

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

The Green Crew AmeriCorps program (GCAP) will use this grant to ensure 15 disadvantaged and unemployed AmeriCorps members will receive job skills, life skills and GED training. As part of their development and service to the community, members will perform environmental stewardship service projects as a corps and empower 1,200 community volunteers from 30 local organizations in Hartford, CT to improve public lands and city streetscapes. At the end of their one year term of service, members will have the skills they need to become self-sufficient, socially-responsible members of the Hartford community. 13 members will obtain jobs within one year of program end. 8 members will receive their GEDs. This project will primarily focus on the CNCS focus area of Economic Opportunity with a secondary focus area of capacity building. The CNCS investment of \$194,556 will be matched with \$419,355.

## Rationale and Approach

### a) COMPELLING COMMUNITY NEED:

GCAP will provide economic opportunity to a chronically underserved portion of America's population, inner-city young adults. Living in one of America's poorest cities, Hartford's out-of-school or unemployed have little hope of economic and personal success without mentorship, training, and a General Education Development Certificate (GED). With a youth unemployment rate of 38% and high school dropout rate of 40% (Hartford School Board), the need for alternative paths to success is staggering. According to the Mayor's Future Workforce Task Force Report, there are at least 3,000 out-of-school youths in Hartford in need of the services that KNOX will provide. Without intervention, this population will remain economically poor and at high risk of criminal activity, gang participation, drug abuse and violence. While initiatives abound to assist those youth in school, GCAP is one of the few programs designed to lift up those who have fallen through public education's cracks. Furthermore, it is the only program in Hartford providing unemployed residents concrete green jobs skills for an industry where 5% of all jobs go unfilled each year (CT Nursery & Landscape Association). At the same time, Hartford lost over 3,000 trees between 2011's October blizzard and 2012's Hurricane Sandy. This is in addition to 200 street trees the city loses every year to disease and natural aging (Hartford City Forester). On a broader scale, Hartford's parks system was listed in Landslide 2009, a report of the Cultural Landscape Foundation detailing America's 10 most endangered public landscapes for its backlog of maintenance. Corporations and community groups recognize these problems, but lack the horticultural knowledge, equipment, and volunteer management expertise to

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solve them. Directly in line with KNOX's mission, GCAP and KNOX recruit these well-intentioned volunteer groups for one day volunteer projects where they learn to work as a group and steward the local environment. Without these volunteers and KNOX's GCAP, the community's capacity to resolve its environmental woes would be greatly diminished.

### b) PROGRAM DESIGN

Through GCAP, KNOX will annually provide 15 AmeriCorps members (for a total of 45 over the grant period) a personalized and effective path from unemployment to success. This is achieved through three strategies: 1) education and training, 2) concrete employable skills simulating the work environment through service work, and 3) mentorship, job and educational placement.

KNOX recruits older youth and young adults ages 17 to 30 who are out of school (the majority are ages 17-24). We recruit through area social service agencies (The Village for Families and Children, the Department of Social Services, etc.), word of mouth, and the AmeriCorps network. We choose members based on how well our program suits their need (lack of GED, job, etc.) as well as how likely they are to complete the program (maturity, history of community service, and a desire to work in the green industry). To ensure potential members will excel, the Program Director interviews each candidate and holds two mock training days to accurately assess these qualities.

Our experience is that nearly all members will be minority (African American and Hispanic) with 75% male and 25% female. Many will have children of their own. This is a needy population experiencing unstable living situations and a lack of purpose and self-esteem. GCAP helps members overcome these hurdles, providing them with a safe and stable work environment, an opportunity for service and a chance to obtain job readiness and job skills that will serve them for the rest of their lives.

GCAP operates year-round with members serving their community full time, typically from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m Monday through Friday. Each morning begins with a meeting where work and/or training assignments are outlined. Members are paid a living allowance and receive health insurance, FICA, and Worker's Compensation. KNOX works with members to obtain their GED so they can redeem their AmeriCorps Education Award and attend a trade school or institute of higher education. In the past three years, members have redeemed their education award for a diverse set of educational opportunities including 4 year colleges, nursing certifications, and truck driving school.

**EDUCATION AND TRAINING:** The Training Regimen is multifaceted and designed to provide participants with educational skills and opportunities, green job skills and life management skills. This training ensures that members are mentally ready for the challenges of full-time work and possess the expertise and wherewithal to move beyond the entry level and life on the streets. In line with the

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program's performance outcomes, KNOX recruits 10 members annually who lack their GED (with the expectation that 8 of the 10 will earn a GED within one year of graduation from the program). In conjunction with Hartford Adult Education, KNOX assesses how close they are to obtaining their GED and provides members with group study time, tutoring by an educator in small groups, or complete classes (including transportation to and from testing and emergency transportation to classes) with Hartford Adult Education.

