

Report to All Star One Governing Council – October 2020
“Star Island Council of Conferences”
from Louise Williams, SIC Board Liaison to CoC

Greetings, All Star One Friends:

As stated in its Charter, the mission of the Council of Conferences is:

- To share ideas and best practices among the various conferences that meet on Star Island
- To study issues and make recommendations to the full Star Island Board, at its request
- To have members that are receptive and open to ideas, have perspective and vision, are familiar with the Star Island, can give the necessary time, and think in terms of Star Island citizenship.

In general, the CoC holds two meetings annually: In the spring, the CoC convenes prior to the annual meeting of the SIC; a fall meeting takes place each October on the Saturday that follows Indigenous Peoples Day. Each conference is invited to send representative(s) – Conferences with more than 100 people are represented by up to two delegates, and conferences with fewer than 100 people are represented by one delegate.

I formally joined the CoC’s Board of Directors in January 2019, as the Liaison of the Board of Directors of the Star Island Corporation (SIC). The purpose of this report is to summarize the CoC’s major activities since October 2018:

- In October 2018, the CoC amended its Charter to allow participation of a Liaison from the SIC Board of Directors as a full voting member of the CoC Board. Prior CoC policy limited the SIC Liaison to a non-voting role.
- The April 2019 focused substantively on the question of the underlying purpose of the CoC, and the specific topics that future meetings should explore. Notes that meeting are attached (Attachment A).
- The October 2019 meeting, in addition to featuring short reports from CEO Joe Watts and participating conferences, centered on questions of how individual Star Island conferences and the Star Island Corporation more broadly can be more welcoming to all shoalers, with an emphasis on newcomers. Two reports distilled from that discussion – one directed to Conference Chairs and Registrars, and other to the SIC Board – are attached. (Attachments B and C).
- The April 2020 CoC meeting was cancelled due to the Covid-19 crisis. In an effort to help conferences share ideas and learn from one another during the summer of 2020, the CoC Board launched and supported an active Facebook group, open to all interested shoalers (see “Star Island Council of Conferences” on Facebook).

- The October 2020 was scheduled to take place via Zoom on October 17, 2020. Attached is the agenda (Attachment D). The outcomes of the meeting will be briefly summarized at the All Star One Governing Council meeting on October 24.
- As of October 1, 2020, the membership of the CoC Board consisted of the following individuals:
 - Robert Clay – Board Member since 2018
 - Sarah Gordon – Board Member since 2014
 - Fiona Monllor – Board Member since 2018
 - Louise Williams – SIC Board Liaison since 2019

The agenda for the October 17 meeting includes an election for two open Board seats.

Respectfully,

Louise Williams

CoC Report - Attachment A

Notes from Meeting of the Star Island Council of Conferences May 4, 2019 First Congregational Church Holliston, MA

The meeting was facilitated by Bob Clay, with significant participation by Board members Philip Sears (Chair); Fiona Duncan, Sarah Gordon, and Louise Williams (Board representative). During introductions, Phil announced that it would be his last meeting as Chair.

Roll call – 10:30-10:40 am

Conferences represented at the meeting included:

Natural History, Star Arts, IRAS, Star Union, All Star One, All Star Two, Faith Development (LRE), International Affairs, Star Gathering II, Family Festival, LOAS I, LOAS II, Pel Reunion, Midweek Retreat I, Midweek Retreat II, Star Women, and Chamber Music.

In all, around 60-65 people attended all or part of the meeting.

Greetings from Star Island Corporation – 10:40-10:50

CEO Joe Watts welcomed meeting participants, reviewed some highlights from the 2018 Star Island season, and shared a short preview of the 2019 season. His remarks touched on Star's recent successes in meeting financial goals, including through very good bednight numbers and awards of significant grants; excellent outside press about Star; the many facilities upgrades taking place; the Green Gosport initiative; and the Beloved Community initiative. He also underscored the need this year (as in every year) for end-of-season Pelicans and encouraged everyone to help in recruitment. Joe also discussed the two new family conferences to be introduced on Star in 2019 – Star Union (last week in June) and Family Festival (first full week in August).

