New Jersey School of Conservation
at Stokes State Forest, NJ

Response to RFEI
by DiamondPREP
March 2022
Expression of Interest, March 2022

This Response to the RFEI dated January 7, 2022, for the New Jersey School of Conservation (NJSOC) Building Complex, is respectfully submitted by DiamondPREP, the consulting function of Alliance for Integrated Healthcare, LLC, a New Jersey-based business. DiamondPREP specializes in public and non-profit health initiatives, including those related to sustainability and environmental health, as they are always considered as significant categories in the social determinants of population health and well-being.

In honor of all the parents, caregivers, and teachers who introduced the School of Conservation (SOC) to next generations, it is the spirit of this Response to be offered substantially as a source of ideas and concepts. We are hopeful that these ideas may be considered to work in conjunction with the proposal(s) that is selected by the State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection / State Park Service for the new long-term management of the New Jersey School of Conservation Campus. In other words, DiamondPREP proposes to be involved in what the RFEI refers to as a “quasi-public/private (and non-profit) partnership” with the campus’s newly selected agency(s) of administration and management; with DiamondPREP deferring to that agency for the experience and bandwidth to complete the RFEI requirements in Item 6.0, number 3, Financials.

The key factors of interest for DiamondPREP in this endeavor would be in providing, by sub-contract, to the new NJSOC managing agency:

* Funding & Revenue Stream Development
* Educational Program Development
* Partnership Development
* Overall Strategic Planning
* Marketing & Communications
* Quality Control, Quality Improvement, and Measurement of Programs

Creating a sustainable and inclusive conservation education destination... by revitalizing infrastructure, revisiting original concepts, respecting and reporting the science of sustainability.
**DiamondPREP** would also be interested and willing to become a coordinating liaison between the NJ DEP State Park Service and the newly designated managing agency(s) for the SOC campus. This may be of particular interest to all parties involved if the state selects two or more different, and potentially disparate, proposals for the management and usage of the SOC Campus components.

[NJSOC Background Information including Building Complex Setting and Site information – DiamondPREP here references the details provided in the REQUEST For EXPRESSION of INTEREST (RFEI).]

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### A Vision, Mission, Core Values and Concerns for the NJ School of Conservation

#### Vision

Creating a sustainable and inclusive conservation education “destination”... by **revitalizing** infrastructure, **revisiting** original concepts, **respecting and reporting** the science of sustainability.

#### Mission

The mission of **DiamondPREP** in the NJ School of Conservation “Vision” is to offer via sub-contract support, the following services to the State and/or to the new managing agency(s):

* elevation/magnification/support/promotion of the existence of the School of Conservation and the new managing agency(s).
* update best practices for the New Jersey School of Conservation
* create a “umbrella” strategic plan for the SOC campus
* define the most critical target audience for promotions and programming
* assist in initial site planning and program development that will halt further deterioration of site infrastructure
* support the sustainable renovation and maintainance of site infrastructure
* guide the development of the NJSOC as a “destination” with inclusivity and accessibility to low income and underrepresented populations
* develop partnerships, educational programs and other revenue streams that will underscore and financially support all NJSOC activities both onsite and remote
* define and secure multiple sustainable funding streams
* assist the managing agency(s) in engaging mission-compliant contractors and sub-contractors to fulfill the desired elements and activities of NJSOC
* develop quality control and measurement tools for assessment of progress on NJSOC goals
* perform all endeavors on behalf of the NJSOC and managing agency(s) in a culturally competent and inclusive manner that ensures the highest quality, equitable, and affordable benefits for all of the population served, including underrepresented racial and ethnic groups and overburdened communities as desired by the State.

**Mission Time Frame**

Full development and implementation of an initial and encompassing strategic plan is anticipated over a two-year period beginning with acceptance of proposal(s) by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection / State Park Service.