This barrier to employment or enrollment in higher education is identified through a needs assessment of each member along with the many other challenges, positive qualities, and aspirations of our members. The Program Director then evaluates this information and refines the training schedule to ensure we provide each year's class with the training they need most. Furthermore, this needs assessment is the first step in developing a life plan for each member, which the Program Director conducts in multiple one-on-one meetings with crewmembers. This plan serves as a path for each member to follow and a way for program staff to encourage and monitor each member's progress. For all members, training includes bi-weekly crew meetings with a portion of each meeting devoted to direct training in the areas of life skills and job skills. Due to the nature of our work and the typical learning styles of our members, most training is hands-on, begins with direct instruction, and is followed by a high level of supervision. The JOB SKILLS training develop a portfolio of marketable skills perpetually in demand: Extensive education in horticulture, landscaping, and related fields (such as greenhouse operation and snow and ice removal); Proper use and safety regulations for tools and commercial grade equipment (commercial mowers, sprayers, trimmers, blowers & hand tools); Education regarding the role of an urban forest on the health and well-being of a community; Graffiti abatement techniques; Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and first aid training and certificate; Use and safety regulations for pesticides training and certificate from the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

The LIFE SKILLS trainings vary with the needs of each crew, but generally includes: Resume writing & job searching; Interviewing skills & career counseling; Civics training; Team building exercises; Conflict resolution; Energy conservation; Diversity; Sexual harassment; Recycling; Environmental awareness; Food & nutrition; Computer training; Money management; Leadership development; Special trainings based on the needs of each year's class.

Training is provided by program and KNOX staff, paid youth development and team-building consultants, and professionals with ties to the organization (who donate their time). For instance, TD Bank's local manager provides the trainings on personal money management and an introduction to

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profit and loss. KNOX's Executive Director conducts the pesticide safety training and is certified to administer the Pesticide Applicator's License by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

**SERVICE EXPERIENCE:** Service projects specifically reinforce the topics members cover in training while maximizing AmeriCorps' value to the community. Members work alongside each other and volunteers from community organizations. These service projects and the program's structure ensure members learn how to function successfully in the workplace with a wide variety of personalities. For many of our members, this is the first time they are held accountable. They are expected to show up on time, keep up with the rest of the group during the day, and act in a manner befitting the AmeriCorps legacy. The service work slated for the next three years includes:

- (1) Landscaping and winter maintenance for nonprofit organizations - Members will work together on 26 service sites annually to bolster their horticultural knowledge and help fund the program (each government entity and non-profit provides matching funds in the form of fee-for-service dollars). Service sites include small city green spaces, nonprofit properties, and private properties requiring new landscapes after the Metropolitan District Commission, the regional water authority, installs new sewage systems in their front yards. Holistically, these service sites provide members experience in all facets of the landscaping profession. From clearing the property in the spring to putting it to bed in the winter, from large scale mowing to entire landscapes redesigns, members learn all activities associated with a commercial landscaping operation. During the winter, members provide snow removal services and salt the nonprofit properties' various surfaces (how most landscapers earn a living in the winter). Alongside supervisors, members converse with each nonprofits' staff throughout the season to understand the needs of each "account" while developing interpersonal business skills.
- (2) Greenhouse Management/Hartford Blooms - Members raise 10,000 seedlings destined for city streets. Community volunteers assist in the initial transplanting. The project begins in KNOX's 8,000 square foot greenhouse, which is the crew's responsibility throughout the year. Members then plant these flowers in 3-foot planters that adorn Hartford's thoroughfares and water and maintain them throughout the year. Through this project, they learn the skills of greenhouse management (watering schedules, temperature control, space allocation, etc.) and reinforce the theoretical lessons they've learned on plant life in classroom training. For the first time this year, members will actually mix their own potting soil, which they and KNOX staff will market to commercial horticulture operations and the KNOX community. KNOX will recruit retired business people from its community to assist in the development of this micro-business.

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(3) Community Garden Maintenance and Creation - KNOX manages 15 community gardens covering 6 acres of Hartford. While the community gardeners tend to their individual plots, GCAP tends to the common areas and puts the gardens to bed in the winter. This project provides a broad understanding of urban agriculture and food production and has even inspired some of our members to tend and harvest plots of their own.

(4) Miscellaneous Projects -- KNOX operates five core programs and manages some 2,000 volunteers annually from over 50 community groups. GCAP provides KNOX the capacity to work with 1,200 of these volunteers from 30 local organizations annually as trained experts able to disseminate horticultural knowledge, lead small groups (some of KNOX's one-day events attract over 300 volunteers), handle the hardest task and ensure all work is completely properly. Without GCAP, most of the organizations requesting volunteer management and horticultural expertise would go unserved. Furthermore, because of knowledge and encouragement provided by KNOX GCAP, these groups take on ownership of the project and continue volunteering as environmental stewards after the one-day event is complete!

Occasional (3-4 days a month for a total of 5-8 projects overall) involvement of the crew in such projects as tree plantings, parks clean-ups, and graffiti abatement rounds out the experiences of their service work. As with all projects, members provide feedback about their experience, which will be logged with all training evaluations.

