

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

The Job Training and Environmental Conservation (JTEC) Initiative is a Tier 1 proposal requesting a three-year grant to fund 195 AmeriCorps slots annually for economically disadvantaged youth, beginning in 2014. JTEC is a current, statewide collaboration among three Colorado youth corps with four service locations across the state: Mile High Youth Corps; Rocky Mountain Youth Corps; and Western Colorado Conservation Corps, together serving 29 Colorado counties. These AmeriCorps members, age 17-24, are economically disadvantaged youth who have earned a high school diploma or GED but have not completed a college degree. JTEC Corpsmembers will gain job training, skill development, and job placement services while addressing critical, natural resource conservation needs through public land improvement projects. MHYC will continue as the lead grantee and manage the grant on behalf of the sub-grantees. Each service location will recruit and select its own members and develop service projects to address targeted needs in their own service area.

## Rationale and Approach

a. Need.

Community Problems. The JTEC Initiative focuses on addressing the following community problems:

¿ The high youth unemployment rate in Colorado: Due to the economic recession, youth corps offer young people hope for a better future by providing stipends, opportunities for job training, leadership development, and case management support to improve their employability and career skills.

¿ Environmental stewardship: With 11 national forests, 4 national parks, hundreds of regional and local parks, and thousands of miles of recreational trails and other open spaces, Colorado's unique environment is a key attraction to visitors and residents alike. Land managers need continual support to conserve these open spaces and JTEC Corps have already partnered in those efforts. This grant will support an even greater impact on environmental stewardship, particularly targeting the extensive environmental damage resulting from Colorado's devastating 2012 fire season.

Target population and rationale. For 20 years, Colorado youth corps have utilized service to engage 17-24 year old youth, most of whom are economically disadvantaged, in job training by way of maintaining and improving public lands. Based on Omni Institute's independent evaluation of MHYC's programs, based on seven years of data, Corpsmembers job skills and leadership skills increased significantly during their terms of service. For the past three years, over 80% of MHYC

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Corpsmembers placed in jobs or postsecondary education after completing their term of service, making MHYC an ideal lead agency for this Initiative.

Extent/severity of need. Opportunities for Economically Disadvantaged Youth. The three JTEC partners provide critically-needed job training and education programs for economically disadvantaged youth at a time when the youth unemployment rate is 17.1% and 20.5% for ethnic minority youth, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. An indication of the severity of unemployment is that JTEC corps receive up to ten applications for each opening. While youth may become discouraged by the daunting job market, corps can improve their chances for success.

Each year, JTEC helps young people bridge the gap between high school and post-secondary graduation and/or the workplace by offering opportunities to earn stipends; acquire marketable job skills and work experience; become more mature and responsible through positive guidance and leadership development; receive encouragement and assistance with college exploration, admissions and financial aid applications; experience civic engagement; and become eligible for AmeriCorps financial awards for post-secondary education in exchange for completing required service hours.

Most JTEC Corpsmembers are low-income, underserved youth ages 17 to 24 that lack the skills and education to obtain employment and move toward self-sufficiency. Additionally, most of our Corpsmembers statistically place below the national poverty level of \$21,780, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Data released by the Census Bureau in September 2012 reported that the percent of Colorado residents living below the poverty level rose from 12% in 2007 to 13.5% in 2011. Of the counties served by JTEC corps included in the report, the following had the most significant decreases in median income during this period: Mesa County (-13.8%); Arapahoe County (-11.1%); Pueblo County (-9.2%); and El Paso County (-8.5%).

While the economic picture in Colorado is beginning to show signs of improvement, recovery is projected to be a lengthy process. Unskilled and undereducated youth are generally among the last to be hired and, more often than not, are hired for low-paying jobs. Youth corps, with its extensive experience preparing this population for future success in sustainable careers such as 21st Century *¿green¿* industries, plays an important role in helping to accelerate the employability of this disproportionately-burdened age group.

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Environmental Stewardship. Each JTEC service location integrates service-learning and environmental education into its program. The extent/severity of need for environmental stewardship activities in the targeted communities may best be documented by media reports throughout the summer of 2012 of several destructive fires ravaging Colorado's forests; the Lower North Fork, High Park, and Waldo Canyon Fires among them. Colorado's extended 2012 fire season burned 200,000 acres of land and destroyed 600 homes. The abnormally high temperatures and drought of the recent years have caused an explosion in pine needle beetle populations, and those dead trees and hot summer made Colorado forests even more susceptible to fire in 2012 and beyond. The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Colorado estimates that it will take several years for forest recovery to occur after the 2012 fire season. Fortunately, crews of Youth Corps members have been trained in fire mitigation and restoration. Their expertise has been used to work with homeowners in forested areas to clear brush from around buildings, which helps protect those structures in the event of fires. As the US Forest Service and other agencies organize fire restoration and reseedling operations on Colorado public lands over the next several years, Corpsmember's skills in restoring forest lands damaged by the 2012 fire season are likely to be in high demand.

