



Western Washington University

Campus Sustainability Planning Studio

## Outback Farm Manager Proposal

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## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Executive Summary**

The AS Outback Outdoor Experiential Learning Program (OELP), more commonly known as the Outback Farm, has been completely student-run since the sowing of its first seeds in 1972. In 2006, the management of the space underwent its first large-scale evolution with the creation of a yearly, paid student coordinator position through Western's Associated Students (AS). Since merging with the AS, the Outback Farm has undergone two major assessments. Occurring in 2010 and 2014, these processes analyze the goals of the office, and the efficiency of its existing objectives. The end result is multiple recommendations aimed to assist the program in addressing threats and weaknesses. One recommendation in particular arose from both assessments. It is this common recommendation that is the primary focus of this proposal. That recommendation is the need to create, fund, and implement a non-student supervisor position that will oversee and support existing student employees. This proposal provides evidence-based justifications for the creation and implementation of a non-student management position for the farm. Additionally, this proposal includes details on the recommended job duties for this position.

## **Introduction**

Currently the farm is managed by two student coordinators, one as head coordinator, and one as assistant coordinator. These positions serve an annual term that is congruent with the academic year. According to their job descriptions (attached in the supporting documents), these students are given 19 hours a week to:

- Keep 5 posted office hours
- Be a resource to campus by attending relevant meetings as requested
- Be a resource to students by maintaining email and phone communications
- Organize and host educational events/workshops
- Attend AS trainings
- Serve on AS hiring committees
- Hire and supervise work-study employees
- Coordinate volunteers on the farm
- Oversee independent study projects in the space
- Oversee two separate budgets
- Make all supply runs
- Create and enforce safety standards and tool handling polices
- Maintain and create relationships with academic programs
- Maintain and create relationships with community partners
- Organize a governing council
- Maintain existing infrastructure at the site
- Create and leave legacy documentation

## **Statement of Need**

The above listed duties are in addition to the responsibilities of maintaining the diverse gardens within the farm. It takes time to learn how to do all of these tasks efficiently, especially while also taking classes. This demanding job rarely has a student serve more than one term, greatly hindering the program's ability to facilitate consistent relationships with academics or income-generating customers. Additionally, this turnover is detrimental to the program's ability to maintain the site's infrastructure and to accrue valuable institutional memory or long term crop rotation strategies.

Short coordination terms make strategic planning very difficult for the program. The OELP is well overdue in taking its next developmental steps and we believe, based on evidence and recommendations, that it is crucial for a non-student supervisor position to be added to the management team of AS Outback Farm in order for the space to grow its capacity to serve the campus community.

## **Project Description:**

Based on the recommendations set forth in previous assessments of the program, and observed success of other university farms, we propose the creation of a Farm Manager pilot-position for the Outback OELP. This three year project would serve as a proof of concept for the existence of this position.

Once hired this individual would be responsible for the long-term success of the program, while the student coordinators would remain in charge of the day-to-day operations of the farm. This manager would direct their energy into the interests of on- and off-campus stakeholders. This

would include creating opportunities for consistent collaboration with the various colleges on campus, residence, dining services, and community partners (such as Cloud Mountain Farm, Sustainable Connections, or Scratch & Peck Feeds), all of which would reinforce the creation of new and diversified student learning opportunities. Lastly, a non-student manager for the Outback Farm opens the door to increased distribution of Outback-grown produce to the students that support the farm. This position would also have the opportunity to explore the potential for the Outback to produce its own revenue through produce or plant sales.

## **Case Studies**

### **1) University of Washington: UW Farm**

The recent success of the UW farm in Seattle can be directly linked to the addition of a non-student supervisor. This occurred in the summer of 2013. The first annual report of the farm was published in 2014. In this report the UW farm says they saw a 50% increase in sales to their dining halls. This added an additional \$11,704 to the program's operating budget. This growth has continued. In 2015 the farm saw sales of \$17,245, and while the 2016 report has not been published, interviews suggest that they saw sales close to \$50,000 this past year.

Annual reports also show an increase in academic relationships as well as number of events and student volunteers.