As this question usually comes up during the clarification process, the Green Crew does not complete work similar to union or non-union workers in the City. The City is not equipped for tree plantings or graffiti abatement, only tree pruning and removal. Furthermore, the green space management work conducted by the Green Crew is at a "lower level" than what the Department of Public Works handles. The fact that small green spaces were not being tended to, graffiti was not being abated, and trees were not being planted is one of the initial reasons the Green Crew came into existence. Finally, the Department of Public Works has increased its hiring lately, and is not laying off laborers.

**MENTORSHIP AND JOB AND EDUCATIONAL COUNSELING:** The most important aspect of the program is mentorship. The Program Director actually began her career at KNOX in GCAP.

Supervisors are all Hartford residents and tied to the community through family and civic life. The ability to relate to GCAP members is one of the key qualities we seek in a Member Manager, who we will hire in February 2013. This Member Manager will continue the work begun by his/her predecessor, seeking out employment opportunities, developing resources for members to evaluate their educational options, and networking them to job interviews. Of particular note, he/she will

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follow-up on a burgeoning relationship with the City of Hartford to place members in the Department of Public Works. This relationship became possible because the City recognizes that GCAP members possess the talent, knowledge, and attitude necessary to become assets by the time members graduate from the program.

Every ride to a service site and lunch break is an opportunity to provide advice, life lessons, and a helping hand for KNOX staff. This, "we are always here for you," mentality extends well beyond the formal time of service. Members 3 or 4 years post-graduation still visit KNOX for job referrals, advice, or to celebrate their triumphs.

When these three strategies are combined - 1) education and training, 2) service experience, and 3) mentorship and job and educational placement - , members develop a foundation enabling them to achieve their personal and professional life goals. This program has received multiple national, regional, and local awards, which we highlight throughout the narrative.

### c) AMERICORPS AS A MEANS TO ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUNG ADULTS

AmeriCorps particularly suits this community need because it provides economic opportunity for Hartford's disenfranchised young adults AND connects them to a larger civic framework. Members of the GCAP never participated in organized athletics or had a chance to join the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts. Many lack the pride and self-esteem that comes with a family striving for their success and helping them through their challenges. Unlike other government programs, membership in AmeriCorps is a badge of pride. Members are part of something greater than themselves, a nationwide movement for a greater, community-oriented America. As they learn job skills, they provide much needed environmental and beautification services to their community while empowering volunteers to shepherd their state capital's landscape. They nurture plants, their confidence and each other. They are finally part of a team and a family that has their best interests at heart.

KNOX ensures that members feel part of a larger framework in a variety of ways. First, we have been diligent in branding the program as AmeriCorps. From clothing to posters to training materials, the AmeriCorps logo, concept and pledge are front and center. This effort will carry onto our new website when it is released in 2013. Furthermore, we shifted our enrollment from March 1 to September 1 as part of a broader shift in the program (members used to enroll for half a year, now they enroll for a year). One benefit of this is that members begin their term of service with most other AmeriCorps members across the state of Connecticut. They attend the AmeriCorps launch and statewide gatherings, one member serves on the InterCorps Council, and the GCAP conducts joint service

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projects with other AmeriCorps members across the state including the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service.

### d) MEASURABLE COMMUNITY IMPACT OF INTERVENTION

The impact of GCAP on the community is twofold. First and foremost, the program lifts each member (who is a part of the disadvantaged Hartford community) out of poverty and onto a brighter path. Second, the GCAP performs and empowers local organizations to complete much needed environmental stewardship work in the community. AmeriCorps' contribution to KNOX's ability to recruit and empower volunteers has always been tracked and we have met this performance measure each year of the program's existence. For the first time this year, we have opted into the capacity building national performance measure. We will now track each organization/group that works with GCAP to measure their increase in horticultural and volunteer management knowledge and whether the involvement of KNOX and GCAP encourages them to continue serving their community. Also in line with CNCS' strategic plan, KNOX realigned its performance measures for the currently running program year to accurately evaluate economic opportunity provided to each member, rather than the program's environmental outcomes. These performance measures evaluate members' employment and education status one year after they leave the program. As such, this data cannot be compiled until September of 2013.

We have tracked job placement and education 3 months out for two supporting funders. For the 2009-2010 program year, 78% of graduating members found employment or were enrolled in college or trade school within three months of graduation. For the 2010-11 program year, 83% of members found employment or were enrolled in higher education within 3 months of program end. KNOX now conducts follow-up interviews, 3, 6, 9, and 12 months after program end, which will ensure we can collect the data promised in our performance measures. With the changes described in the application, we are confident GCAP will achieve its goal of 86% of members employed one year after program end and 80% GED obtainment within one year of program end. The program maintains a 100% enrollment rate each year.

