust Shade, Prince William County Park Authority.
- e) Exposure of participants to healthy leisure activity choices.
- f) Program gained the attention of the Let's Move Outside campaign which is supported by the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture. The Let's Move Outside campaign is a part of First Lady Michelle Obama's nationwide Let's Move campaign to end childhood obesity. For more information regarding this program visit: <http://7bends.com/2010/06/21/shenandoah-hiking-and-outdoor-program-for-families/>.
- g) A multitude of youth with high risk profiles were served in both years 2009 – 2010. Participants were referred to our program through Department of Social Services, school counselors, and local police departments.
- h) The program served a culturally diverse group of youth; children with documented cognitive disabilities, children from the local foster system, and children who received free and reduced lunch in the public schools (used to evidence economic need).
- i) The program served a balance of male and female participants.
- j) Parents reported great things as a result of participation in the program:
- My child is allergic to effort but she can't stop talking about climbing and hiking!
 - My child wants to work for the program next year as a Counselor in Training.
 - My children loved being in the outdoors.
 - My child took me back to the park so I would know about the trees and where we camped.
 - My child wants to come back next year to help teach the new kids!
 - My child has spent his time differently after camp and is beginning to choose better friends.
 - My child has never enjoyed camp before participating in Camp S.E.E.D.
 - My child said that this program was one of his all time favorites and he has lots of family camping experience.
 - My child could participate because you made access to camping gear possible otherwise we couldn't afford to send our child to camp.
 - My child was extremely shy and now has the confidence to express interests.
 - My child was afraid to sleep in a tent but now wants their very own tent and sleeping bag.

- My child had so much fun, I wish you would teach me how to camp so I could take my whole family camping!
- k) Attached please find photographs of engaged and happy participants and their drawings about the environment (see Appendix A). These pictures are evidence of the successful delivery of meaningful outdoor experiences.
- l) Offered diverse programming in the spirit of the Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights (<http://www.kidsoutside.info/billofrights.php>); hike a trail, discover wilderness, camp under the stars (we even brought in an astronomer), catch and release frogs and insects, explore nature, play in the stream, swim, hug a tree and celebrate the rich heritage of public lands in their neighborhood and in their state.
- m) Offered diverse programming in keeping with the concerns raised in the H.R. 3036: No Child Left Inside Act of 2008.
- n) Successful programs in past years increase likelihood of future program success and increases in registration.
- o) Program diversity was achieved. Not all children are comfortable with a week-long sleep away camp. The use of Shenandoah National Park campsites allowed shorter overnight programs (1 and 2 night experiences).
- p) The program served as the first opportunity for more than half of the participants to spend the night outside, to spend time in the dark, and/or to sleep in a tent. We combated homesickness and fear of the dark by creating night programs and having night-staff that were there to greet a concerned child. We had lots of lanterns too!
- q) The program served as the first experience for 80% of the children to participate a Ranger program in a national park.
- r) This was the first time that 83% of the participants (2009 – 2010) had visited Shenandoah National Park.
- s) The program exposed participants to appropriate field technology by creating exercises using hand-held GPS units for resource investigation.
- t) The 2010 program was the first time that 100% of participants gave up their cell phones and other electronic devices for two nights and three days and forgot to request the return of these devices at the end of the program in Shenandoah National Park. They didn't miss them. They forgot all about them. The participants actually spoke to one another in person rather than texting the child standing next to them. They spent time writing in their journals, taking videos, interviewing each other, interviewing the staff, interviewing the rangers, drawing pictures, playing cards, making s'mores, helping clean-up, pitching tents, and cooking. Children slept on the way home on the bus or talked together about their experience throughout the week, admired their patches and their

Junior Ranger booklets. They were wet, dirty, tired, and loved every minute of the great outdoors!

u) Northern Virginia Community was successful in meeting stated commitment to partnerships. Shenandoah National Park was identified as a partner under a 2009 Task Agreement. NOVA is committed to partnerships that “create gateways of opportunity” with “local governments to develop key relationships with local governments that are willing to invest in NOVA as a strategic asset in their localities future”.

(http://www.nvcc.edu/president/strategic_vision.pdf)

v) NOVA successfully partnered in 2009 with Community Recreation Services, Camp Ravens Quest, Fairfax County Government, Fairfax, Virginia to deliver the CAMP S.E.E.D. program.

w) NOVA successfully partnered in 2010 with Prince William County Park Authority to deliver the CAMP S.E.E.D. program. To view the program page please visit the link: <http://pwcparks.org/RecreationGolf/LocustShadePark/SEEDSummerCamp/tabid/582/Default.aspx>.

x) The Recreation, Parks & Leisure Studies program (NOVA) was academically successful in creating educational service learning opportunities for college students which helped to facilitate career exploration for RPK students. Interest stimulated supports the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) and Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) programs. It also planted seeds in the minds of participants about careers related to the environment and outdoor recreation.

y) Academic credit was awarded by NOVA to students who studied issues in Camp Management (RPK 121) during the summer programs at Shenandoah National Park.

z) The Recreation, Parks & Leisure Studies was successful in placing students in part-time and full-time employment directly related to the implementation of the CAMP S.E.E.D. program with sub-partners.