Open Discussion – 10:50-11:45 am

Bob Clay opened the discussion by referring to the purpose of the meeting as articulated in advance: **What is the purpose and future of the Council of Conferences? What topic should we focus on for the fall meeting of the Council of Conferences?** The following notes represent the main issues that arose, and specific ideas shared and discussed by meeting participants:

Purpose and value of the Council of Conferences

- Sharing best practices and traditions
- Getting conferences out of their silos
- Helping other conferences with administrative topic, such as programming or registration
- Helping the Island serve a more diverse population
- Responding to issues as presented to the conferences by the Board
 - Examples: Island Opening Late crisis; boat transport; conference scheduling; alcohol; insurance; etc.
- Bringing issues before the Board, such as Island capacity issues

- Revitalizing old conferences

How can the Council of Conferences more effectively serve these purposes?

- More effectively share information, solicit input, and encourage participation
 - Engage social media (such as a C/C Facebook page)
 - Host meetings via Zoom
 - Add a Council of Conferences page to the Star Island website
 - Ensure wide circulation and promotion of meeting invitations and agenda
 - Livestream Council of Conferences meeting
 - Experiment with other uses of technology
- Focus on building relationships among conferences
- More actively encourage participation in Council of Conferences meetings
- When having topic-specific meetings:
 - Make sure the right people are in the room (ie, stakeholders in the topic being discussed)
 - Encourage breakout sessions

Ideas for future Council of Conferences meetings/initiatives

- Convene conferences treasurers for information-sharing (*note: just some of the larger conferences have treasurers*)
- Convene other conference leaders with shared interests, such as children’s staff (*note: Board already does this for Chairs/Registrars in January*)
- Convening leaders from small conferences
- Serving children and youth
- Retaining the “post-college, pre-family crowd”
- Removing barriers to attendance – disability, cost
- Getting partners to come to Star
- Promoting welcoming and inclusive practices

Additional comments

- One of the best ways to learn from other conferences is to attend other conferences
- Missing from this meeting: Youth and young adults
- Star Island also has a lot to learn from UU Alliance of Camps of Conferences, for which Joe Watts is an active leader
- Who is a member of the Council of Conferences? Are we an exclusive body?
- For all conferences, there is learning on the Island that we can take back to our communities. How can we help capture that learning, even for people who cannot make it to the Island?
- Affordability continues to be a concern across all conferences

Election of Board Members: 11:45 am-12 pm.

Two new people agreed to join the Board: Jill Brody and Jennifer Whitten. The new Board met briefly following Council of Conferences and agreed to meet over Zoom in June.

CoC Report - Attachment B

Star Island Council of Conferences

Ideas and Insights for 2020 Star Island Conference Chairs and Registrars

A summary of contributions at the 2019 fall meeting of the Star Island Council of Conferences

I. Introduction: Personal 2019 highlights

At the beginning of the fall meeting, participants shared some of their personal highlights from the 2019 season. These included:

- Among many successful group leaders, Ellen Taylor's outstanding instruction for writers (Star Arts)
- An increase in abstracts and posters submitted for the conference, which focused on CRISPR gene editing technology (IRAS)
- Wonderful organized activities ... culminating in a final morning of *no* formal activities (Natural History)
- A beautiful new marine lab ... to be enjoyed even more in 2020 (Pel Reunion)
- "Amazing, amazing" presentation from Alexandra de Steiguer, Star's winter caretaker (Star Arts)
- An especially successful workshop on parenting (Faith Development)
- A gratifying transition of conference leadership from the "old guard" to a new generation of leaders (Faith Development)
- An improved menu for the Island's vegetarians (LOAS)
- Thoughtful and well received speakers on topics of interest to the New Hampshire Seacoast and the Isles of Shoals in particular (June ISHRA)
- Successful and fun "Behind the Scenes at Star" programming, including deeper looks into the kitchen and outdoor facilities (September ISHRA)
- A chocolate fountain on the porch (on three different occasions!)
- Blending conference cultures and learning from sharing the Island with other conferences (IRAS + Star Union)
- The September weekend where conferees had access to three different kinds of live music
- Truly responsive and caring emergency medical assistance from Island doctors
- Enjoying the bees and the butterflies in the Pel Garden near the EMB
- Experiencing Star as an End of Season Pelican
- Enjoying the Star conferee experience ... a year after serving as Chair!