GCAP's service work with local organizations and on its own is critical to the community's economic, social, and environmental revival. This work ensures Hartford appears attractive and well-kept to investors, prospective residents, and visitors. The Knight Foundation's annual report, "Soul of the Community," finds that a place's physical beauty (the availability and cleanliness of parks and green spaces) is one of the three most important drivers of attachment and passion for a given town. More valued than jobs, safety, and the economy, the environment ignites passion for one's community and

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consequentially civic engagement. The GCAP ignites this passion in Hartford. Over the 10 year course of the program, these members have planted or assisted volunteers in planting at least 2,000 trees, grown 100,000 flowers for Hartford's streets and common spaces, cleaned over 2,500 incidences of graffiti, and empowered at least 14,000 volunteers to care for Hartford's public spaces and parks. These acts of environmental stewardship not only revive Hartford, they are crucial in linking AmeriCorps members to their community. As previously stated, our members had to make hard choices early on in life. Their service allows the community to see them as part of the solution. Furthermore, by integrating their service with the work of KNOX's volunteers, members build relationships with such community assets as the Mayor of Hartford, his family, the City Forester, Prudential's Financial Managers, and longtime community activists. These relationships expose members to the wide world of opportunities open to them with their new skills, work ethic, and education award. A few of these relationships even created job opportunities for our members. Please note: KNOX has opted into the Capacity Building and Economic Opportunity performance measures with outcomes G 3.3, O15, and O16 and will align all MSYs and member slots within these measures. 2 MSYs will be dedicated to Capacity Building and 13 MSYs to Economic Opportunity. 15 member slots will be attributed to Capacity Building outcome 3.3, 15 to Economic Opportunity Outcome O15 (successful employment of members), and 10 to Economic Opportunity Outcome O16 (GED obtainment of members). A problem within the performance measure system in eGrants (incident 130110-000383) would not allow us to attribute MSYs to both the economic opportunity national performance measures. We have been informed other programs are having the same problem and have created a "dummy" performance measure in eGrants to accurately reflect the distribution of our MSYS. Doing this was also the only way eGrants would verify our application for submission.

### e) A FEW WORDS ABOUT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Beginning this program year, members will visit the State Capital for a tour and attend a public hearing of Hartford's City Council. Afterwards, they will spend time discussing how to interact with local government with a council member.

In the past, members of the GCAP received formal training in government and civic engagement through the We the People Curriculum. This new method of more hands on training sparks much more engagement in our members. By the end of the program, members know how to vote, what their vote means, how to learn about civic issues, as well as how to approach politicians and the organizations they govern. Even more importantly, the program effectively reintroduces the members

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of our crew to the community in a new light. The first step towards meaningful engagement is to foster a true compassion and connection between our members, their neighborhoods, and their city. As the activities section describes, these connections develop with every project the crew undertakes.

### Organizational Capability

a) ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING:

MISSION, HISTORY, and STAFFING

KNOX was founded in 1966 when Betty Knox established a trust fund to help improve the City of Hartford. KNOX's MISSION, "Using horticulture as a catalyst for community engagement, KNOX forges partnerships between residents, businesses and government, providing leadership to build stronger, greener, healthier and more beautiful neighborhoods in Hartford." KNOX has had many successes since 1966, establishing a reputation as Hartford's "go-to" resource for horticulture, community building, environmental improvements, community gardening, green youth development and graffiti abatement.

The Trees for Hartford Neighborhoods program is a nationally recognized and replicated model for strategic, resident-driven urban reforestation. Through this program, KNOX successfully planted in excess of 3,000 trees over the last 7 years (GCAP planted over 2,000 of these alongside community volunteers or on their own). These trees have a 97% survival rate due to community involvement and ownership, an impressive accomplishment for any urban tree planting initiative.

Hartford's first community garden since WWII was established by KNOX in 1972. KNOX then helped to establish the American Community Gardening Association in 1979. We now manage 15 urban gardens composed of 290 plots serving 243 local families. These square-foot urban gardeners are pioneers in the local food movement. When there is an overabundance of produce, gardeners freeze it for winter, share it with neighbors and homeless shelters, or sell it at farmers markets adding to their meager family income.

Finally, KNOX provides outstanding life-skills and Green Jobs trainings to an underserved population. KNOX has run crew-based efforts to improve and maintain city landscapes since the early 1980's. We expanded to a year-round program for adults in 1995 when we developed our first horticultural job-training program for welfare recipients. This program evolved to a full-scale youth conservation corps model in 2001 to serve out-of-school youth. The program offered full time year-round service opportunities for 2 crews of 8 youth, serving 40 youth over 18 months. The program provided crewmember development, employment skills, and life skills training. Seven youth received AmeriCorps Education Awards through the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps in

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its first year. KNOX then operated GCAP from September 2003 to August 2004 with CNCS discretionary funds. From September 2004 to the present, KNOX has operated GCAP with CNCS funding and State Commission oversight. KNOX is highly experienced in operating a youth corps as described in this proposal. In fact, KNOX's GCAP was honored for Excellence in Corps Operations by the CorpsNetwork, which our Program Director received at a ceremony at the Capital Building in Washington.

### b) BOARD OF DIRECTORS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND STAFF:

KNOX has 15 board members responsible for overseeing the health of the organization and its focus on its mission. It reviews GCAP's direction to see that it maintains a close connection to KNOX's overall mission. It also reviews financial performance to make sure GCAP is properly supported within the organization and that necessary resources are directed toward its operation.