Forest fires are not the only serious threat to Colorado's forest lands. According to the State Forest Service in the 2011 Report on the Health of Colorado's Forest, population explosions of the mountain pine beetle (MPB) continued to be Colorado's most damaging threat in 2011. The current outbreak, which started on the Western Slope in the late 1990s, has continued to spread eastward and, as of 2011, 3.3 million areas of pine forests have been impacted and widespread tree death has occurred. In 2011, foresters observed an overall area of 752,000 acres of lodge pole, limber and ponderosa pine forest in which MPB had killed trees during the past year. This represents a decline in the total area damaged statewide compared to recent years (878,000 acres in 2010 and 1,046,000 acres in 2009); however, heavy mortality continues to occur, especially in areas where beetle populations increased during the past few years. Youth Corps members trained for safely removing beetle kill pine trees have worked with the Forest Service over the past several summers to help remove hazardous trees in an effort to prevent natural disasters like those in the summer of 2012. In light of the report indicating forest areas affected by MPB continued to increase in 2011, these services are likely to be in demand for the next several years.

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JTEC Corpsmembers also play a critical role in invasive species removal throughout Colorado. Trees are considered invasive if they are exotic or non-indigenous species introduced into environments in which they did not evolve. Invasive species have no natural enemies to limit their reproduction, and thus can displace native vegetation by taking over habitat. Two of the most invasive species are Russian Olive and Tamarisk, introduced decades ago as windbreaks. The Colorado Department of Agriculture now lists these species as noxious weeds that are prohibited from propagation. Concerted efforts are made to remove the trees posing the most threat to native vegetation and water supplies. For example, Tamarisk dries up springs, wetlands, and riparian areas by lowering water tables. The Tamarisk Coalition, a nonprofit alliance based in Grand Junction, estimated in 2007 that approximately 92,000 acres of Tamarisk and 5,000 acres of Russian Olive have infested every major drainage way in the state with the exception of the North Platte area. Corpsmembers with sawyer training in removing hazardous trees and plants are likely to continue participating in service projects that assist public land managers in addressing these critical natural resource management needs in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

Other work performed by trained Corpsmembers includes trail building and maintenance of public lands. The U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, and numerous county and local governments contract with experienced and skilled JTEC partners to perform a myriad of environmental projects.

### b. AmeriCorps Members as Highly Effective Means to Solve Community Problems

Member activities. AmeriCorps members serving with JTEC partners have the opportunity to participate in career training, life-skills training, and a host of other services to help better prepare them for success. Following initial training, Corpsmembers are assigned to work crews on a myriad of projects that improve public lands, including trail building, fire mitigation/restoration, and clearing noxious weeds.

Career Readiness Training: Members at each service location will participate in environmental-focused Service Learning Curriculum (SLC) and Career and College Readiness Training (CRT) curriculum. Members will create short and long-term plans related to their professional and personal goals. Goal plans are active tools used throughout their term of service. Most members will participate in job and educational panels, job shadows and tours, mock interviews, and resume and cover letter

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development geared toward their educational and employment goals. In addition, members will gain valuable soft skills in work ethics: punctuality; teamwork; interpersonal skills; problem solving; cognitive skills; professionalism; creative thinking; and communication. Each member will participate in SLC, implemented by a Crew Leader. The SLC contains easy-to-facilitate readings, activities, and discussion topics in a variety of focus areas, including environmental education, civic engagement, independent living skills, career development, healthy lifestyles, and leadership.

Working on crews of 6 to 10 members and supervised by seasonal staff Crew Leaders, members will complete labor-intensive, direct service projects that include fire fuel mitigation, trail rehabilitation, environmental restoration, and other projects to improve and protect wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation facilities at state parks, city parks and other public lands.

Improvement of Public Lands: Fire fuel mitigation projects include using chainsaws to remove beetle-killed Tamarisk, Russian Olive, and other potential fire fuels and clearing and/or chipping the debris. Trail rehabilitation projects include building and maintaining trails, building erosion control structures and tent pads, and installing picnic tables and signage. Environmental restoration projects include planting trees and shrubs, removing invasive plant species, removing fences to create wildlife corridors, and creating flower and shrub beds in public parks and nonprofit centers. All members receive training in proper tool usage, standard trail design, and key plant identification techniques. Members participating in fire fuel projects can earn USFS/BLM recognized S-212 sawyer certifications and CPR and First Aid training. Project sponsors will include Colorado State Parks, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, the Audubon Society, The Tamarisk Coalition, and multiple parks and open space municipalities throughout the state. Members provide the direct services needed to complete these projects.

