

Partnership for the Sounds

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW AND IMPACT

1. MISSION & PROGRAMS

The mission of the Partnership for the Sounds, Inc. (PfS) is to promote sustainable, community-driven economic well-being and stewardship on the Albemarle-Pamlico peninsula through environmental education, and nature-based and cultural tourism.

The Partnership's primary way of carrying out this mission is through the operation of environmental education/tourism centers that highlight the A-P region's natural and cultural resources and promote visitation to other sites throughout the entire area. We have direct operational control of 4 facilities and at various times have provided administrative support and part-time staffing to related facilities owned by related entities.

The 4 Partnership facilities are:

- North Carolina Estuarium -- Washington, NC
- Columbia Theater Cultural Resources Center -- Columbia, NC
- Roanoke/Cashie River Center -- Windsor, NC
- Tyrrell County Visitor's Center (includes Main Office) – Columbia, NC

Related facilities we have worked with include the Octagon House in Hyde County and the Walter B. Jones Sr., Center for the Sounds in Columbia.

Prior to the formation of the Partnership these communities lacked sites specifically dedicated to fostering tourism and thus were unable to generate significant economic benefit from it. In the early 1990s local and regional leaders recognized that the A-P's most valuable assets are its natural and cultural heritages, and so worked together to develop a network of facilities that would help promote the entire peninsula as a destination for eco/heritage tourism. This marked a unique moment of collaboration between local governments competing for the same resources, and thus it was nurtured by state leaders who saw inherent wisdom in the willingness of small communities to support themselves by supporting their neighbors.

2. CUSTOMER/ TARGET POPULATION

There are two specific ways we classify the people who benefit from our existence. Most directly are those who visit our facilities – travelers, day-trippers, local residents, students. Our goal is to ensure that everyone who comes through our doors feels a sense of welcome to eastern North Carolina and that our exhibits and programs provide them meaningful, accurate information in an engaging and empowering way. Less direct but equally important customers are the communities where our facilities are located. By offering quality visitor experiences we bring the economic stimulus of tourism to this remote, overlooked region and provide hubs of activity, local identity, and community pride.

3. ORGANIZATION INCEPTION

PfS was incorporated as a private non-profit organization in 1993 and began operations in 1994. We have been active on a full time basis since then. Our facilities opened to the public as follows:

- Tyrrell County Visitor's Center -- 1995
- North Carolina Estuarium -- 1998
- Columbia Theater Cultural Resources Center -- 1998
- Roanoke/Cashie River Center – 2000
- WBJ Center for the Sounds – 2002

4. FOOTPRINT

Partnership operations directly involve Beaufort, Bertie, Hyde, and Tyrrell counties, and we have participated with and supported a variety of related activities in neighboring Martin and Washington counties through the years. Our programmatic footprint extends to all 100 North Carolina counties, all of the other 49 states, and the over 50 foreign countries from where our visitors have come. Nothing else in this region can showcase the people and resources of the “Inner Banks” the way our facilities do.

5. BUDGET

The Partnership operates on a fiscal year beginning July 1 and ending June 30. (See Attached.)