KNOX will hire a new Member Manager and supervisor in February, fully staffing the organization with 11 full-time and one part-time staff people. The Program Director and Member Manager work full time on the AmeriCorps program while 2 supervisors also commit 75% of time to training, mentoring, transportation, and supervision. The Program Director has general oversight of the program, setting direction, screening recruits, setting policies, developing projects, organizing training, and increasing member retention rates. The Member Manager will support the Program Director's work and his/her job description is directly aligned with this year's performance measures. He/she will network members to jobs and social services, assist with reporting, and coordinate the crew's schedule with outside trainers and volunteer activities. Other staff, including the Executive Director, the Financial Operations Manager, the Green Space Manager and the Community Outreach Director, will engage with the Green Crew multiple times each week. Collectively, they provide administrative and financial/HR record keeping, training, purchasing, liaison with the community, supervision, and oversight. Fundraising staff includes the Advancement and Marketing Manager and Associate, who are both responsible for donor/grantor cultivation and marketing.

Key program and fiscal positions responsible for the GCAP program include the following:

ERICUS ADAMS, GCAP DIRECTOR: Ericus enrolled in GCAP as a member in 2003. In 2005, she was hired as a GCAP Supervisor and served under that title with ever-increasing responsibility. She was promoted to the position of Program Director in November 2009 for her intimate knowledge of GCAP, her ability to be a role-model to crew members, and her vision for improving the program. Under her directorship, the program was recognized as 1 of the 52 most innovative AmeriCorps programs in the country by Innovations in Civic Participation.

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MEMBER MANAGER, TO BE HIRED, For the Member Manager position, KNOX seeks a person with ties to the local community, strong organizational skills, a track record of successful youth development, and the capability of building strong bonds with the GCAP members and employers.

JOHN THOMPSON, SUPERVISOR, Mr. Thompson came to KNOX through the City of Hartford, Department of Public Works. There, he was responsible for parks maintenance and horticultural work. He is a Hartford resident and relates well to crew members on both a personal and professional level.

SUPERVISOR, TO BE HIRED, We seek the same qualities as we did in Mr. Thompson; someone who can relate to our members, understands horticulture, and acts as a quality role model to the young men and women in his/her care.

RON PITZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, Ron has a degree in horticulture, a degree in business, and is a Master Gardener. Ron served as the Program Director of GCAP since its inception. Before GCAP, he coordinated welfare-to-work programs for KNOX. Mr. Pitz expanded the fee for service, horticultural programs and strategic partnerships exponentially which helped to make KNOX and the GCAP sustainable.

NIC WILLARD, GREEN SPACE MANAGER, has a BS in Horticulture and 6 years supervisory experience. He is experienced in a wide range of work from tree maintenance to garden center operation to patio construction and planting. He provides some of the most technical horticultural trainings and handles purchasing of landscaping supplies.

NAN ARNSTEIN, FINANCIAL OPERATIONS MANAGER, joined KNOX in 2010. Ms. Arnstein has a Masters of Science in Professional Accounting. She has 25 years of public and private accounting experience. She has worked as the CFO for several multi-million dollar medical communications firms, the Controller for personal service corporations and as the Principal in a financial consulting business.

CHARMAINE CRAIG, COMMUNITY OUTREACH DIRECTOR, has been a community organizer, a staff person for a city councilwoman and an engaged community leader for many years in Hartford. For the AmeriCorps program, she is responsible for integrating members into KNOX's volunteer projects.

### **PROGRAM MANAGEMENT, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND COMPLIANCE**

As the structure above describes, KNOX provides the members with a time-tested model, experienced staff, and well-suited role models to ensure their experience and ultimately their futures are outstanding. The Program Director completed the City of Hartford's Youth Development Practitioners

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Academy and Middle Management Institute course in 2010 and the new Member Manager will be required to attend a similar course. This is in addition to attending all trainings and conferences sponsored by CNCS and the State Commission. KNOX works with a number of consultants who provide programmatic and financial assistance. The organization is audited every year. The board ratified a new strategic plan in September 2012 calling for increased marketing on all fronts, a capital campaign, increased educational opportunities in all of our programs, and outside evaluations of all our programs. To this end, KNOX hired Kenya Rutland of KJR Consulting to conduct the GCAP's evaluation this year. Most importantly, KNOX regularly works with its local community foundation, The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, which provides a wide assortment of grants through their Technical Assistance Grant program. In the past 3 years, KNOX has utilized this program to update its financial tracking systems, technology plan, and develop a new strategic plan.

The program scores highly on all evaluations by the state office. On the rare occurrence when a problem is identified, staff quickly takes action to resolve the issue. We learned last year that AmeriCorps was not as well branded into the program as CNCS' and the state commission's investment of time, training, and resources warrants. To remedy this immediately, KNOX is working with a graphic designer to develop a program logo and its own rebranding firm to ensure AmeriCorps is featured prominently and separately on the organization's soon to be published website. To further advance AmeriCorps' visibility internally and externally around KNOX, the new facilities currently being designed (to be built in 2-3 years) will include an AmeriCorps wing that houses the crew's training facilities, break room, and offices together, complete with modern touches.