For more detailed information on the UW farm, see the attached supporting documents.

### **2) Evergreen State College Organic Farm**

The Evergreen State College Organic Farm has a similar history to that of the Outback, having been established by students in 1971. One major difference is that they hired their first non-student Farm Manager in 1981, just 10 years later. This person was able to organize the

production of biennial reports, create academic relationships, plan and implement long-term management strategies, and overall help the program to grow from a student-run garden space to an actual academic program (the Practice of Organic Farming Program POF) with a certified Organic and Salmon-Safe Farm that grows produce and sells it through multiple avenues campus-wide. The current farm manager is responsible for the financial success of the farm, which under his direction brings in \$25,000-\$50,000 per year in revenue, which then pays for the operational needs of the farm. Evergreen's model of Campus Farm is highly respected by the University as an academic program that is able to generate significant Profits.

### **Project Timeline**

As previously stated, the research team suggests a three year (part-time) pilot position so as to test the viability of this position, with minimal long-term consequence. Three years provides time for the position to become well-established, assess itself and make adjustments as needed before seeking funds to operationalize itself through a specific office or collaboration of departments.

### **Objectives:**

1) Begin the application process for a large \*Sustainable Action Fund Grant (SAF). This grant would be authored based on the recommendations in this proposal, as well as its attached supporting documents. This should occur in late March of 2017. Amount to be requested is outlined in the budget section of this proposal.

*\*An initial meeting with the SAF coordinator to discuss this proposal and the project itself is recommended.*

- 2) In conjunction with step one, the team must author the job description for this position position. Guidelines for the position's recommended job responsibilities are included in a later section of this proposal.
- 3) Write and submit a formal SAF grant application to fund a three year pilot position in Spring 2017. This would include:
  - One year to establish itself, create base data, partake in AS assessment, and author initial planning documents.
  - A second year to continue previous data collection, author the first annual report, and implement plans set forth in the first year.
  - A third year for continuation of implemented policies, authoring of the second annual report, and (assuming we see measured growth) time to operationalize funding of the position.
- 4) Summer 2017, receive SAF grant.
- 5) Recruit appropriate applicants as outlined in final job description.
- 6) Hire qualified candidate. Timeline of hire is dependent on the date of grant receipt.
- 7) Candidate serves term and participates in assessment of performance as outlined in the final job description.
- 8) Project is considered complete at the end of the pilot positions term. Operationalized funding will only be sought if this project is successful.

### **Pending Considerations**

Before applying for this grant, the team must figure out who oversees this supervisor, i.e. where would this position hold a temporary office? There is the potential that the position is funded through the SAF, and is housed at Fairhaven college since they own the space. Additional conversations could lead to this position temporarily falling under the Viking Union's

administration. The Lakewood manager, the Outdoor Center coordinator and the Recycle Center manager are listed as VU staff. Answering this question is paramount.

It determines:

- Who heads up the hiring committee.
- Who this person reports to.
- Where support will be found during the fledgling year.

### **The Position**

The basis of the supervisor's job responsibilities will be derived from the program's existing strengths, challenges, opportunities, and threats that were identified in the Outback's most recent SCOT analysis. Emphasis will be on eliminating challenges and threats, while seizing opportunities and maintaining strengths.

### **Challenges include:**

- Rough transitions from coordinator to coordinator
- Lack of data collection policies
- Lack of long term relationships with professors and academic programs

### **Threats include:**

- Funding dependency
- Unrealistic student job responsibilities
- Lack of access to large funds or savings accounts for infrastructure improvements.