II. Examining Successful Practices: A summary of topics, examples, ideas, and experiences discussed during the CoC fall meeting

A. Encouraging greater diversity within conference governance and programming. As the Star Island Corporation moves forward with its Beloved Community initiative (which was among the topics addressed by Island staff during the first part of the CoC meeting), a number of conferences at Star have focused recently on ensuring that their own leadership and governance structures are more representative of the communities they aspire to serve – so that, in turn, their conferences will become more inclusive. During the CoC meeting’s limited discussion on this topic, tangible ideas for bringing more voices into conference governance and program-planning included:

- Enlisting a professional consultant to lead a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion workshop for conference leadership
- Undertaking a conversation within conference leadership about what it means to encourage the participation of younger people and conferees at a traditionally “adult” conference, including the point at which a formal youth program may be necessary to support generational diversity
- Developing systems so that, when inviting speakers or special guests, conference planners “don’t just pick who we know”
- Working intentionally to bring in youth, people of color, women and other traditionally overlooked groups into year-round conference business and planning
- Encouraging generous contributions to financial aid funds (whether conference-specific or Island-wide)
- Ensuring affordability of conference registration fees.

B. What are some great ideas for evening activities – whether before or after chapel?

- Island staff advises putting special care into first-night activities, including by enlisting activity leaders with training and experience in community-building. A great first night helps create bonds early and also helps new people feel welcome (see more below about how to be as welcoming as possible).
- Through stunt nights and talent shows, as well as late-night coffee houses, nearly all conferences offer myriad ways for people of all abilities to share their creative bounty.
- Several conferences recommend the “Moth on Star” – one or more story-telling events. Old and new conferees alike can bring hilarity, poignance, and more to this increasingly popular event.
- YAC recommends holding parties and other activities in unusual places, such as at the Graveyard, the Summer House, or the Solar Array. Island staff welcomes “out of the box” thinking – although, of course, smaller conferences will always have greater flexibility in this regard than the larger ones (as it is easier to set up in non-customary locations for smaller groups).
- Popular games and group activities included a two-conference game of Jeopardy (Star Arts and Natural History); evening movies (IRAS); a “family dinner” in Newton, which fit a smaller conference (Star Union); a “joke night” (All Star One); Late-Night Dictionary (All Star II); and more.

- All Star I's successful "15 x 20" night provides an opportunity for 10-12 conferees (of all ages) to share a set of 15 slides – programmed to be screened for just 20 seconds each – about a topic of their choice. The 15 x 20 allows conferees to learn about the passions of their fellow shoalers ... but offers zero opportunity for any single speaker to monopolize the conversation!
- The "Drive-In" movie idea, first tried at Family Festival 2018, is gaining popularity. Navigating around bedtimes and other activities is part of the planning, but conferences are increasingly interested in incorporating this new option into their schedules.

C. What are some successful experiences serving special foods or drinks during the week?

- Many conferences have long traditions serving clams and mussels at Social Hour.
- The Island kitchen is well experienced at preparing artichokes for large conferences at Social Hour, served with an array of sauces and dips.
- The chocolate fountain was a popular 2019 innovation!
- Conferences are increasingly adept at offering alternatives to alcohol at social hour, including through:
 - Prominent placement of fun and interesting non-alcoholic beverages, such as a juice bar
 - "Make your own" lime rickys ... with lots of fun additional flavors, including some that offer local flair (homemade blackberry syrup, for example)
 - Focus on the food! On one recent occasion, the marine lab helped prepare a selection of seaweeds for sampling. For several conferences, preparing interesting and creative appetizers is among the volunteer activities.
 - While welcoming everyone to social hour, many conferences also schedule a Friends of Bill W. meeting at the same time.