PARTNERSHIP FOR THE SOUNDS
5-Year Organizational Budget Summary

	Actuals for FY 6/30/2009	% of Total	Actuals for FY 6/30/2010	% of Total	Actuals for FY 6/30/2011	% of Total	Actuals for FY 6/30/2012	% of Total	Budget for FY 6/30/2013	% of Total
<i>Income</i>										
NC Dept of Environment & Natural Resources	517,250	50.5%	506,905	52.4%	481,560	52.6%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%
NC Dept of Commerce	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	409,326	45.3%	391,941	49.0%
NC Dept of Transportation	150,000	14.6%	150,000	15.5%	150,000	16.4%	150,000	16.6%	150,000	18.8%
Town of Columbia NC	4,500	0.4%	5,000	0.5%	5,000	0.5%	5,000	0.6%	5,000	0.6%
Tyrrell County NC	13,000	1.3%	13,000	1.3%	14,000	1.5%	14,000	1.5%	14,000	1.8%
Tyrrell County Tourism Development Authority	1,500	0.1%	-	0.0%	750	0.1%	1,500	0.2%	1,500	0.2%
Town of Windsor NC	13,268	1.3%	13,300	1.4%	13,300	1.5%	29,700	3.3%	29,700	3.7%
Bertie County NC	6,000	0.6%	3,000	0.3%	3,000	0.3%	3,000	0.3%	5,000	0.6%
Hyde County NC	3,000	0.3%	3,000	0.3%	3,000	0.3%	3,000	0.3%	3,000	0.4%
Fundraising and Contributions	16,695	1.6%	40,765	4.2%	18,368	2.0%	10,496	1.2%	21,815	2.7%
Sales, Admissions, and Program Fees	127,805	12.5%	122,908	12.7%	110,457	12.1%	110,115	12.2%	121,125	15.1%
Grants Revenues	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	10,290	1.1%	3,700	0.4%	-	0.0%
Interest Income	17,274	1.7%	1,010	0.1%	497	0.1%	438	0.0%	500	0.1%
Refunds and Reimbursements	11,706	1.1%	2,139	0.2%	1,629	0.2%	5,784	0.6%	8,360	1.0%
Capital and Marketing Reserves	142,815	13.9%	106,285	11.0%	68,605	7.5%	146,023	16.2%	-	0.0%
Restricted Membership Reserves	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	2,441	0.3%	2,483	0.3%
Insurance Claims	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	33,385	3.6%	9,210	1.0%	-	0.0%
Sale of Equipment	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	1,300	0.1%	200	0.0%	-	0.0%
Fund Balance Appropriated	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	45,174	5.6%
Total Revenues	1,024,813	100.0%	967,312	100.0%	915,141	100.0%	903,933	100.0%	799,598	100.0%
<i>Expenses</i>										
Salaries and Related Expenses	781,514	76.4%	733,472	75.3%	710,726	74.3%	648,999	74.9%	577,200	72.2%
Governance	752	0.1%	845	0.1%	699	0.1%	697	0.1%	770	0.1%
Programs and Events	11,449	1.1%	10,290	1.1%	13,421	1.4%	12,044	1.4%	25,305	3.2%
Equipment Repairs and Maintenance	15,915	1.6%	26,809	2.8%	13,302	1.4%	11,688	1.3%	3,990	0.5%
Gift Shop Expenses	52,937	5.2%	51,035	5.2%	45,989	4.8%	47,541	5.5%	45,030	5.6%
Grant Expenses	458	0.0%	-	0.0%	10,106	1.1%	4,560	0.5%	783	0.1%
Facility Operating Expenses	115,600	11.3%	108,226	11.1%	120,506	12.6%	101,943	11.8%	103,835	13.0%
Marketing, P/R and Promotions	283	0.0%	1,078	0.1%	2,280	0.2%	2,424	0.3%	3,375	0.4%
Other Operating Expenses	44,506	4.3%	41,944	4.3%	39,135	4.1%	37,127	4.3%	39,310	4.9%
Total Expenses	1,023,414	100.0%	973,699	100.0%	956,164	100.0%	867,023	100.0%	799,598	100.0%
Revenues Over (Under) Expenses	1,399		(6,387)		(41,023)		36,910		-	

6. SALARY COMPLIANCE

The Partnership does not have any state-supported positions with annual salaries above \$120,000. The Partnership currently provides employer paid health insurance and SIMPLE IRA retirement match. Budget cuts have made it necessary to reduce our workweek from a standard 40 hour week to a 36 hour week. For 2013/14, we plan additional cuts to benefits including the elimination of employer paid health insurance benefits.

7. LOBBYING SERVICES

The Partnership has never contracted with any firm to provide lobbying services. No Partnership employee is a registered lobbyist with the State of NC.

8. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Visitation is an essential performance indicator for us, but our numbers must be viewed in relative terms. This region has never been considered a tourism destination and has generally been seen as a pass-through to the beach. The Partnership was a pioneer in trying to raise the A-P region's tourism profile and continues to be a leader in this effort. In assessing visitation at our facilities we feel we have two important constituencies: the traveling public (reflecting our role in tourism) and school groups (reflecting our role as a provider of meaningful educational experiences).

At least as important, though, is how much our home communities value our presence. For example we were recently named the 2012 Nonprofit Organization of the Year by the Washington/Beaufort County Chamber of Commerce, and we have continued to receive annual appropriations from all the local governments in our hometowns and counties for over a decade, which clearly demonstrates their support of our existence. And it is worth noting that the North Carolina Estuarium in Washington was identified as the best local tourism attraction and received remarkably high positive ratings in a professional visitor survey commissioned by the Washington Tourism Development Authority in 2009. In a region of small towns with limited ways to capture tourists and promote local identity, we provide a recognizable presence that has been bringing communities together for almost two decades.

9. SIMILAR ORGANIZATIONS

We are unaware of any other organization that serves as wide a variety of roles as the Partnership. For one, we are unique in our exclusive focus on the Albemarle/Pamlico sounds and North Carolina's estuaries, which comprise the second largest system of estuaries in the U.S. These waters and surrounding lands have huge ecological and historical significance to North Carolina but have struggled economically for generations. Uniting the goals of environmental stewardship, local economic development, and community collaboration remains a widely supported vision in this region, and we are very much the embodiment of that. Other organizations promote those objectives independently, but none have the nearly 20-year track record that we do of bringing disparate constituencies together for a common cause.

This value is multiplied by the fact that the A-P peninsula encompasses some 3,200 square miles but has a population of barely 100,000. The Partnership's professional, technical, and physical infrastructure is rare out here and it is integral to our mission to share these assets in

supporting the activities of a wide variety of groups, including local Chambers of Commerce, local governments, schools and universities, environmental organizations, tourism development authorities, community development organizations, agricultural interests, state agencies, historic and cultural councils, and more.

10. BUDGETARY IMPACT

The Partnership funding from the State has been cut by 24.23% since 2009. These reductions have had the greatest impact on salaries, benefits, hours of facility operations, travel, and technology upgrades and repairs. We have cut staff hours, eliminated some part-time positions, repositioned work locations of staff, and imposed mandatory furloughs without pay. Our primary focus has been to absorb these cuts in areas having the least affect on our programs, facilities, community outreach, and visitor experience. We have NOT diluted implementation of our mission.

We have generated revenue from our gift shop sales, program sponsorships, admissions, and memberships but certainly not enough to offset the state appropriation reductions. Salaries have been cut for the last 5 years but we have not raised admission or program fees. We feel that every child and every family in North Carolina should be able to afford a visit to one of our facilities and learn about the environmental issues that affect all of us in a welcoming and entertaining way. Additional revenues generated through our membership program have been diverted to defray admission and program costs for schools so that classes from across the state will be able to visit at little or no expense.

The goal of becoming self-supporting, while desirable, is unrealistic for our organization at this time. Our facilities are located in rural Tier 1 counties with some of the smallest populations in the state. We are very proud of the fact that even in a distressed area of the state, our local governments in 4 counties commit funding to the Partnership every year from their stressed budgets. The inception of the Partnership galvanized around the concept that a healthy environment was a local, regional, and state responsibility as we *all live downstream from somebody* and our actions have wider impact than our own backyards. If the Partnership is to continue to deliver the message of environmental stewardship to such a wide audience, we need for that message to be accessible to everyone. We cannot bear that cost without the State's help and recognition of its importance. Our appropriation is crucial to our ability to maintain the integrity of that message with current science and continuing discussion of the issues facing our area.

Because we operate facilities, we must have on-going funding for operations on a recurring basis. Our "specific program" goals are to bring visitors into the region and into our facilities. As such we must have permanent staff, standard operating hours, maintained buildings, equipment and exhibits, and the support services that are necessary to facilities open to the public.