JTEC offers three AmeriCorps slot types: 1700 hours (full-time), 900 hours (half time), and 450 hours (quarter time). The program will engage 18 full-time (FT), 8 half-time (HT), and 169 quarter-time (QT) members. Slots will be distributed as follows: MHYC (Denver and Southern Front Range service locations) - 18 FT, 72 QT; RMYC - 8 HT, 72 QT; and WCCC - 25 QT. Due to the increased demand for youth corps services in public land restoration projects as well as the high number of youth applicants, JTEC is expanding the number of youth served at two service locations: RMYC and WCCC. These slot types allow each service location to select and engage members for a time

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commitment that meets specific needs in the local community. Because of JTEC's focus on college and career readiness training and the target age for members being 17-24 year olds, the majority of members is in school and serves QT slots during the summer months or during a semester off. Given the nature of Colorado's weather and the program's focus on environmental projects, most work is completed during summer and fall. Depending on crew structure, some members serve on residential (or camping) crews, meaning they travel together and camp near the project site. Other members serve on non-residential (or day) crews, meaning they return home each evening.

The AmeriCorps grant adds value beyond financial support. The multi-site JTEC initiative continues to strengthen efforts to advance the youth corps movement. In particular, the Initiative's focus on CRT and SLC has caused each corps to intensify their efforts to incorporate job training and leadership opportunities into all aspects of programming. Because of these efforts, each JTEC corps has developed its own internal "leadership ladder" for members. The ladder represents a series of opportunities that youth can take advantage of to move up the ranks within a Corps. Each step offers additional responsibility and the opportunity to develop new skills. JTEC corps continue to share best practices and lessons learned with each other, making leadership development and job training a cornerstone of the youth corps experience in Colorado.

c. Evidence-Based/Evidence-Informed and Measurable Community Impact. With young Americans having the highest level of unemployment and the slowest economic recovery, youth corps are a means of providing young people with meaningful service opportunities and skill development. Each JTEC implements best practices of the Youth Development Model. According to the Mentoring Resource Center (2007), Youth Development in its broadest sense refers to the stages that all children go through to acquire the attitudes, competencies, values and special skills they need to become adults. Youth corps incorporate the basic principles of the Youth Development Model in their program design by: involving youth in decision making; developing youth leadership skills; engaging youth in community life; developing and testing new knowledge and practical skills; allowing youth to experience success; encouraging a sense of belonging or connectedness; and empowering youth to make a difference in their communities. Mile High Youth Corps (MHYC) and Rocky Mountain Youth Corps (RMYC) both implement an ongoing, cumulative evaluation conducted by Omni Research, which conducts pre- and post-surveys measuring: attained employment-related skills; leadership skills; self-esteem; problem solving; civic engagement; social

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responsibility; program satisfaction; educational aspirations and post-Corps employment. The results of these surveys inform corps strategies to ensure best practices are being utilized.

The impact on the community resulting from the AmeriCorps investment can be found in the skill development of economically disadvantaged members and the improvement of public lands. More specifically, the JTEC Initiative will recruit 122 (or 63% of requested slots) economically disadvantaged youth and provide them with Career Readiness Training (CRT) and Service Learning Curriculum (SLC). The job training and skill development of Corpsmembers will be measured through course attendance records and exit surveys where members will self-report that they are more prepared for environmental careers. Within one-quarter of completion of their term of service, 80% (or 99) economically disadvantaged Corpsmembers will be placed in a job or post-secondary education. Job placement will be measured by Corpsmembers providing an acceptance letter from their employer, a copy of their first pay stub, or self-attestation. As a result of the direct service projects, JTEC members will improve 750 acres of public land and 25 miles of trails and/or rivers. Improved miles of trail and acreage of public land is measured through tracking documents and land manager surveys.

Performance measure targets were determined through review of historical outcomes achieved, assessing whether there are current or expected changes in outputs such as staffing, funding, or programmatic components that may impact overall outcomes, ensuring that all JTEC service locations are meeting or exceeding national standards for AmeriCorps and youth corps programs.

Each JTEC service location will report to MHYC on their progress through semi-annual reports using standardized tools (i.e. member timesheets, land improvement logs, training logs, etc.). MHYC will report to Serve Colorado through the OnCorps electronic reporting system.

During the last full year of program operation, all performance targets were exceeded and are as follows: Of the 158 members, 142 members self-attested to be more prepared for environmental and/or green jobs and post-secondary education endeavors because of their corps experience; A total of 1588.2 acres of public lands were cleaned and/or improved by team-based service projects at the four operating grant sites. These projects included invasive species removal, fire fuel mitigation, and replanting. This total acreage meets and greatly exceeds the target outcome of 630 acres; and Over

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121 miles of trails or rivers on public lands were cleaned, created, and/or improved by team-based service projects at the four operating grant sites. These projects included trail maintenance, trail construction and ADA-compliant trail improvements.

