

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

In calendar year 2014, the Utah Conservation Corps (UCC) will continue its mission in the CNCS priority areas of environmental stewardship and veterans. Throughout Utah 27 full-time, five half-time, seven reduced half-time, and 109 quarter-time AmeriCorps members will create or maintain 150 miles of trail; restore habitat on one thousand acres of public lands; maintain or construct eight miles of fence; recruit 2,500 volunteers, and reach 25,000 students with educational presentations. The UCC expects that at least 95% of project sponsors will indicate the project 1) was completed in a satisfactory manner that met their agency's standards 2) could not have been completed without the UCC and 3) was a cost-effective means to increase the community infrastructure for the tourism economy. The CNCS investment of \$777,663 will be matched with \$778,527.

## Rationale and Approach

### Program Narrative

#### 1. Program Design

##### a. Need

According to National Park Service, Congressional, and United States Government Accountability Office reports, public lands managed by the Department of Interior and Department of Agriculture have been neglected to the extent that they are burdened with a \$25 billion backlog of essential maintenance. Addressing this backlogged maintenance and other conservation projects are critical for Utah's economy. According to Outdoor Industry Foundation, outdoor recreation generates \$5.8 billion annually to Utah's economy and \$300 million in annual state tax revenues while supporting 65,000 jobs.

In addition to backlogged maintenance projects that affect the local tourist economy, a disproportional number of youth and veterans are unemployed and not building career skills. The current unemployment rate for youth is 17.1%, nearly double that of the national average and doesn't include the large number of young people who have stopped looking for work (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, July 2012). Among this number are 6 million Americans between the ages of 16-25 that are neither working nor in school that cost taxpayers more than \$500,000 each in public assistance over his or her lifetime. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics October 2012 report, the unemployment rate for veterans of active duty since 2001 is 10%. The unemployment rate for female veterans of active duty since 2001 is a staggering 15.5% compared to the national average unemployment rate of 7.9%. Additionally, in many cases there is a disconnect between veterans' skills

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and the skills needed for civilian jobs.

The Utah Conservation Corps (UCC) seeks to address critical conservation needs on public lands while employing and developing a diverse cadre of members. The UCC's mission is to develop the conservation leaders of tomorrow through service and education. Through leveraging numerous resources, AmeriCorps programs like the UCC effectively and efficiently complete the conservation and backlogged maintenance projects this sector of the tourist economy relies upon. The National Parks Association's "Made in America" report estimates that investments like conservation corps working on public lands are highly effective for strengthening local tourism economies as every dollar invested in the maintenance of the park generates about \$10 to local communities. A local example of this is the \$40,000 Dead Horse State Park raised to build 15 miles of new trails in 2008 with partners including the UCC. As cited in the "Get Out West! Advisory Group Report to the Western Governors", revenues for the park have been steadily climbing since the trail opened in 2008 from \$494,991 to \$709,202 in 2011. UCC represents a cost-effective means to address these issues as cited by the National Park Service study finding that using a corps program resulted in a 44% cost savings for the National Park Service in addition to the benefits of engaging young people ("Get Out West! Advisory Group Report to the Western Governors", June 2012).

In an April 18, 2012 memo regarding the creation of a national 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, Chief of the Forest Service Tom Tidwell remarked, "in a diminishing resources environment, innovative program ideas and partnerships are critical to our ability to grow youth employment and service programs." The training of young people is especially important at a time when 38% of Department of Interior and 35% of the Department of Agriculture workforce plans to retire within the next two years.

Not only does the UCC follow in the legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps to address critical backlogged maintenance projects in a cost-effective manner, but it will also be part of the current federal government's call for a 21st Century Conservation Service Corps to combat an unemployment epidemic for youth and veterans. Through completing unmet environmental stewardship projects, programs like the UCC recruit, train, and develop diverse populations to go on to serve in federal agencies like the Department of the Interior that as noted in an August 2010 Washington Post article ("New Diversity Plan For The Interior Department") have traditionally been challenged with hiring a diverse workforce. The UCC has successfully run Bilingual Youth Corps, veterans, and disability inclusive crews as part of its conservation field crews for most of the past decade that have met critical unmet environmental stewardship needs while preparing members to be the conservation leaders of

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tomorrow through AmeriCorps service.

