

Testimony
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The National Parks Business Plan Initiative (BPI) is a creative public/private partnership designed to promote the long-term health of our national parks through development of improved financial planning and management tools. The BPI is a collaboration between the Student Conservation Association (SCA) and U.S. National Park Service (NPS). Graduate students from leading business and public policy schools are placed in an internship by SCA as management consultants in selected national parks. The consultants work with park staff to produce a business plan that clearly outlines park operational requirements, identifies available financial resources that are currently available, and analyzes any funding gap that exists. Consultants also work with park staff to identify operational and investment priorities and develop strategies for meeting those needs. In addition, some parks that have produced business plans in the past are revisited to update their plans and/or perform various in-depth analyses to assist in program development. In the past three years, SCA has engaged 37 National Park units and placed 78 Business Planning consultants through this partnership. BPI intends to field 20 consultants throughout the 2006 programming season.

SCA's established relationship with educational institutions, introduces students to the BPI Program and its valuable career and life enhancing experiences. SCA assists the NPS with recruiting, site placement, training coordination, and administration. BPI consultants are recruited and selected by the NPS Business Management Group and SCA. They participate in an eleven-week program that typically begins the first week in June with a week-long orientation session in a national park and ends in mid-August. SCA administrative support includes logistical support for participant travel to trainings, facilitation of the orientation workshop, administrative and financial liaison with the consultant's park site, and the planning and conducting of a fall wrap-up meeting held in Washington DC, where participants present their Business Plan Document. Finally SCA assist in the administration of program monitoring and evaluation as well conducting site visits directed at improving future program development and training.

Each consultant reports directly to their park's supervisor, with oversight provided by NPS Business Management Group staff which additionally provides program leadership, technical guidance, and quality assurance focused on maintaining consistency of the analysis. Additionally, SCA staff is made available to the consultants for additional training, logistical support, and counseling. SCA also provides emergency management support for all consultants while they are in the field. Each park provides housing and office space.

Over the course of the summer, teams of consultants interview park staff and review budgets and other relevant documents. Consultants analyze the park's programs, operations, and activities; identify standards of operation for each program; and develop financial and management strategies. Consultants produce business plans and utilize the online Business Plan Developer (BPD) system for data collection and presentation. At the conclusion of their internship, the teams of consultants present a report of their findings to park management.

Upon completion of the program the participants become SCA Alumni and through the NPS/SCA partnership we are also able to provide ongoing mentorship, career resources and counseling which has resulted in employment opportunities for program participants. Numerous BPI alumni from the 2004 and 2005 Business Plan consultant group have accepted positions with the National Park Service including placements with Yosemite National Park and Valley Forge National Historical Park. Other consultants have gone on to accept job placements with other public and private institutions introduced to them throughout the program as well as in follow-up career transitioning sessions. This has resulted in placements with such firms as Booz Allen Hamilton, Price Waterhouse Coopers and the General Accounting Office, and with not for profit organizations including the World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, and Trust for Public Land.