The Program Director and Executive Director are both committed to program compliance and excellence, as described in section c) COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY below.

### **FUNDING AND FINANCE**

KNOX has developed a high capacity to manage federal grants. We have received high marks during all AmeriCorps audits and site visits, and our state commission has used some of our systems as models for other grantees. We have successfully managed or currently manage other federal grants from the EPA, the USDA Forest Service, and the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. KNOX has successfully met their match each year in recent memory, and the organization has operated under a balanced budget for the past 3 years. In large part, this is due to the success of KNOX's fundraising staff and Executive Director, who have diversified KNOX's sources of income and attracted new grantors and donors to both GCAP and the organization as a whole. As the fundraising side of KNOX's revenue stream grows, fee-for-service becomes less important to the organization and

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our AmeriCorps program's long-term sustainability. This shift allows GCAP to spend more time in training and conducting service projects best suited to provide them experience and benefit the community. For the current program year, which coincides with our fiscal year, KNOX's projected revenue is as follows: Corporate Contributions: \$37,225, 3%; Individual Contributions: \$71,100, 5%; Community Garden Fees: \$10,000, 1%; Grants: \$603,120, 46%; Fee-for-Service: \$547,525, 42%; Sales: \$9,700, 1%; Events: \$32,250, 2%.

KNOX has received competitive funding through our state commission for the past 9 years. The corporation's current contribution represents 9% of our total budget (as compared to 17% in 2009-2010). KNOX expects AmeriCorps' investment for the 2013-14 program year to represent 12% of our overall budget. As the program size has increased from 12 to 15 MSYs and the program shifts away from fee-for-service funding in order to provide members time to study for their GED and receive training, this is to be expected. To put this shift (and our increased request) to CNCS in perspective, fee-for-service work funded 57% of the program's budget for the 2011-12 program year and 61% of 2012-13's budget. It will fund 45% of 2013-14's program budget.

Along with the CNCS's investment, KNOX will reapply for grants from the Lincoln Foundation (\$18,000), City of Hartford CDBG Grant Program (\$18,000) Common Sense Fund (\$36,000), Hoffman Foundation (\$10,000), Bissell Foundation (\$10,000), Travelers Foundation (\$10,000), and a number of other small grantors to contribute an expected \$23,500 in matching grants. In addition, GCAP will raise \$282,200 through fee for service work. Finally, \$8,000 of in-kind donations and \$3,656 in individual contributions will be dedicated to the program's success. Given the program's past success, we are confident in our ability to match CNCS' investment. That being said, it is a continual struggle to balance funds raised with fee-for-service income. Without CNCS' investment, our members would not be able to spend enough time in non-revenue generating training, study time, and service work.

### b. Sustainability

Because of the shift away from fee-for-service revenue described throughout this grant, we must ask CNCS for more funding in the short-term. KNOX understands the implications of this shift. First and foremost, it increases the potential for longterm success in our members. Furthermore, it enables the organization to approach a new group of funders interested in ensuring low-income individuals obtain their GED or high school diploma. With our new performance measures, increased program year, and stronger relationship with Hartford Adult Education, we feel confident that this new pool of grant funders will fill in the increased funding gap currently requested from CNCS over time. For instance,

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the Common Sense fund increased their funding from \$25,000 to \$36,000 as they assisted with and watched GCAP's priorities shift from the environment to its program participants.

Furthermore, as the organization raises more funds overall and meets its budget every year, the welfare of GCAP improves as well. Happily, KNOX is in a much stronger financial position than it was three years ago and funders have begun to respond accordingly. For instance, we are in a position to begin planning a capital campaign to benefit all of KNOX's programs.

Due to special circumstances inherent to working with this population in this city, GCAP will always require significant grant funding in order to successfully meet the educational, workforce training and personal development needs of its members. While contributions from local corporations, private foundations, and individuals have increased in recent years (from 36% in 2009-10 to 57% this year), the local funding market cannot support GCAP on its own, especially during the ongoing economic uncertainties. We will continue to add funders as the opportunity arises, but with both the City of Hartford and State of Connecticut facing major budget shortfalls again this year, an investment from any source that could replace CNCS funding is unlikely at this time (see: SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES).

### **INVOLVEMENT OF COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS**

Our funding partners for the program are listed above, and their involvement in the planning and evaluation of the program varies. Some grantors, specifically the Common Sense Fund, have taken a true interest in the program's evolution over the past few years. They originally provided funding for a job that eventually became the Member Manager position because of their interest in the long-term success of our members.

On a broader scale, KNOX will not initiate a project until there is buy-in from the community. For the AmeriCorps program, this means ensuring both members and the community that will benefit have input in service projects. Sometimes, this leads to a small shift (move this tree three feet that way). Sometimes, it means restructuring the project significantly (adding 30 community residents into a parks clean-up that GCAP had planned on accomplishing themselves). This community first mentality applies with large-scale and long-term partners, like the City of Hartford Mayor's Office, Department of Public Works Parks and Forestry Departments down to volunteer friends groups that steward each of Hartford's major parks. KNOX considers over 90 organizations in Hartford its partners along with its 100,000+ residents. This mentality of collaborative leadership directly fits in with our mission of empowerment, community ownership and partnership.