Outcomes from the previous AmeriCorps funding cycle show that: 93% of Corpsmembers across all service locations self-attest that JTEC had a positive impact on their lives and futures; 100% of Corpsmembers served in a leadership role during their term of service; and over 1,100 acres of public land were improved by the removal of over 12,881 trees on a fire fuel mitigation project with Denver Mountain Parks and the removal of slash from nearly 700 acres of land. In program years 2011 and 2012 the JTEC Initiative enrolled 100% of awarded slots and maintained high retention rates of 85% in 2011 and 96% in 2012.

The proposed outcomes at the end of the three year funding cycle include: 585 unduplicated youth who have graduated from high school but not yet completed a college degree will have improved 2,325 miles and 75 acres of public land. Of the 585 members, 372 (63%) will be economically disadvantaged and will receive job training, skill development, and career and college placement services. Within three months of service completion, 297 (or 80%) economically disadvantaged members will be placed in a new job and/or post-secondary education within one quarter following completion of their term of service.

d. Member Recruitment. As part of the JTEC Initiative, RMYC, WCCC, and MHYC will recruit 195 Corpsmembers. Each service location has committed to prioritizing the recruitment of local youth. MHYC has set a recruitment goal of enrolling 90% local candidates. In addition to recruiting local youth, each service location will place an emphasis on recruiting economically disadvantaged youth from their region to fill quarter-time slots. Members are recruited from relationships with existing referral sources, partnerships with local high schools and colleges, and local job fairs. One of the most successful strategies for recruitment has been word-of-mouth. Corpsmembers share their experiences within their individual networks, providing an opportunity to reach youth who might not otherwise consider national service opportunities. Finally, JTEC sites recruit members from traditionally underrepresented areas of the community including youth involved in the child welfare system and the Department of Juvenile Justice.

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e. Member Training. Every youth participates in an orientation that includes an introduction to AmeriCorps team-building; assessments; history of national service; safety procedures; an overview of environmental job industries; service learning; and a description of the intensive technical training that will prepare them to complete direct service projects. The policies and procedures of AmeriCorps and the JTEC corps where they are serving are also discussed, with an emphasis on prohibited activities. The initial orientation is a critical training and development opportunity for new members. Significant time is dedicated to team-building activities to lay the groundwork for how crews work together in the field. Sessions are held around safety and expectations in order to best prepare the members for projects. Members will also learn about the critical needs in their community and how their service activities will address those needs. Following orientation, members are assigned to crews and begin on-the-job training on service projects focused on land conservation. Each program provides specific information for camping and day crews.

An extended orientation period for camping crews includes intensive independent and healthy living skills training as well as skills they will need in the backcountry, such as cooking over a campfire and specific environmental safety skills. Crews also participate in conflict resolution training to help them prepare to share a close working and living environment.

A variety of training formats are part of the program: some are required initially and others are ongoing throughout a member's service. Service Learning Curriculum (SLC); Career and College Readiness Training (CRT); and personal development and educational workshops are part of the training package for each AmeriCorps member. Before working on a service project, assigned crew members receive technical skills trainings such as the proper use of tools, building trails and/or fences, and chainsaw use and maintenance, etc., safety overview, and learn about the sponsor's expectations. Ongoing personal development and career exploration trainings include life-skills workshops (money management, conflict management, and public speaking). CRT sessions focus on career exploration, conducting a job search, preparing a resume, and job interviewing skills. Full-time members also make field trips to local companies and attend speaker's panels featuring local employers. For Corpsmembers exploring educational opportunities, staff members assist with identifying interests, gathering information about post-secondary educational institutions, scheduling campus visits and researching scholarship and financial aid opportunities. Trainings are provided by experienced staff, project sponsors, and other community organizations. SLC activities include both hands-on service

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and educational activities led by seasonal staff Crew Leaders, project sponsors, or members. Activities occur at project sites, during crew meetings or daily debriefs and during educational sessions. These activities help to foster a sense of stewardship and instill an ethic of service.

f. Member Supervision. AmeriCorps members are directly supervised by staff Crew Leaders that manage their day-to-day service on project sites. Crew Leaders are selected through a rigorous application process that includes two rounds of interviews, reference checks, and background screens. All Crew Leaders complete a mandatory, week-long training and orientation in addition to technical and risk management training. Crew Leaders at each location report to a Program Manager and/or Project Coordinator who is responsible for overall program management and member development.

Program Manager and/or Project Coordinator responsibilities, in addition to supervising Crew Leaders, include attending the annual Program Manager Compliance conference; participating in quarterly conference calls; facilitating member recruitment, selection and orientation; data entry and eGrants management; and providing all reporting data to MHYC. Each service location also has a Field Coordinator responsible for providing in-field logistical support to crews and Crew Leaders who are focused on each member's progress toward their goals and the crews' progress in completing projects. MHYC's Federal Grant Compliance Coordinator will provide support and technical assistance to sites as needed. Staff members assist AmeriCorps members with job seeking, college exploration, education and training, project development, and referrals to community resources, including counseling services.

g. Member Experience. Developing an ethic of service is a critical part of corps' youth development objectives. A major component of the JTEC Initiative is Service Learning Curriculum (SLC) and Career and College Readiness Training (CRT). Through these activities, members have structured opportunities to reflect on their service, discuss what they have learned, and evaluate their impact on their community. Members also discuss what it means to be a good citizen and develop a personal action plan for becoming a community leader. The curriculum is supplemented by presentations from speakers representing local governments, civic institutions and non-partisan groups, as well as elected officials. The goal is to utilize national service as a vehicle for developing these young adults into responsible citizens who become community leaders and problem solvers.