**Core Values**

The following Core Values will serve as the foundation on which **DiamondPREP**

* Creating a sustainable and inclusive conservation education destination... by revitalizing infrastructure, revisiting original concepts, respecting and reporting the science of sustainability.
operates. These values should also be reflected in the ideals of each individual member of the Advisory Board, Strategic Plan Work Groups, staff, contractors and sub-contractors retained by any partnering agency and the NJSOC, and NJSOC Staff. The Core Values of DiamondPREP are as follows:

- Inclusion & Equity
- Diversity
- Sustainability

Collaboration (Internal and External)
Accountability & Commitment
Respect (Internal and External)
Excellence & Integrity

**Initial Concerns for the Overall SOC Mission**

There are specific areas in which DiamondPREP suggests concern based on experience in business building, specifically with entrepreneurs and disparate agencies:

* overall management of the mission of the NJ School of Conservation
* “umbrella” and broadbased fundraising for the NJ SOC
* Marketing and Communication of the mission and programs of the NJ SOC
* ongoing Quality Control and Measurement of program success

If there is more than one agency approved for management, administration and use of different areas of the complex, how will the overall mission of the NJ School of Conservation be honored and managed? What means of Quality Control, Quality Improvement, and measurement of successes will be used to determine what is working for the campus and what is not; what is sustainable and what is not?

**Strategic Priorities & A Strategic Goal**

In the pursuit of the established – and to be established - goals for the School of Conservation... by revitalizing infrastructure, revisiting original concepts, respecting and reporting the science of sustainability.
Conservation, **DiamondPREP** is determined to ensure that certain values and/or priorities are not compromised. To that end, the agency is dedicated to uphold Professionalism, Compassion, Adaptability and Cultural Competence as it pursues fulfillment of SOC Strategic Goals. **DiamondPREP** suggests that the following Strategic Goal supports the NJSOC’s Vision and Mission:

The strategic goal is to stabilize, renovate and revitalize the NJ School of Conservation Building Complex and develop and implement a proactive & efficient strategic plan for conservation education programming that is consistent with evidence-based sustainability practices, to ensure the provision of vital conservation resources and services in an inclusive and culturally competent manner. We believe this will be best accomplished by designing “destination” characteristics and experiences into the strategic planning for the revitalized School of Conservation. This means moving forward with minds open to programming that will achieve this part of the strategic goal and attract a broader and more diversified audience to the campus.

**DiamondPREP Advisory Board Members (Proposed)**

Representative(s), The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
Representative(s), Friends of the NJ School of Conservation – or similar agency
Individuals:
David Axelrod, Instructional Specialist, Economics
    Montclair State University Feliciano School of Business
    Specialty: Holistic and Sustainable Economics
Carly Clark, Owner/Operator
    BodyMind Coaching and Consulting
    Specialty: Training for Entrepreneurs

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Partnerships

There is significant and positive proof that the aggregate actions of a group will offer greater success than confining program endeavors to an individual agency = the common sense of “strength in numbers”, “united we stand, divided we fall (fail)”, etc. The managing agency of the NJ School of Conservation should build an unlimited number of partnerships in varying sectors including, but not limited to:

Banking/Finance/Corporate
Public & Private Education Institutions and/or sub-departments of these institutions; for example MSU’s Clean Energy and Sustainability Analytics Center (CESAC)
Charitable Funding Organizations
AARP Chapters  YMCA Chapters  Scouts BSA  Americorps
Food & Agricultural Organizations and Agencies
Culinary Schools  Hospitality Schools
Other State and Federal Park Organizations
Other Conservation and Sustainability Organizations
Real Estate and Property Management Agencies

Partnerships are indispensable, if only for the cross pollination and higher visibility of the NJSOC missions and objectives through each partner organization’s social media channels. It often equates to FREE and repetitive outreach to thousands of additional people in the target demographic and beyond, and it is one of the best avenues to quickly raise the visibility of the NJSOC and the managing agency.

Example of a common yet attractive promotional image indicating multiple partnerships with common objectives:

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Creating a sustainable and inclusive conservation education destination... by revitalizing infrastructure, revisiting original concepts, respecting and reporting the science of sustainability.
of the SOC should explore a holistic approach to learning that at the very least includes substantial references to the SOC philosophy. Attendees / students / partners should become engaged, perhaps sign a pledge, to honor best practices for sustainability and conservation, certainly during their presence at the SOC campus, but also to bring a stewardship of sustainability out into their public and private lives in their respective communities.