### **c) COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

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The Program Director and Executive Director make weekly stops to check in on members and supervisors to ensure compliance at service sites. The Program Director maintains an open dialogue with the State Commission in order to provide transparency and receive feedback. As members meet with the Program Director individually twice a month, they have confidential time to voice concerns and share ideas on how to improve the program.

Prohibited activities are carefully described during orientation, and all work is carried out under the supervision of trained staff to ensure members comply with rules on prohibited service activities. During training sessions, activities prohibited by AmeriCorps guidelines are outlined to our members. As trainings and activities are planned, careful consideration will be taken to avoid engaging in any of these prohibited activities while members are earning service and training hours or wearing the AmeriCorps Logo.

Members have not and will not be required to participate in any political campaigns. Members will not be involved in religious activities. However, members will work with and alongside faith-based groups such as the Christian Activities Council (which develops affordable housing) in carrying out service activities.

Because of our open dialogue with the State Commission, regular reporting, and visits to our office and with members by the commission, compliance issues and problem areas are quickly identified and dealt with. We describe remedies to the minor compliance issues faced last year in section e) below. The Executive Director and Board of Directors both monitor the outcomes of the program and the Executive Director regularly receives feedback from staff and program participants. This ensures a high-caliber program that continually improves.

### d) Enrollment and Retention

Enrollment for this year was 100%, as it has been for the past 3 years of KNOX's grant cycle. Retention rose significantly to a recent high of 85%. Although KNOX strives for 100% retention, we understand that we work with a population facing especially challenging circumstances that include teenage parenthood, drug abuse, and involvement in the criminal justice system. We are making every effort to improve the depth of our trainings and overall program to better serve this population. The most major shift occurred at the beginning of this program year when we shifted from a 6-month to 12-month enrollment. This shift gives members the winter, KNOX's slow time, to receive individual training, attention, and preparation. However, not every member will either follow AmeriCorps rules or be able to complete the required number of service hours to graduate given the challenges they face.

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### e) Performance Targets and Demonstrated Compliance

KNOX successfully met its performance targets for the past year. As our last continuation describes, we have shifted away from reporting on the environmental stewardship outputs of the crew in order to hone in on the core purpose of the program, improving the economic circumstances of disadvantaged young adults in Hartford. Performance measures for our last completed program year (the last year we enrolled 21 members) include:

\*Member Development - 21 members completed editable resumes.

\*Environmental Stewardship - 305 trees planted, 200 planters, 35 non-profit and public green spaces maintained, 15 community gardens and 23 City green spaces maintained.

\*Volunteer Recruitment - 2010 volunteers recruited.

We have evidence that our theory of change for these young men and women is effective, as described in MEASURABLE COMMUNITY IMPACT OF INTERVENTION. "For the 2009-2010 program year, 78% of graduating members found employment or were enrolled in college or trade school within three months of program end. For the 2010-11 program year, 83% of graduating members found employment or were enrolled in higher education within 3 months of program end. KNOX now conducts follow-up interviews, 3, 6, 9, and 12 months after program end, which will ensure we can collect the data promised in our performance measures."

KNOX has had 4 total compliance issues -1 "Charge Back" Member manager absence from a required AmeriCorps event and 3 "late financial submission reports" that were one day late. While not monumental in their impact on the program, we take all noncompliance very seriously. The then Member Manager's role has been shifted to involve him less in the program. While his knowledge of horticultural operations still contributes to the success of GCAP, his only direct interaction with the crew is during specific trainings, scheduling some of their fee-for-service work, and working with suppliers to purchase their equipment. Mr. Willard's new role allows him to excel and shifts him away from member development, which was never his strength. For the financial reporting, KNOX's Executive Director has become much more involved in the day-today financial operations of the organization. All financial deadlines are included in his calendar and he ensures that each deadline is met.

The final issue our program faces is the direct result of the aging headquarters where we reside. It lacks secluded office space and the entire facility has seen better days. In the long-term, KNOX has begun to plan a capital campaign. In the short-term, KNOX will rent a modular office and break/training room for the members to ensure they have a worthy place to call their own and

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program director has a secluded office to meet with members that is also close to where the members train and break (her current office space is on the opposite side of the building as the members and conversations held there can be heard from the greeting area next door).

As we describe in ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING, we strive to improve the content of the program constantly, and are quick to take action when areas of improvement are identified by anyone, including the Connecticut State Commission.