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Team-building is a vital component of youth corps activities. Each slot type begins and ends as a crew (or team), which means members participate in orientation as a group and work together in crews throughout their term. Throughout their service, members have opportunities to interact with peers from other youth corps through statewide trainings that foster an *esprit de corps* throughout the state. Corps from various locations in Colorado often work together on special projects, such as those completed on National Service Days.

h. Volunteer Generation. Volunteer Recruitment and Support. The multi-site JTEC Initiative will recruit 450 volunteers during each year of the grant for large-scale projects such as National Service Days. Volunteers will be asked to contribute an average of four hours each, for a total of 1,800 hours. Most volunteers will work on one-time events or projects, where project-specific roles are created (e.g. painting, serving meals, and assisting with building projects). Volunteers generally are not recruited for day-to-day work projects because of physical demands, remote locations, or technical skills required. In addition to large-scale projects, each JTEC site has volunteer opportunities including: volunteer board positions; tutoring members; presenting to members on community resources/opportunities, etc.

AmeriCorps members are involved in recruiting and managing volunteers for hands-on service projects. Long-term members (half-time or full-time) take the lead on volunteer recruitment for service projects and are responsible for supporting volunteers by providing information in advance of projects, organizing projects to ensure a positive experience for volunteers, supervising volunteer teams, and planning after-project celebrations. All volunteer orientation sessions provide training and address appropriate activities, with special emphasis on activities that are prohibited.

i. Organizational Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification. Each JTEC site proudly brands national service in a variety of ways. Connectedness to AmeriCorps is an ongoing theme throughout the members' term of service. During orientation and initial trainings, members are introduced to national service history and how their service connects to the larger movement. This is reinforced through supplemental trainings to include topics on: civic engagement; leadership; and lifelong service. Additionally, members wear uniforms with the AmeriCorps logo in order to maintain a positive identity while working in their communities. Corps vehicles display the logo and, when possible, signage at project sites identifies the work of youth corps. In addition, each service location

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conducts a graduation ceremony to recognize and celebrate community contributions by AmeriCorps members.

### Organizational Capability

a. Organizational Background and Staffing. Mission and History. Mile High Youth Corps (MHYC) began in 1992 as Year One, Inc. founded by then-Boulder County Commissioner Josie Heath. Year One was rooted in the tradition of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) of the 1930s, addressing the employment and educational needs of youth by putting them to work on projects benefiting the community. Primarily focused on conservation and neighborhood improvement, Year One gave youth the chance to earn, learn, and serve. Within a short time, Year One became known as Mile High Youth Corps (MHYC) and began offering services for youth ages 16 to 24 that are designed to help Corpsmembers succeed in the classroom, workforce, and everyday life. MHYC's mission is to help youth make a difference in themselves and their community through meaningful service opportunities and educational experiences. In 2009, MHYC merged with the youth corps in Colorado Springs, thus expanding its services from a seven-county urban corps to a fifteen-county urban, suburban and rural corps.

Last year (2011), MHYC served 217 Corpsmembers, 45 of which were JTEC. 186 of Corpsmembers completed nearly 97,000 service hours, with an 86% retention rate. Corpsmembers earned \$302,892 in education awards. Ninety-six (52%) of 2011 Corpsmembers were placed in jobs and 70 youth were placed in post-secondary education. Forty-one youth were pursuing employment in green industries or post-secondary education. Also in 2011, 86% of all MHYC Corpsmembers were placed in college and careers within one quarter after program exit.

Rocky Mountain Youth Corps (RMYC) was established in 1993 by the City of Steamboat Springs in response to a community demand for more youth employment, educational, and recreational opportunities. In 1999, RMYC obtained 501(c) 3 status, enabling the organization to serve a greater geographic area from which to recruit youth and procure projects, with greater capacity for programmatic expansion in response to fluctuating demands. Their mission is to "engage youth in the outdoors, inspiring them to use their strengths and potential to lead healthy, productive lives. We teach responsibility for self, community and environment through teamwork, service and experiential education."

RMYC projects include building and maintaining trails, bridges, and fences, watershed restoration,

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campgrounds and parks, beetle kill mitigation, and hazardous fuels reduction. The program incorporates comprehensive education focusing on career development, leadership, healthy lifestyles, environmental education, and civic and social responsibility. The residential nature of the program allows for deep and thorough involvement with this educational component.