### **The Manager's Position Responsibilities will Include:**

- Oversight of coordinator legacy

- Creation and enforcement of data collection procedures
- Author, and distribute, annual report
- Author, program strategic plan
- Specific attention to be paid to increasing campus food security.
- Explore, and implement, potential revenue streams from the space.
- Write a "business" plan
- Establish, and maintain, savings account for large projects
- Establish, and maintain, long-term relationships with westerns academic programs.
- Specific attention to be paid to optimizing STEM opportunities.
- Supervise operating budget
- Student coordinator to supervise AS programming budget
- Supervise and work with student coordinators
- Train incoming coordinators on
  - Budget obligations
  - Job responsibilities
  - Safety procedures
  - Hiring Work-study students
- Establish, and maintain, infrastructure maintenance calendar
- Maintain farm supplies

### **Measuring Success**

Once created, success of this position and the effectiveness of its ability to steer the program toward its next development phase will be measured in part through an AS Structure and Program Advisory Committee (SPAC) analysis process. \*The Outback is scheduled to go

through this process in the 2018 academic year. During this process the AS will analyze the relationship between the proposed supervisor position and the student coordinators. It is this committee that will determine if changes to the student coordinator and apprentice job descriptions/terms are needed. Additionally, this process will immediately measure the impact the position has on the workload of the student positions and the objectives of the farm program.

*\*Depending on the hiring timeline of this position, it is recommended that SPAC assessment dates be negotiated to achieve a useful assessment of the staffing change.*

Success will also be measured through the difference in data within the second and third year of annual reports. The first year's report will serve as a baseline measure. If the AS Outback Farm OELP sees an increase in revenue and/or academic usage after this position is established, this project will be deemed successful.

If proven successful, it is recommended that further assessment be done to determine if this position needs to be expanded into a full time position.

## **Budget**

Previous analysis has estimated a pilot position such as this to cost 130,000 over the duration of a three-year project. This estimate does include standard benefits and is based on existing salary schedules for the university. This information was gathered from the supporting document, *Developing an Outback Manager Position*, by Paul Kearsley. Final salary will be determined in collaboration with HR, upon the completion of the job description.

As noted in the 2014 SPAC report and Kearsley's supporting documents, there are many avenues through which this position could be funded, including but not limited to: Fairhaven College, Huxley College, Office of Sustainability, Dining Services, Facilities Management, University Residences, Associated Students, the Provost's Office (the farm's largest funder outside the AS), and the President's Office. At this point in the positions development it is near impossible to determine which of these potential funders would derive the most benefit from this positions existence.

We therefore propose the first three years of this part time position to be funded through the less-biased channel of the Sustainable Action Fund (SAF). This is to avoid a situation many non-profits wind up in where they are constantly creating programming to match funding, rather than seeking funding that supports what they do. The only requirements the SAF fund upholds is visible educational benefit and further progression of Western's sustainability, both of which will be strongly supported by the creation of this position.

A large grant through the SAF ranges from \$5,000-300,000, therefore funding this pilot in full for three years is doable. Authors of this grant will need a staff or faculty sponsor. An advisor to the Outback naturally fits this role. Additionally, those spearheading this grant will need to work with the SAF team to articulate clear *student benefit* from this position's creation. By the beginning of the third year, campus stakeholders should have a very firm grasp on which departments have received the most benefit (and therefore where to acquire appropriate buy-in) from the creation of this position. Collaboration between departments may be required, and is encouraged.

**Conclusion:**

The AS Outback OELP has reached a bottleneck in its capacity to serve Western Washington University. It is time to invest in a position that would guide the farm into its next developmental stage. This includes increasing the farms academic relationships, creating a sustainable operating budget through revenue streams, and alleviating unnecessary responsibility restraints on student coordinators. A non-student management position would allow student leadership to focus on farm work and the student to student relationships that are so valuable to the program. This advancement would shift the Outback to be more in line with the management structures of other successful farm programs across the country (including programs not housed within agricultural schools). The implementation of the recommended pilot position outlined in this proposal would strategically position the farm to be a leader in the growing network of campus farms.

## **Supporting Documents:**

WWU Associated Students

→ Student Coordinator Job Descriptions

→ TAP report and final recommendations

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B1xI4EyfADkbTS16amY0SzQyYVU>

OELP Evaluation and Outback Manager Position Recommendation

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B1xI4EyfADkdkxCNzBJM284M00>

UW Farm Case Study

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B1xI4EyfADkbYzUtd0hrZ2JHOW8?usp=sharing>