D. How to be a Welcoming Conference: Promising ideas and successful practices

- The Island's conference services staff offers a number of resources to help conferences be intentionally welcoming of new shoalers. The 2019 "Staying on Star: What to Expect" video has proven to be a popular tool for chairs and registrars, who find that sharing the video with new conferees well in advance is an effective way to minimize surprises
- The Island's conference leadership handbook also includes a section on "How to Run a Great Conference," with an emphasis on intentional welcoming of new shoalers
- Island staff further recommends re-thinking old ideas that may prove to be the opposite of welcoming. For example, conferences are not advised to leave people who are new to Star Island out of assuming a role or a job – to do so overlooks a good opportunity for them to meet people and learn about conference practices and traditions. New conferees will likely welcome the opportunity, for example, to set up at Social Hour; to help ring the bell before meals or activities; or to partner with an experienced shoaler in leading an activity

- Many conferences pair new conferees with experienced shoalers in advance, with the Star Arts' conference "Shoalmates" program serving as a particularly successful example. Star Arts pairs old and new shoalers well before the conference, and they know to greet each other at the dock. Shoalmates provides an easy resource and trouble-shooter for new conferees throughout the conference.
- For several conferences, coordination of welcoming new conferees is a volunteer position, with written instructions supplied ahead of time.
- One year, Faith Development circulated a "glossary" of special Star words and phrases (Pelican; Fire & Water; Polar Bear; etc.) to help new conferees avoid confusion.
- Conference Facebook Pages can be an effective way for new conferences to learn more about their upcoming visit to Star Island and who they might meet there. Several conferences also circulate newsletters in advance, inclusive of both information about the week and instructions for everyone.
- Youth leaders can help kids get ready for a successful conference by reaching out in advance of the conference to the members of their group. For example, they can send a postcard or welcome letter with information about what group activities to expect and how to prepare for the week (such as bringing an item to tie-dye).
- Actively welcoming new conferees at the dock – as well as during the ride out to Star – is an area where several conferences have room for improvement. Understanding that it is hard to be the new person in an environment where everyone seems to know each other, the CoC will continue to look for good practices in this area.
- **Conference leaders ought to be quite visible (hat, t-shirt, etc.) when the boat arrives so that new conferees can readily identify people who are available to help/talk/guide, and are knowledgeable about the week's plans.**
- Encouraging all conferees to attend the Fire & Water meeting – including known truants! – is an effective way to underscore equality and inclusiveness in the conference community.
- In recent years, Island staff has requested during Fire & Water that conferees refrain from saving seats the dining hall. This additional content has proven welcome to conferees who may have felt uncomfortable raising the issue by themselves.
- A "FAQ" (frequently asked questions) meeting for new shoalers early in the conference – and perhaps even again near the end – can help solve mysteries that become apparent upon arrival, or that linger throughout the conference.
- All Star II has experimented with a picture wall that helps all conferees attach names to faces. Early in the conference, a group of volunteer photographers snap pictures of individuals and families, which are posted near the dining hall. New and experienced conferees alike welcome the information.
- An island newsletter – such as the IRAS "Daily Star Beacon" or International Affairs' "Sandpiper" can make sure everyone has access to breaking conference news.

- The dining hall offers special opportunities to mix old faces with new ones. For example, at one lunch, conferees can be encouraged to eat with people with whom share a birthday month.

CoC Report - Attachment C

Star Island Council of Conferences Report to Board from CoC 2019 Fall Meeting December 10, 2019

The Star Island Council of Conferences (CoC) held its annual fall meeting on Saturday, October 19, 2019 at the South Church (UU) in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Around thirty people attended, representing both large and small conferences, Island staff, and even the day-visitor community. Conferences sending representatives included the Yearly Adults Conference, Natural History, Star Arts, ISHRA (June and September), IRAS, All Star I, All Star II, Faith Development, LOAS (jointly represented), and Pelican Reunion. Participants at the meeting also brought direct experience as conferees at Star Union, Family Festival, Midweek Retreat, and a number of other smaller conferences. Joe Watts, CEO, attended the entire meeting; John Bynum, Island Manager, participated in the morning session; and Justina Maji, Conference Center Director, participated in the afternoon session.