In 2011, over 175 RMYC participants were provided with job training, education opportunities, and experiential life skills training through involvement with RMYC's conservation corps programs. Sixty-four of these participants received an AmeriCorps Education Award for higher education on top of their work stipends. These youth and young adults filled their own tool box with numerous useful skills while also giving back to their community and environment through high priority, meaningful conservation projects. RMYC is governed by a board of directors comprised of eleven community leaders.

The Western Colorado Conservation Corps was started in 1994 under the non-profit group Partners of Mesa County. WCCC is headquartered in Grand Junction and, in addition to Mesa County; its service area also includes Delta, Gunnison and Montrose counties. WCCC is accredited by the Colorado Youth Corps Association. Their mission: "To provide young men and women ages 14-25 with the opportunity to work and learn in an outside setting on and about local conservation projects." WCCC serves youth ages 16-25 by providing work, training, education, scholarships, and life skills to succeed in the conservation industry and beyond. WCCC is engaged in a number of projects focused on the maintenance of Western Colorado's varying ecosystems, working with agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, the Colorado National Monument, Vega State Park, and many more. Most projects are focused on trail building and maintenance, invasive plant species removal such as Tamarisk and Russian Olive, habitat restoration, fire fuels mitigation, erosion control, fence construction and maintenance, and campground maintenance.

In 2011, WCCC served 197 youth and young adults who completed nearly 51,000 hours of field work; participated in 7,000+ hours of training; and learned environmental, life-skill, career and academic lessons. More than 116 youth were certified in skill sets ranging from Sawyership to CPR. Participants earned a total of \$96,000 in AmeriCorps Award Scholarships for Higher Education.

Experience and structural capacity. As clearly demonstrated, all four sites have significant experience

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in providing young adults with opportunities to acquire marketable job skills and improve their prospects for successful lives. Only accredited Colorado youth corps may participate in the JTEC Initiative. The accreditation process is rigorous and ensures that the corps has strong programmatic and fiscal capabilities that meet standards established by the state association.

All partners are well known and respected in their communities, as staff members serve on a variety of committees, task forces, and other community agencies, including the Denver Employment Alliance; Colorado Outdoor Stewardship Initiative; Denver Public Schools Alternative Education Task Force; Routt County Family and Adolescent Resource Council; Human Resource Coalition; Denver's Workforce Investment Board: Youth Council; Craig-Scheckman Foundation Steering Committee; and the Mesa County Youth Employment Council. MHYC, RMYC and WCCC also participate in many community events such as national service days, Service Nation Day of Action, Peace in the Streets, Earth Day, and National Trails Day.

MHYC has successfully managed AmeriCorps and ARRA grants and implemented the JTEC Initiative during the past seven years and has developed the infrastructure, procedures, and systems needed to support and oversee each service location. To successfully serve as the lead grantee for multiple sites, MHYC invested in key staff positions, professional development and training to ensure that the grant was managed appropriately.

MHYC's accounting system exceeds federal requirements and currently manages over \$1 million in federal funds, including the current AmeriCorps operating grant. MHYC has also successfully administered other federal grants from HUD, the Department of Labor, and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. MHYC's Finance Director and Finance Manager have 30 combined years of accounting experience to administer the current AmeriCorps grant. Finances are scrutinized by the Finance Committee of the Board and monitored through an independent A-133 audit and audits conducted by other funding agencies. MHYC has never had any audit findings. The Finance Department has developed new budgeting and invoicing procedures to assist each JTEC corps in tracking and reporting program income. MHYC's program staff members are familiar with AmeriCorps regulations and procedures and already have systems in place for tracking member hours, project accomplishments, and performance measures. MHYC will continue to provide significant technical assistance to the other corps.

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Board of Directors, Administrators and Staff. Each partner corps has its own board of directors that provides governance for their respective agency and participates in fundraising activities. Each corps also has its own Executive Director/CEO and its own management team. All three Executive Directors/Chief Executive Officers have been involved for the previous 3-year grant cycle (Kelly Causey, Ph.D., MHYC; Gretchen Van De Carr, RMYC; and Trevor Wickersham (WCCC).

MHYC's management team consists of the CEO, the Regional Director: Metro Denver, the Regional Director: Southern Front Range, the Director of Development, and the Director of Finance and Operations. The Director of Finance and Operations, Kevin Haney, and the Federal Grants Compliance Coordinator, Vanessa Fewell, have primary responsibility for administering the AmeriCorps grant.

Mr. Haney manages all accounting, finance, and operation activities of the organization. This includes daily accounting functions, grant management, budgeting, cost control, contract review, informational technology support, building maintenance, and human resources. He joined MHYC in 2008 and has over 20 years of experience in large and small for-profit entities. Kevin earned both a BBA in Accounting and a Juris Doctor from Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Ms. Fewell served as an AmeriCorps VISTA and VISTA Leader in the Nevada Service Learning Partnership and spent the last four years managing and implementing federal grants in Jacksonville, Florida. She earned her BSW from Winona State University in 2002 and MSW from Colorado State University in 2006.