### f) SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

According to an American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, Connecticut had the third lowest poverty rate in the country in 2006 at 9.3%. However, 33.5% of Hartford residents live below the poverty line, making our city the second poorest city in the United States with a population of more than 100,000 people. This results in a high cost of living (or of program operation), which especially strains resource poor individuals and organizations. As previously stated, we provide the opportunity to serve a particularly needy subsection of Hartford's population, out-of-school youth, who require more training, support, and services than other AmeriCorps programs. Furthermore, like many low-income cities, Hartford receives the brunt of negative environmental impacts and environmental injustice. When considering our capacity to run this program, one should also note KNOX's celebrated 46 year history along with the fact that the organization is in a growth mode. While many nonprofits have shut down or decreased operations, strong leadership and an increased concern for all things "green" has created opportunities for KNOX even under the current economic uncertainty.

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

Our budget is definitely adequate to carry forth the program. Running the program for the past ten years gives us ample experience and knowledge of needs and related costs when preparing the program's annual budget. Additionally, KNOX has two dedicated fundraising staff persons that successfully raise the required match annually.

Compared to some of the other AmeriCorps programs in Connecticut, KNOX's cost per member is higher. We have chosen to recruit our crew members from among a difficult to serve population within the generally low-income population of the city: out-of-school youth. Not only do these young people come from an environment of poverty, most of them dropped out before completing high school, most of them were raised in single-parent households, and most of them suffer from very unstable living situations when they join the crew. We have had several crew members who were effectively homeless at times during their terms of service.

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To serve this group, we have made program decisions that in other circumstances might seem unnecessary or excessive. First, we extended the program year from 6 to 12 months for each member, doubling their training time and experience. This gives each member enough time to settle into and progress further upon their new life plan while increasing the cost of the program for each member. While costly, it is crucial to achieve the new goals of the program. Secondly, AmeriCorps members who landscape and run a greenhouse require much costlier equipment and supplies than AmeriCorps members conducting such work as tutoring. You cannot teach someone how to operate a commercial mower without owning one. Thirdly, we provide all work clothing and safety equipment, far beyond the basic T-shirts and such that some other programs provide. This not only creates a uniform appearance for GCAP, but it relieves members of the burden of providing appropriate work clothing. We provide bus passes for all GCAP members. Although Hartford is a small city, transportation is often a challenge. The passes enable crew members to get to work, travel to job interviews, and GED classes (if necessary). Finally, based on the recommendations of the State Commission, we have added a modular office building to our property in the short term to ensure GCAP has its own identity and that the program director has a confidential office directly next to the crew members. Until KNOX's renovations are complete 3 years hence, this ensures members are connected to program staff. Our Program Director has successfully completed all necessary criminal history and FBI checks on staff and program participants. These are included in the budget based on the cost per inquiry from last year.

### JUSTIFICATION OF INCREASE IN MSYs

As this narrative describes, GCAP has taken on a bold new direction in order to provide members adequate GED and job training with this program year (the final year of our 3 year grant). Running the program thus far has identified that our crew members success firmly depends upon an increased investment both in terms of staff time and finding ways to offer them more time in training and GED preparation (and less time raising funds through fee-for-service work). KNOX's MSY is higher this year at \$12,970. To some degree, this is due to the SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES of operating in Connecticut, where all costs are high and serving some of the neediest among us, who require additional resources. Most importantly, it is because we endeavor to provide members the best possible chance at success after troubled beginnings.

KNOX still provides 68% of the budgetary match for this program, well above the percentage required by CNCS. An organization that has developed an award-winning program should be penalized for effectively overachieving for years in terms of funds raised and a low MSY when they temporarily

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increase their request. This is especially true as this request is the result in GCAP aligning its performance measures to meet CNCS' strategic plan, better serve its members, and follow the recommendations provided to us. Over the next three years, KNOX will attract new grantors to supplement its new program goals and performance measures in order to decrease our reliance on federal support. CNCS' investment will allow GCAP to develop the track record necessary to secure these funds.

### **Evaluation Summary or Plan**

We have sent along a preliminary draft of the independent evaluation conducted to our State Commission. We will send along the final results to our State Commission when it is complete. As we received the initial evaluation this week, we have not fully developed strategies to remedy all of the weaknesses; however, the issues raised therein are largely solved by this grant application. The evaluation recognizes the program for its unique approach to member development, the positive and supportive environment staff members create, the competence of staff members, the many collaborative opportunities members are connected to, and the ability of GCAP to instill life and jobs skills in its members.

The major challenges GCAP faces revolve around communication between GCAP members and staff and between staff members. The evaluation recommends service projects be planned further in advance, that staff meet at night to discuss the next day's work instead of the morning, that supervisors be more empowered to plan, communicate, and mentor the members, and that a more formal system of discipline, accountability, and adherence to policy needs to be developed for both members and staff. This is largely the direction the organization and GCAP are moving in already. We have included funds to train supervisors this year. As the application states, KNOX is in a growth mode. The methods of communication, planning, and accountability that work for an \$800,000 organization are not as effective for an organization almost double that size. We look forward to working with CNCS, the CT State Commission, and local partners to implement effective changes that will ensure KNOX's and GCAP's continued excellence.

### **Amendment Justification**

N/A

### **Clarification Summary**

N/A

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## Continuation Changes

N/A