

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2013 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust

Application ID: 13AC147141

Program Name: Massachusetts Lands Initiative for Tomorrow (MassLIFT)

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 applicant presents a very strong needs assessment, documented with ample, current analysis of Massachusetts's troublesome rate of land loss to development as evidenced by two reports: (1) a U.S. Forest Service 2009 report concluded that the state's water quality would be among the most affected of the 20 states in the northeastern and mid-western region due to forest loss from development; and, (2) Open Space Institute, in 2005, concluded that local and regional capacity for land conservation is an especially important need in protecting land at risk of being developed.
- (+) The applicant describes the problem to be addressed by the proposed AmeriCorps project: local and regional land trusts need training, volunteers and community support to effectively address their towns' land protection and stewardship needs.
- (+) The applicant describes the target community as 8 to 14 regional conservation organizations within the state of Massachusetts.
- (+) The applicant explains why they selected this population to serve; for example, the rate of land lost to development in Massachusetts is increasing, and regional land trusts play an indispensable role in supporting community-based conservation efforts.
- (+) The applicant's request is for 20 AmeriCorps members serving in full-time slots: seven Land Stewardship Coordinators; four Regional Conservation Coordinators; five Community Engagement Coordinators; and four Service Learning Coordinators. This staffing model provides Members interested in environmental protection several different options to learn about the various field and administrative aspects of this work. Providing an opportunity for Members to do Service Learning Coordination will help to develop a trained and experienced pool of service-learning experts to help the service-learning movement grow.
- (+) The applicant provided abundant documentation of evidence-informed interventions that Mount Grace AmeriCorps members have successfully guided or facilitated projects, which resulted in significant land conservation

initiatives in all four established program Member roles.

(+) The applicant clearly articulates how the use of AmeriCorps members will allow the organization to achieve a greater impact in the community. For example, AmeriCorps members have conducted trainings for community volunteers serving regional and local land trusts and municipal boards, ensuring the ongoing stewardship capacity of groups with limited or no staff. Volunteers will increase the impact through direct service in activities such as maintaining trails and through community outreach and awareness activities.

(+) The applicant provides convincing details of its intention to expand its AmeriCorps-driven interventions by implementing 360 capacity-building projects and helping at least 130 organizations better meet the needs of their communities.

(+) The applicant describes how the interventions in the proposed program are evidence-informed. For example, the applicant cites outcomes from its 2010 and 2011 AmeriCorps programs using the proposed interventions, which provided assistance to communities for 88 land protection projects and other capacity-building activities. The applicant cites the Open Space Institute's 2005 Assessment of Land Conservation in Western Massachusetts to support its strategy of providing AmeriCorps members training and experience in conservation land transactions as a proven intervention for success.

(+) The applicant details specific activities and anticipated outputs for AmeriCorps members. Realistic targets are established for the number of volunteers recruited and service hours provided. The use of a pre- and post- assessment tool is appropriate to measure organizational change. Additionally, the applicant indicates they will engage a consultant evaluator to assist with the development of evaluation tools. The integration of activities in school settings is likely to ensure that children and youth will gain important conservation awareness that is likely to have a long-term impact in the targeted community.