A1) NOVA students in the Recreation, Parks & Leisure Studies program have expressed interest in the Camp Management course and working with the CAMP S.E.E.D. program and Shenandoah National Park up to a year in advance of the program demonstrating dedication of college students to the program.

A2) NOVA Recreation, Parks & Leisure Studies students and CAMP S.E.E.D. participants have expressed interest in becoming National Park Service, or U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management employees.

A3) Prince William County Park Authority identifies partnership in general as one of their agency goals in their 2010 – 2015 Strategic Plan. The plan specifically states that the agency is to “Develop partnerships with a focus on environmental sensitivity and awareness”. Therefore partnerships that share dedication to “environmental initiatives” are of highest priority.

A4) Prince William County Park Authority has reached out to the NPS locally as Prince William Forest Park (NPS) is the home of Camp Mawavi for the last 5 years. Prince William County Park Authority would prefer that the relationship be more than a rental site for Camp Mawavi and enter into a partnership with the park to benefit from the subject matter expertise of the park employees and programs. For more information visit: <http://www.pwcparks.org/Portals/0/Camps/PDF/Mawavi%20Brief%20Sheet%202010.pdf>.

A5) The 2010 grant allowed Prince William County Park Authority to expand programming, program destinations and ability to work with another National Park. Without this grant, Prince William County Park Authority may not have considered Shenandoah National Park (NPS) as a potential partner. Prince William County Park Authority is committed to return to the park with programs and hopes to formalize their partnership relationship with the park.

5) Review methodology for project determination

a) The Recreation, Parks & Leisure Studies program (NOVA) selects projects based on relevance to course content and curriculum goals, institutional capacity to serve, ability to create service-learning opportunities and student commitment from student leaders in the Recreation & Parks Society (a NOVA Student Activities organization which may be found on line at www.nvcc.edu/rpk).

b) Prince William County Park Authority places a higher funding (FY 2011) and programming priority on all programs which have components of “environmental sensitivity, awareness, education, and stewardship”.

6) Recommendations for future program partners (non-fundraising partners)

a) Refine definition of partner types – create guidelines and set parameters for program partners (non-fund raising partners and academic institutions not associated with research) and publish these guidelines on the agency websites.

b) Develop links “So you want to be a NPS partner”, “What to expect” and “Next steps”, and “FAQ’s” and add to the “About Partnerships” webpage. It looks as though there are links created that are awaiting activation on topics: Forming Partnerships, Partnership Management, NPS Management Realities, Alternative Funding, Special Partnerships that may address these issues (www.nps.gov/partnerships/about.htm).

c) Develop a link on the “About Partnerships” webpage to include a link to the “Reference Guide to Director’s Order #21 Donations and Fundraising” which contains fantastic materials (www.nps.gov/refdesk/DOrders/DOrder21.html).

d) Develop partner suitability screening mechanism (survey, questionnaire, or checklist) to help federal agencies ensure suitability of and institutional capacity of the partner (perhaps something like this already exists).

f) Expand "Dynamics of Successful Partnerships" website page in case studies section to include sample task agreements, sample Memorandums of Understanding with sub-partners, participation statistics and program outcomes may be featured to encourage future partnerships (www.nps.gov/partnerships/inspiration.htm).

g) To address the concern regarding value of partnership so as to reduce financial risk to the NPS, the NPS may wish to take the opportunity to train existing partners and groups interested in partnership side-by-side with their park managers and employees (after pre-qualifying the partner).

h) Program partners may be willing to serve as regional training locations in order to reduce demands on NPS facilities and staff preparation for training. NOVA would be willing to serve as a training destination.

i) Training of partners may be a pre-requisite to partnership. Much as a pre-bid conference, if a partner is not willing to participate in regional training, then their request for partnership may be denied.

j) Training of partners may help to streamline and the process of the task agreement and help set mutual expectations.

k) Negotiated timelines would aid partners with regard to resource allocation, support contracts, hiring of staff, background checks and coordinating volunteers and sub-partners.

l) NPS, USFS, BLM to systematically approach neighboring community colleges, colleges and universities for program support with the agencies as service learning is on the rise as an educational modality.

Conclusion

The opportunity to partner with the National Park Service at Shenandoah National Park has been inspiring. It has been a pleasure sharing this information with the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands. All partners look forward to a sustained relationship with the National Park Service.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee for this opportunity to address these important issues. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.