As the Federal Grants Compliance Coordinator, Vanessa is responsible for assisting MHYC and its sub-grantees with implementing AmeriCorps grants according to regulations outlined by the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Colorado Youth Corps Association. She provides the Program Manager/Project Coordinator at each partner site with the resources, support, technical assistance, and guidance to implement programs at their sites, including site visits as necessary. She monitors the budget at each location; processes invoices; completes financial reports; and ensures compliance with fiscal regulations. She is the primary liaison with Serve Colorado and compiles all grant reports. Mr. Haney and Ms. Fewell collaborate on developing fiscal policies and

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monitoring the grant budget.

Each service location has a Program Manager and/or Project Coordinator with responsibility for managing the program at his or her site. Ms. Fewell supports and manages these staff members to successfully implement the program. Crew Leaders at each site provide day-to-day supervision of members on project sites. Each corps also has a Field Coordinator and Finance Assistant to assist with developing service projects; managing inventory and supplies; providing education and training; and managing fiscal tracking responsibilities; among other duties. Currently, each Program Manager and Project Coordinator has at least five years of experience implementing and managing the JTEC Initiative. This governance structure of placing program Project Managers and/or Project Coordinators, Field Coordinators, and Finance Assistants at each JTEC location provides for a bottom-up, rather than a top-down, approach to program planning and implementation.

Staff Orientation, Training and Technical Assistance. MHYC will provide training for each JTEC service location prior to launching the new grant cycle as well as providing updated written procedures and systems to assist staff with grant management. Site staff will attend the state service conference and have opportunities to receive ongoing technical assistance by the Federal Grant Compliance Coordinator, who will be in regular communication with service locations to assess their needs for ongoing training and TA. She will also facilitate the sharing of best practices and key innovations among participating organizations.

Member Training and Skill Development. The three JTEC sites collectively have more than forty years of experience delivering job-readiness training, service learning curriculum, common orientation elements, life-skills training, and other learning opportunities that help ensure that the overall mission of the JTEC Initiative is maintained. Members will have the opportunity to interact with their peers at the annual member service conference and the annual youth corps projects training.

b. Sustainability. Success in Securing Match Resources. Each JTEC partner has successfully secured match resources from a variety of sources for the current and previous AmeriCorps grants. The majority of matching funds come from earned income from community project sponsors, i.e., fee-for-service contracts with local and state land managers, municipalities and community based organizations. Due to the high demand for youth corps services, MHYC and the other corps are

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providing 54% in matching funds for the program, exceeding the required amount.

Local Financial and In-kind Contributions. The communities served by JTEC partners consistently demonstrated their support for youth corps; some through fee-for-service contracts and others through in-kind contributions, such as providing mental health and legal services for Corpsmembers. Businesses, including those that serve on the MHYC Employer Advisory Council, open their doors to Corpsmembers for tours of their company operations or allow them to job shadow their employees. Businesspeople also volunteer to provide presentations to Corpsmembers in class settings to share their experiences and expertise. One local business, Essential Safety Products, donates hundreds of dollars of safety gear each year. Corps also receive financial contributions from individual donors in their communities. Local support has also come from entities across the state, including the Denver Office of Economic Development, the City of Grand Junction, Mesa County, Yampa Valley Community Foundation, and the City of Colorado Springs. While each of these sources continues to grow around the state, the most significant increase in revenues is from the increasing demand from project sponsors who contract for services.

MHYC partners with several private and non-profit organizations in the community to provide training and work sites, to serve as employment advisors, and to act as mentors for the youth involved. These organizations range in scope from trade-specific (i.e. construction skills, land conservation, material handling) to the less project specific such as leadership and the softer skills needed to succeed in society. Red Rock Community College and the Colorado Youth Corps Association are among the partners that provide specific educational classes and trainings for the Corpsmembers.

c. Compliance and Accountability. Each of the three JTEC youth corps are well-versed in AmeriCorps-prohibited activities because of their participation in the current AmeriCorps operating grant and the Colorado Youth Corps Association's (CYCA) Education Award Program. As the lead agency, MHYC monitors sites to prevent and detect compliance issues in number of ways. First, service location agreements provide a detailed account of the responsibilities of MHYC as the lead agency and the service location. Second, Program Managers and/or Project Coordinators from each service location are required to participate in an annual Program Manager Compliance conference hosted by MHYC. This conference provides up-to-date information about prohibited activities, including changes or updates from CNCS and procedures for monitoring member services. Third,

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MHYC's Federal Grant Compliance Coordinator conducts two site visits at each site per year to conduct thorough file audits, witness member activities, and provide technical assistance for program implementation. Next, MHYC hosts quarterly conference calls are held for Program Managers to discuss issues and concerns related to program implementation, share best practices and receive technical assistance in a group setting. Finally, each site is required to provide all necessary documents for a file audit prior to exiting a member, to ensure accurate data is entered in eGrants. In the event a service location displays a pattern of one or more areas of concern, MHYC will work with the Service Location to develop a Corrective Action Plan to resolve any challenges faced in managing the JTEC Initiative.