The CoC Board

Robert Clay, *Faith Development & CoC Fall Meeting Convener*
Jill Brody, *Life on a Star*
Sarah Gordon, *Star Arts*
Fiona Monllor, *All Star II*
Jennifer Whitten, *Institute of Religion in an Age of Science*
Louise Williams, *All Star I & SIC Board Liaison*

The fall meeting was a good start to the CoC's revitalized effort to facilitate communications among the more than 60 conferences that take place at Star during a single season. In addition to inviting participants to share best practices from their respective conferences, the agenda incorporated time to discuss the questions presented to the CoC by the SIC Board of Directors following the Board's August 2019 retreat. The discussion followed a detailed report in the morning by Joe and John and, later, remarks by Justina about recent efforts to make the Island more welcoming. Although the CoC did not formally vote on its responses concerning the Board's questions, the discussion produced a number of insights that may prove useful in guiding the Board and Island staff in future undertakings. CoC reactions to each question are summarized below.

- 1. How can the SIC assist all conferences in welcoming newcomers, so that they, too, will want to "come back"?**
 - First, fall meeting participants praised the 2019 "Staying on Star: What to Expect" video as an excellent resource for orienting newcomers. The video is a popular tool for chairs and registrars, who have found that sharing the video with new conferees well in advance is an effective way to minimize surprises.
 - After Island staff mentioned the section in the conference leadership handbook called "How to Run a Great Conference," CoC participants proposed that, in the future, staff

can integrate CoC insights and ideas, as appropriate, during routine updates to the handbook.

- Meeting participants discussed the point raised by staff that some old ideas for welcoming newcomers may prove to have the opposite effect. For example, new conferees may not appreciate getting called upon by virtue of their first-time status or for their unfamiliarity with Island traditions. Newcomers also may feel unduly excluded if they are left out of volunteer assignments or other opportunities to meet new people in lower-stress situations.
 - Ensuring that children and youth that are new to the Island have a positive experience is critical to getting families to return. Some conferences may benefit from more support for their children/youth programs, including through sharing of best practices across conferences that typically host children and youth.
 - The SIC should consider circulating an after-conference survey to all new shoalers to learn more about their individual experiences.
 - Discussion then focused on how conferences and the Island can work together to build welcoming practices into crucial early moments of each conference, including:
 - On the boat, would it be possible for the Island to arrange for Island or conference leadership to welcome conferees over the public address system?
 - Upon arrival, new conferees may benefit from a designated escort to their rooms and help finding Elliot hall for the Fire & Water talk
 - At Fire & Water (F&W), Island staff and conferences could work to:
 - Reinforce to all conferences that attendance at F&W is mandatory, and that experienced shoalers who skip F&W may be setting a tone of exclusivity or lack of equality among conferees
 - Ensure that F&W is substantively meaningful to both old and new shoalers (through updated content and key introductions, etc.) and that all participants leave with a sense of having learned something new or important
 - Further ensure that F&W imparts the Island’s commitment to inclusive practices, such as its recent direction that conferees should not save seats in the dining room, an addition that many conferees appreciated
 - Consider whether a “child-specific” orientation is worth offering; alternatively, working to direct the F&W experience to all ages of people attending the conference.
 - The CoC Board appreciates the Island’s willingness to circulate the summary of best practices developed following the fall meeting, entitled “Ideas and Insights for 2020 Star Island Conference Chairs and Registrars.”
- 2. For new and smaller conferences, what can the SIC do to help you become more established or to grow, pursuant to your vision or mission?**