Reference is made to the book “Nudge, Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness” by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein (2009). The thrust of the book is to explain the use of the behavioral science of “choice architecture” to successfully “nudge” individuals and populations toward good decision making without eliminating the ever-important desire for freedom of choice. It is about designing an environment where the good and sustainable choices are the easiest (not a great deal of thinking to be done) choices. The SOC should consider this throughout the revitalization of the campuses and the concept should be evident in all of SOC programs that are open to the public.

Examples:

1) The Carry In, Carry Out Trash Free Parks Program
   Provide a welcome kit that includes a trash bag to SOC arriving guests.

2) A Program to reduce plastic drinking water bottles.
   No single use plastics allowed on SOC premises. Provide a discount to guest arrivals if they show proof of use of an eco-friendly reusable water container while on campus. Do not sell plastic water bottles on campus but instead, consider positioning water filtration systems in key locations around the campus where guests can refill eco-friendly containers. Sell SOC logo branded eco-friendly reusable water bottles on campus.
In summary, using the “choice architecture” behavioral science, conservation and sustainability education should be built into every element of the SOC campus, and not just through pedagogy. The younger the audience, the greater the chance of developing a “conservation personality”. Having stated that, following are ideas for educational offerings:

**Formal Education Programming**
Continuing Education Credits/Units specific to Environmental, Sustainability, Health Programs
College / University Undergraduate and Graduate Level Field Work, Internships, Job Skills training specific to Environmental, Sustainability, Health Programs
Programs offered in coordination with NJ State Schools
Environmental and Ecological Curriculums
Certificate Programs**

*Examples:*
- Community Liaison (or Ambassador), Conservation & Sustainability
- Community Liaison (Ambassador), Environmental Health
- Community Specialist (Ambassador), Recycling (5 R’s or 7 R’s Programs)
- Community Liaison (Ambassador), Public Health

*Ditto all of the above certificates for the Corporate environment:*
- Corporate Liaison (Ambassador), Conservation & Sustainability, etc.

**“Less Formal” Education Programming***
Day Camps (all ages including senior citizens)
Grammar, High School, College, University Field Trips – “Immersion in Conservation” on a Daily / Weekly / Weekend basis

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Private Groups (corporate, non-profit, academic) – “Conservation Conversations”
“Sustainability in the Real World”
“The Economics of Conservation”
“A Holistic & Sustainable Lifestyle”
“Your Health Relative to Planet Health”

Specialty Education Programs**
Sister Cities Programs (local, state level, national level, global level)
Sister Parks Programs (local, state level, national level, global level)
Intergenerational Programs = an “earthshaking” approach to issues of Planet Earth conservation/sustainability with compelling success stories in development of “social capital and social cohesion” http://generationsworkingtogether.org (website access 2/26/2022)
Audiences = Gen X,Y,Z, Alpha and Baby Boomers
Launching a Sustainable Life – for new parents and caregivers
Training for Trainers – on topics of environmental care, conservation, public health
School of Conservation Spring Cleaning, Fall Cleaning Programs
Audience participation in keeping SOC buildings & campus clean, vibrant, SUSTAINABLE!
Some semblance of the Master Gardener Program (American Horticultural Society)
Forest Ambassador Program (an SOC creation)
A program similar to “Model U.N.” but at the state level and conservation-related
Developing Young Entrepreneurs
* topic offerings can expand exponentially and may be made specific to the needs of a particular audience
** perhaps these topic offerings can be developed as SOC (or designated agency) intellectual property; proprietary
Indoor Program Activities
Communication Skills  Life Skills  (family, workplace, etc.)
Immersion classes on a variety of topics  Resource Library
Knit / Crochet / Needlepoint / Rug Hooking / Embroidery
Meditation  Yoga  Stretching
Ancestry  Genealogy  Photography
Educational Movies and Documentaries
(See also Food, Children, Combination Indoor/Outdoor Skills)

Outdoor Program Activities – “into the woods” and “on the lake”
The following may involve unsupervised guest activities or supervised and/or lesson-based activities; per diem rentals provided for necessary equipment or included with certain accommodations or other programs:

Walking – 10,000 steps program
Bird & Wildlife Walks, Moon Walks, Clean the Woods Walks, Mushroom Walks, etc.
Exploring a Freshwater Lake
Hiking  (including section hikes on the Appalachian Trail)
Archery  Cross Country Skiing  Bicycling  Swimming  Fishing
Tubing  Kayaking  Canoeing  Paddle Boarding  Volleyball
Wall Climbing  Photography  Shinrin Yoku Forest Therapy (Forest Bathing)
Scavenger Hunts – nature-related, exploring forest species
Tree, mushroom and other plant identification
Star gazing  Shelter building  Tent Camping  Picnicking
Small scale sponsored marathons and relays
A conservation-related tree house and climbing frame for young children
Campfire / Philosophy Around the Fire including primitive fire making skills.
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Reference to the importance of the campfire to intergenerational learning, internal and external cultural exchange, evolution and sustainability

**Combination Indoor / Outdoor Program Activities**

Camping skills  Survival skills  Yoga, Qigong, T’ai Chi chih  Photography

**Activities for Children (of all ages)**

Lego Lab  Build a Bear (or similar)  Ceramic shop  Book reading
Story telling  Writing  Drawing / Painting  Sustainable Toys

**Theme Retreats**

Diverse New Jersey  (attracting participants from NJ’s diverse ethnic populations)
NJ Big City Campaign – sustainability in our most densely populated environments

* Newark (282,788)  * Jersey City (256,747)
* Paterson (144,150)  * Elizabeth (131,067)

No Devices  (for adults = putting away the laptops, tablets, phones)
Also “Children Without Devices”

Police & Community  (developing collaborative programs to address a community’s specific needs)

Animals of the North Jersey Forests
Nation  (exploring, one per retreat, the foods and cultures of nations represented in NJ)

Personal Care  Stress Relief  Detoxification
Brain Health  The Art of Happiness  Caregiver Rejuvenation Programs

Life Transitions for Returning & Disabled Veterans
Photography and/or Art Exhibits featuring New Jersey photographers and artists
Conversations about Race
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Silence - participants are silent except for mealtimes
Music in the Forest - mini classic music concerts, recitals
Thanksgiving - the holiday itself plus other gratitude themes
Forgiveness - based on “Stanford Forgiveness Program”
Time Management - perfecting use of personal time for an extraordinary life

**Food on Campus**

Farm to table
- Community Garden and Greenhouse on premise OR
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) on premise OR
- Collaboration with local (Sussex County) farms

Gourmet selections / visiting gourmet chefs
Packaged lunches for walking/hiking
Afternoon Tea as part of a Warmed Beverages & Baked Goods Offering
Culinary Arts: Cooking, baking, candy making, creation of a NJSOC signature food

**Accommodations on Campus**

If the School of Conservation is to become a “destination”, the accommodations, (with the exception of the bunkhouses), especially those where a revenue stream is expected from private paying visitors and corporate clientele, will need substantial improvement along with the significant renovation and general revitalization of the SOC Complex buildings and campus as required in the RFEI.

An upscale shower house with limited spa-type amenities should be considered. The accommodations should reach, as a minimum, the current industry standard for “glamping”. (See “Quality Standards Glamping” on website: visitisleofman.com)
Communication, Marketing and Promotions for NJSOC

During the past several decades in the field of Public Health, it was learned, often the hard way, that it is necessary to use the marketing strategies and tools that are used in the corporate and commercial environment in order to create a visible and successful platform for public health programs and interventions. This approach is also used to keep social justice messaging competitive in an increasingly commercialized world and should be taken into consideration for all levels of communication, marketing, and promotion for and about the New Jersey School of Conservation.

An adaptation of the 4, and now 6 “P’s of Marketing (image following text) should be used as part of an outline approach to making the NJSOC and the managing agency highly visible to a strategically defined and targeted demographic in a defined geographic area.

In Public Health, which includes Environmental Health (health of places where we live, work, play) the strategic tasks are to Educate, Empower and Advocate for

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GoFundMe; crowdfunding / alternative financing applications
On campus donations by visitors
Donations from local businesses
Bequests through wills and trusts
Scholarship donations for low income/under-represented populations
Annual Membership Support Programs

Potential revenue streams:
   Education programs
   All “destination” programs and offerings
   Space rentals for onsite practices, onsite work spaces
   Space rentals for private use / corporate events
   Activity equipment rentals
   Food services including tea/bake shop on premises
   Accommodations
   Special Event and Theme Retreat Attendance
   NJ School of Conservation store on campus/online
   Pop-up retail allowance for outside vendors on campus

Example of a multi-tiered funding and human resource structure using the “Office Building” on the SOC Eastern Campus:

* Funds for restoration and maintenance of the School of Conservation Office Building were provided by a grant from the Kaiser Family Foundation and tools & materials donations from Lowe’s Home Improvement, Newton NJ Store.