Demonstrated Compliance. MHYC has proven record of clean audits including the most recent conducted for by Taylor, Roth and Co. and positive monitoring visits from Serve Colorado. In 2011, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) audited the grantees of Serve Colorado and identified compliance issues regarding: (1) background checks; (2) Department of Justice National Sex Offender Public Registry (NSOPR) checks; (3) unsigned timesheets; (4) 30 day enrollment window; and (5) billing for the Statewide Compliance Manager position. Serve Colorado and MHYC took immediate corrective action on all of these compliance issues and subsequently implemented new policies and procedures where appropriate. Additionally, this led to the creation of a full-time position of the Federal Grant Compliance Coordinator ensuring compliance across sites and provide ongoing technical support for program implementation.

Enrollment and Retention. For the past two program years, the JTEC Initiative has successfully filled 100% of its slots. In 2011, JTEC had an unusually low retention rate of 86%, compared to a the typical retention rate of over 90%. After careful review of programmatic components, several changes were made to program implementation: More detailed information about the difficult nature of the service work is included in the interview process; Ensure that crew leaders are mature, responsible, and hardworking individuals that set a positive example for Corpsmembers; and clearly stating the expectations related to attendance and service completion, both in the member contract and during orientation. As a result of these changes, the 2012 retention has been at 96%, with 151 of 158 members successfully completing their term of service.

### **Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy**

a. Cost Effectiveness. With Colorado's youth unemployment rate at an all-time high and the high

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demand for resources to protect and maintain public land, the multi-site JTEC Initiative is a cost effective solution to these community problems. Member costs have been monitored over the last several years, and the living allowance offered by Mile High Youth Corps is competitive, evidenced by our high retention rate. While obtaining the necessary skills to improve public lands, members are provided with College and Career Readiness Training (CRT) and the Service Learning Curriculum (SLC), to which they might not otherwise have access. This unique design ultimately reduces costs for land managers, allowing them to invest back into their respective communities.

For over ten years, MHYC has applied for and been awarded AmeriCorps State funding. Throughout these years, MHYC has consistently monitored program income and expenses at each site in order to remain cost effective. The total cost per MSY for the 2013 JTEC Initiative is \$12,836, which is \$99 lower than previously funded years, and \$199 less than the allowable amount. The requested dollars represent only 14 % of the total organization budget. Each JTEC partner has successfully secured match resources from a variety of sources for the current and previous AmeriCorps grants. MHYC and the other corps are providing 54% in matching funds for the program, exceeding the required amount. The majority of matching funds are earned income from community project sponsors, i.e., fee-for-service contracts with local and state land managers, municipalities and community based organizations.

b. Budget Adequacy. The budget is based on actual past performance of the JTEC Initiative. The payroll and accounting databases provided the hours worked by each staff member and the expense dollars respectively. In addition to compiling this data, financial analysts evaluated averages, inflation rates, and raises, to provide a complete and reasonable future estimate. All estimates are in accordance with Corporation for National and Community Service requirements. Personnel costs are listed by position, accompanied by a salary and percentage spent working on this award. Associated Fringe benefits are then applied. All travel is itemized. Training, certifications, and background checks listed in this proposal are required for project completion. Member costs are within the allowable living expenses. Lastly, Mile High Youth Corp has elected to use a fixed one percent commission rate, which is lower than the five percent maximum.

### **Evaluation Summary or Plan**

Evaluation Summary or Plan. MHYC and RMYC, which have the majority of AmeriCorps slots, contracted with Omni Research and Training beginning in 2005 to evaluate their programs and a summary of these findings are below:

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Summary of MHYC results: members showed a statistically significant increase in job-related skills; 95.4% of members felt that the service they performed was helpful to the community; MHYC had a positive impact on the attitude of members toward environmentalism; statistically significant increases were observed for environmental self-efficacy and perceived likelihood of engaging in pro-environmental behaviors; 92.7% of MHYC members were satisfied with the program and 97.2% would recommend the program to friends.

Summary of RMYC results: statistically significant improvements were observed for job skills, leadership skills, self-esteem, and stress; a statistically significant increase was observed in civic engagement; members showed statistically significant decreases in their use of alcohol and marijuana; and members reported their experience in the youth corps to be meaningful, challenging, and satisfying, providing valuable career preparation.

### **Amendment Justification**

N/A

### **Clarification Summary**

N/A

### **Continuation Changes**

N/A