

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Consultant REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

ISSUED BY:

Wildlife Leadership Academy

Contact: Michele Kittell Connolly, Executive Director

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BACKGROUND

The Wildlife Leadership Academy is a 501(c)(3) non-profit whose mission is to engage and empower high school age youth to become Conservation Ambassadors to ensure a sustained wildlife, fisheries and natural resource legacy for future generations. This Academy experience begins with our Conservation Ambassador training for high school students, which includes attending rigorous 5-day residential summer field schools taught by leading natural resource professionals that focus on wildlife/fisheries conservation, as well as leadership skills development. Equipped with knowledge and skills, through the next year, students serve as Conservation Ambassadors in their communities, giving back through education, service, media engagement, the creative arts and outdoor mentorship. As students grow with the Academy, they explore career possibilities via professional conferences and college visit days, gain work experience via our summer field schools, and engage in professional development through our Academy Alumni Network of 800+ strong.

The Wildlife Leadership Academy currently has two full time staff members, two part time staff members, and a seven member board of directors. In the summer, the Academy hires 16-20 staff for various roles at the summer field schools and partners with state agencies and conservation organizations to bring 50+ conservation professionals to teach at the various field schools. There are 140 participants each summer – 120 of those being youth between the ages of 14-18 and 20 are adult mentors often school teachers. Youth are recruited through a nomination process whereby teachers, school counselors, Envirothon advisors, employers, and youth group leaders are encouraged to nominate students to apply to the Academy. Students who are nominated are sent an invitation to apply highlighting the benefits of the program.

Our Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

As in nature, the more diverse an ecosystem is the more resilient it is. We honor these values in the diversity of our programmatic culture through gender, race, sexual orientation and/or religion – understanding and knowing our engagement with young conservation leaders better equips them to face the natural resource challenges ahead.

Diversity: Actions speak louder than words.

In the last five years:

Our summer field school recruitment and acceptance of female students has ranged from 40-60%. In the coming years, we aim to maintain this 50/50 ratio of male to female.

We focus on reaching out to underserved communities for both youth and adult opportunities.

Academy staff actively build relationships year-round with other organizations and community leaders with the focus on identification of interested youth and mentoring them through the application process.

We are committed to making our staff reflect the population we want to serve.

Inclusion: We are committed to ensuring equity in education for all students. No one should ever be prevented from engaging with the Academy because of barriers. We aim to ensure that if a student is accepted into the program because of their passion to become a Conservation Ambassador, we will work to reduce any barriers that may prevent them from attending.

Two ways we are currently taking action are:

(1) Hoping to reduce any financial barrier to entry, 50-80% tuition scholarships (tuition is \$500) are offered for the program. Students are notified of this opportunity in their invitation to apply to the program.

(2) Academy staff work to address other barriers such as coordinating transportation and being prepared with a Spanish language interpreter to communicate program details to students' parents whose native language is Spanish.

Inclusion: The summer experience of the Wildlife Leadership Academy brings youth together of different identities and cultural backgrounds. Honoring each student's uniqueness, we aim to show them that we welcome the value their experience brings to the program, whether it be through conversation or through a reflection of their individual and/or team projects during their time with us.

The leadership of the Academy values fostering respectful listening and conversing, open and authentic learning, and non-judgmental discussions between our students, mentors, volunteers, staff and instructors.

We understand there is always work to do and we do not shy away from challenging conversations. We hope that our current efforts move the needle in the right direction. We are dedicated to making even more of an impact through current and additional programming and deeper discussions.

PURPOSE & SCOPE OF WORK

The natural resource field faces a lack of diversity in those pursuing degrees and in the workforce. According to the US Census Bureau (2020), in 2045, more than half of all Americans will belong to a minority group. These two confounding issues create a situation where those making conservation decisions are not representative of the populations they serve. In assessing factors that affect the decision to pursue a career in the natural resources among historically underrepresented groups of people, Burmann (2019) concludes, "More needs to be done to introduce middle school and high school students to career options while occupational interests are formulating. There is need and opportunity for environmental education programs that target diverse groups to integrate components of careers awareness into their programming." The Academy wants to ensure that if our vision is to engage and empower the next generation of conservation leaders, we take action to recruit and support under-represented populations as they are a vital part of the conservation of our natural resources today and into the future.

Works Cited

Burmann, L. (2019) Formative Interests and Pathways to Natural Resource Careers Among Racial and Ethnic Minorities, Open Access Master's Thesis. Michigan Technological University.

Vespa, J., Media L., and Armstrong, D. (2020) Demographic Turning Points for the United States: Population Projections for 2020 to 2060. US Census Bureau.

The Academy is seeking a consultant to work with our team on the following scope of work:

- (1) assess equity and inclusiveness in our youth recruitment process and develop a strategic recruitment plan to reach underserved youth,
- (2) assess equity and inclusion in our field schools and post-field school engagement efforts with our students as they serve as Conservation Ambassadors and create a plan for how to be more equitable and inclusive in our engagement with students from diverse backgrounds, and
- (3) assess and offer training to staff that would help us engage better in diversity, equity and inclusion efforts as we engage with students, staff, volunteers and instructors who have diverse background.

The overall goal for this work is to:

- (1) ensure that we have a program where all youth and parents feel represented and thought about in our recruitment strategy, as we engage with those students at field school, when we mentor them as they complete outreach in their communities and as they grow in their journey from high school to college and/or career, and
- (2) ensure that we have an organization where staff, volunteers and instructors also feel heard and empowered to engage in diversity, equity and inclusion conservations and efforts.

This project period is intended to run for a maximum of six months with final presentation to our board of directors in the fall with an option continuation based on progress and deliverable goals.

RFP SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- Experience working with smaller organizations to assess, plan, and implement an organizational wide strategy for diversity, equity and inclusion efforts
- Successful track record in integrating DEI into recruitment and marketing practices
- Experience with youth education and/or in the conservation and natural resources field

Wildlife Leadership Academy is committed to equitable treatment in its relations with consultants and potential consultants. The Academy encourages proposals from organizations and individuals who represent diverse communities.

Proposals should contain the following:

1. Cover Letter
2. Qualifications and Experience: provide a description of the history, experience, and qualifications you have to perform the scope of work.
3. Approach to working with our team based on scope of work.
4. Project Costs – Provide a detailed costs and clear itemized budget for the services to be performed by the vendor. This can include both fixed and/or fee based costs but should be justified based on the work. Please provide itemized pricing to the fullest extent possible.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

RFP RELEASE DATE: March 15, 2022

RFP DEADLINE: APRIL 1, 2022

FINAL DECISIONS: April 15, 2022

Contract Execution: TBD – The Wildlife Leadership Academy will be working to secure funding for our work with a DEI consultant as soon as possible.

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION: All proposals should be emailed to Executive Director, Michele Kittell Connolly at mkittell@wildlifeleadershipacademy.org in a PDF format. This email should include the individuals name who will be performing the work including address, email and telephone number. Please place in the subject line:

DEI RFP.

Questions may also be directed to Michele Kittell Connolly at the above email or 570-245-8518.

This Request for Proposal does not commit the Wildlife Leadership Academy to any contractual obligation whatsoever. The Wildlife Leadership Academy reserves the right to accept the proposal it considers to be in its best interest, reject any proposals, or request modifications.