

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY
2013 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Department of Natural Resources - Maryland Conservation Corps

Application ID: 13AC145072

Program Name: Maryland Conservation Corps

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

(+) The target community (seven Maryland State Parks) is described along with salient reasons for choosing these parks which include their high visitation rates and a high percentage of adjoining homes and businesses which encroach on park property.

(+) The applicant utilizes relevant and recent data obtained from the 2010 Maryland State Parks Economic Impact and Visitor Study published by the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development and the 2009 State of Maryland Trails Strategic Implementation Plan (TSIP) to provide key insight and evidence that the needs for conservation-related projects exists in the Maryland State Parks.

(+) The applicant provides a comprehensive description of the conservation-related projects on which Maryland Conservation Corps (MCC) AmeriCorps members and volunteers will serve. This includes essential projects to address loss of open space, reduced water quality, human overuse of natural resources, forest fragmentation, invasive species, and homeowner encroachment onto park property.

(+) The applicant effectively describes how the proposed project model strategically addresses the needs of the targeted community by participating in strategies for addressing these needs as identified in the TSIP.

(+) The rationale for addressing these needs is that they pose major environmental risks to the health of Maryland State Parks. The applicant uses an ideal source to prove that these needs are indeed major: Maryland Trails Strategic Implementation Plan, a document developed by six Maryland State Agencies.

(+) The economic and demographic needs in the target community (value of state parks to the economy, the ability to produce jobs, additional spending in local communities, and a great population influx) are also clearly described and are supported by citations from the Maryland Department of Planning.

(+) The applicant thoroughly describes what Members will do, including time commitments, specific tasks and activities, service terms, and supervisory and training components, demonstrating that its program model is based on previous experience and has the potential to bring about strong outcomes.

(+) The applicant describes its hemlock restoration project and other specific projects to support its program design and model in a way that shows scientific deliberation, such as creating natural filters to help reduce runoff to local waterways; reduce human impact in environmentally sensitive areas; and restore land by removing invasive plants and reestablishing native plants in their place.

(+) The applicant demonstrates strongly what can be accomplished with the addition of the Members by quantifying the number of leveraged hours (54,000) that are performed by volunteers as a result of its project, and the number of volunteers who will be engaged (1,000). The applicant quantifies the significant results of its previous conservation projects that have leveraged volunteers, and describes the qualitative benefits in a way that demonstrates its potential, strong outcomes.

(+) The applicant quantifies how many full-time Members are requested (e.g., 35 Members who will serve 40 hours each week and be divided into seven crews), and fully describes its training process and components.

- (+) The applicant states that all Member service activities occur in the context of an environmental plan for the local area to be served. This integration with local environment plans is ideal because it assures that service important to the community will be done.
- (+) There is also a clear description of how small groups of Members who usually serve in separate teams will perform together on one large scale-project relating to hemlock preservation. Therefore, Members perform a diversity of services both in small and large groups.
- (+) The community supports the Member role in mobilizing and supporting other volunteers. The applicant proposal identifies five specific well-established and nationally-known agency partners who will supply volunteers. This diversity of volunteer sources increases the likelihood of an adequate supply of volunteers as well as expertise in management and supervision.
- (+) The applicant thoroughly describes the impact of the AmeriCorps investment in both quantitative and qualitative terms, including a discussion of sustainability factors and leverage for long-term effects. The applicant describes its goal for Members to act as role models and encourage a cadre of youth volunteers that will continue environmental service as a result of the positive impacts and results of the projects.
- (+) The applicant thoroughly describes and quantifies the overall evidence-based changes that it expects to see as a result of Member activities by the end of the three-year grant cycle by providing a strong performance measurements system (e.g., 70 public land improvement projects will receive a 1 letter grade level improvement or better).
- (+) The applicant thoroughly describes its targeted problem areas, and provides a detailed description of strong performance reporting tools with which to measure the impacts of its activities in this environmental-based project (e.g., surveys and reports that will assess the condition of the land before and after the Member crews improved the land).
- (+) Past success in meeting the needs is clearly documented with data relating to hours of service completed and the number of trails and improvements to state parks. Specifically, the applicant's impressive track record includes 260,000 hours of service, the creation of 1,592 miles of trails and 717 improvements to state parks.
- (-) The applicant does not state the extent to which the target communities are economically disadvantaged.
- (-) The applicant does not provide strong documentation as to the effects of its targeted problems on disadvantaged communities (other than rural) adjacent to its targeted areas and how proposed improvements will ameliorate these conditions.
- (-) The applicant states that they will utilize disadvantaged youth in some of their projects, but does not specifically state how their service will impact this population or neighborhoods at large.
- (-) The applicant proposes to invite disadvantaged youth between the ages of 14-17 to become volunteers and serve alongside AmeriCorps members and be supervised by park rangers; however, the applicant does not include the agency's policy for conducting criminal history and child abuse registry checks on staff, volunteers, AmeriCorps

members, or park rangers who come into contact with these youth who will be serving.