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(coverage of the overall building structural renovation inside and out = Kaiser Family Foundation awards a one time $50,000 grant for the building resotation followed by an annual sustaining grant of $500 per month for maintenance and utilities; Lowe’s donates tools/materials.)

* Office Equipment in the Reception Office of the School of Conservation Office Building was donated by Staples Office Supply, Newton, NJ.  
  (donation of office equipment for the reception area)

* The labor and materials for the refurbishment of the Reception Office of the School of Conservation Office Building were provided by DiamondPREP as part of the School of Conservation “Adopt a Space” Program. 
  (donation of time, labor, decorative elements for the reception area)

* Staffing of the School of Conservation Office Building is provided by the Friends of the New Jersey School of Conservation and student interns from William Paterson State College. 
  (volunteer staffing of the reception area as necessary)

* Branded and other retail available in Reception Area of Office Building
  (as part of the general revenue stream of SOC branded items plus other appropriate conservation-related retail items)

The information acknowledging sponsorships and donations can be placed on signs and plaques appropriately located on and in the subject building and room(s) – as well as acknowledgements posted online. Overall, the funding structure is a redistributive function, taking money from areas where it is available and redistributing it through programs for conservation, sustainability, and other social justice programs to be held at NJSOC. It should allow for just about anyone to participate in some way, from large to small contributions.

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Diversified Human Resources
Here too, DiamondPREP would suggest a structure that would allow just about anyone to participate. The NJSOC should search for human resources in the following areas:

NJ High Schools, Colleges, Universities Internship and Fieldwork Programs
Garden Clubs Junior League Chapters Sports Organizations
Senior Citizen Organizations and Residences
Scouting Organizations YMCA Organizations AmeriCorps
Family (or other group) Work Weekends
Specifically seek NJ individuals to be NJSOC Mission Cheerleaders, Champions, Influencers, Local Celebrities for social media campaigns

Quality Control, Measurement & Evaluation of NJSOC Programs

DiamondPREP suggests that regardless of choice of NJSOC site management, an evaluation strategy and quality improvement program should be in place.

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Although the approaches to evaluation may vary, baseline evaluation questions tend to remain the same and are structured within the same key parameters:

* **OUTCOMES:** Are you doing the right things?
* **IMPLEMENTATION:** Are you doing things right?
* **IMPACT:** Are you doing enough of them to make a significant difference?

Commonly in use for evaluations of Public Health and Social Programs, the **S.M.A.R.T. Format of Evaluation** offers a simple to remember acronym that guides evaluators to ensure that evaluation and research objectives are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime limited.

Quality Improvement Plan goals are suggested as follows:

- Identification of best practices
- Increased participation of Stakeholders and Funding Sources
- Campus population control
- Streamlined processes and delivery of programs and service services
- Increased attendance at programs
- Increased audience satisfaction
- Improved morale for all those engaged as Human Resources
- Reduced costs and redundancy
- Elimination of waste

**In Summary**

**DiamondPREP** expression of interest in answer to the RFEI by the NJDEP is grounded in a historical passion for Stokes State Forest and the sustainable... by **revitalizing** infrastructure, **revisiting** original concepts, **respecting** and **reporting** the science of sustainability.
revitalization of the NJ School of Conservation. Within a sub-contract structure, we would like to work closely in conjunction with the State and the new site management of NJSOC to bring most of the ideas within this expression to fruition.

Simply by existing, the forest is an education environment. Having been immersed among the trees, people simply feel better – and know better. The job of all NJSOC stewards moving forward is to bring people to the NJSOC campus, expose them to the wonders of the forest and the importance of sustainability, and watch as they make their own conclusions. We can see it. We can feel it. We are excited for the possibilities at the NJSOC campus and appreciate this opportunity to submit this expression of interest and ideas.

Resources


Community Check Box Evaluation System. Community Tool Box, March 4, 2022 Ctu.ku.edu (The University of Kansas)