- The Natural History Conference, mindful of the recent history that resulted in the change of its traditional week on Star to one week earlier, noted a preference for its former timing on the calendar. Although Natural History is interested in expansion and even transitioning to a multigenerational group that includes a youth program, the fact that the week takes place while most K-12 students are still in school limits its potential for growth. In the past, the conference has attracted as many as 120 conferees.
- Pel Reunion noted that its size – which has been as high as 200 in the past – is somewhat limited by staffing constraints that are typical at the end of the summer. An ideal size is “whatever fills the Island.” Flexibility in leaving dates may help increase enrollment. Pel Reunion would also like to have input into which other conference(s) they may share the Island with – there may be synergies that impact the growth of each.
- Yearly Adults values its place as Star Island’s “first conference” of the year. Yearly Adults would welcome assistance becoming more connected with recent Pelicans or other youth conferences, along with other publicity or marketing assistance that the Island might offer. Yearly Adults understands that its growth is necessarily constrained by the fact that it takes place before the arrival of many Pelicans.
- Other smaller or mid-sized conferences represented at the CoC meeting (such as IRAS and Star Arts) noted their interest in growth and in continued support from Island staff for this purpose. Meeting participants discussed the tension inherent in filling the Island with two or more conferences, especially with respect to issues such as noise and meeting space – while at the same time ensuring that the Island is accessible to a range of groups and that its bed-night goals are achieved.

3. For larger conferences, what is your preferred capacity? How can the SIC and conferences work together to address capacity issues?

Discussion under this topic focused on the Island’s efforts to be flexible for larger conferences: Beyond around 280 people, it is up to each conference to determine how many people it will accommodate (providing they can fit). Some conferences prefer to maximize their numbers, so as to not leave anyone out. Others feel that any number beyond 300 is too many. Island staff noted their invitation to all conferences to inform them before Thanksgiving about their preferred limits, so that this expectation can be folded into the final budget numbers. The Island is further seeking assistance from registrars in redirecting waitlisted conferees to similar conferences that have space.

Since larger conferences were not broadly represented at the CoC meeting, the question of cooperation among conferences to handle waitlists may find more traction at the conferences and registrars meeting.

AGENDA
Star Island Council of Conferences

Fall Meeting: October 17, 2020

9:30 am – 1:00 pm

By Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84186213802?pwd=MG52Tnk5dEVzOW56VnFBcVh2dmF1Zz09>

Meeting ID: 841 8621 3802

Passcode: 017002

Call to Order	Bob Clay, Convener	9:30 am
Opening Words	Sarah Gordon	9:30 – 9:35 am
Roll Call	Fiona Monllor	9:35 – 9:45 am
Organizational Updates, including Q&A		9:45 – 10:30 am

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|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Council of Conferences | Bob Clay |
| 2. Star Island Corporation | Joe Watts, CEO
Justina Maji, Conference Center
Director |

Conference Sharing	Bob Clay	10:30–11:20 am
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*Each conference will be allotted three (3) minutes to share its experiences from the past year, including its responses to the 2020 Island closing and other updates, news, or ideas that may be of interest or benefit to others. Discussion and Q&A will be incorporated, time permitting. Notes will be taken during this session and compiled for distribution to 2021 Conference Chairs and Registrars. **Conferences are also encouraged to submit written summaries to councilofconferences@gmail.com.***

Break		11:20–11:30 am
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Discussion Items	Bob Clay
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1. Questions from SIC Board of Directors for CoC discussion 11:30–12:15 pm and feedback:

As the SIC moves forward with planning for 2021, does your conference have any suggestions or requests concerning timing of the season announcement, circulation of the Blue Book, conference registration, etc.?

Notes will be taken during this session and compiled for distribution to the Star Island Board of Directors and Star Island Corporation staff.

2. Election of new CoC Board Members 12:15–12:30 pm

The CoC Board has two open seats, one currently held by an incumbent. **Individuals interested in joining the Board as a full member or alternate – and who can commit at least two years of participation – should notify the CoC Board of their interest no later than Wednesday, October 15 by sending an e-mail to councilofconferences@gmail.com.** Participation on the CoC Board involves up to six meetings (mostly online) each year for the purpose of planning and implementing cross-conference collaboration, information-sharing, and support for Star Island Corporation activities and initiatives.

3. Additional Business 12:30 – 12:40 pm

Meeting Reflections	Bob Clay	12:40 – 12:50 pm
Closing Words	Louise Williams	12:50 – 12:55 pm
Adjournment	Bob Clay	1:00 pm

Council of Conferences 2020 Board of Directors
Robert Clay – Board Member since 2018
Sarah Gordon – Board Member since 2014
Fiona Monllor – Board Member since 2018
Louise Williams – SIC Board Liaison since 2019