The UCC has also worked with the Public Land Service Coalition (PLSC) to assess its effectiveness of developing these conservation leaders. A recent evaluation found that when compared with a control group with no corps experience, a corps experience leads to a higher likelihood of future community and civic engagement and increased appreciation of public lands ("2011 PLSC Evaluation Report", Duerden 2011). A follow-up evaluation completed in 2012 found that "corps participants reported increased community engagement and positive attitudes towards public lands" ("2012 PLSC Evaluation Report", Duerden, Edwards, Lizzo 2012). UCC AmeriCorps members thus gain the skills to be engaged and knowledgeable conservation leaders of tomorrow while cost-effectively addressing the critical unmet environmental stewardship needs of today.

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

For this proposal of both conservation field crews and individually placed AmeriCorps members detailed below, the UCC is requesting a total of 27 full-time, five half-time, seven reduced half-time, and 109 quarter-time slots (61 MSY total) in 2013-2014. The UCC has requested different slot types to adequately meet project sponsor needs and utilizes more quarter-time slots due to the seasonal and physically-demanding nature of many of the environmental stewardship projects.

From the above total request, the UCC is requesting sixteen full-time, seven reduced half-time, and 88 quarter-time slots for conservation field crews. An additional twelve quarter-time positions will be filled by veterans for conservation field crews. These AmeriCorps members will serve in four to eight-person teams under the direction of conservation project sponsors and UCC staff to create or maintain 150 miles of trail; remove noxious weeds and restore habitat on one thousand acres of public lands; and maintain or construct eight miles of fence. AmeriCorps members serving on these conservation field crews may be pulled from scheduled environmental stewardship projects to complete disaster response projects throughout the nation on an as needed basis. The UCC recently sent AmeriCorps members to assist with Hurricane Sandy recovery efforts in November 2012 and January 2013 and assisted in Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts in 2006 and 2007. The UCC has recently completed a Service Disaster Response Cooperative Agreement (DRCA) with the Corporation for National and Community Service.

The UCC will continue its emphasis of recruiting and developing diverse populations for conservation field crews. AmeriCorps members will serve in leadership positions for the Bilingual Youth Corps, a program that employs diverse high school youth and delivers all education materials in both English and Spanish. The UCC will operate inclusive crews utilizing AmeriCorps members

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with disabilities. Bilingual Youth Corps and inclusive crews will be scaled based on community need and project sponsors request of appropriate environmental stewardship projects. The UCC will also act as an intermediary organization for Canyon Country Youth Corps (CCYC), an organization that has traditionally placed underrepresented Hispanic and Native American youth in AmeriCorps positions. Of the 88 requested quarter-time slots for conservation field crews, twenty education award-only quarter-time AmeriCorps members will be placed at CCYC to complete similar environmental stewardship projects.

From the above total request, the UCC is requesting eleven full-time, five half-time, and nine quarter time members to be individually placed at non-profit organizations throughout the state. These AmeriCorps members will increase organizational capacity through volunteer generation and expanded environmental education programs in response to project sponsor need. These AmeriCorps members will recruit at least 2,500 volunteers and reach 25,000 students with environmental education presentations.

AmeriCorps members, trained by UCC staff, represent a temporary labor source for environmental stewardship project sponsors that is more skilled and reliable than volunteers as well as more cost-effective than contractors. This leveraging of resources to complete environmental stewardship projects that build tourism infrastructure is vital for the economies of rural communities that surround public lands. In the 2011-2012 grant year 27 of 28 project sponsors indicated that these projects could not have been completed without the UCC. Since the start of the program in 2001, 95% of project sponsors have responded that they were satisfied with the project; it met their agency's standards; and the projects could not have been completed without the UCC.

### c. Evidence-Based/Evidence-Informed and Measurable Community Impact

The UCC, as part of the Public Lands Service Coalition, will have all AmeriCorps members participate in an ongoing survey developed by Texas A & M University in 2011 to assess the impacts of corps programs on member attitudes and behaviors. Within its program, the UCC expects to continue to see a positive correlation between skills and values gained in the AmeriCorps experience with future education and employment. In 2011 and 2012 this evaluation found that UCC AmeriCorps members were not only more civically engaged as compared to a control group, but corps members also reported increases in employment skill areas including ability to work in teams, leadership skills, self-responsibility, grit, and communication skills.

The impacts of the UCC to address unmet community needs will continue to be measured by weekly report forms as well as project sponsor and AmeriCorps member surveys. AmeriCorps members will

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complete weekly report forms that will track outputs from environmental stewardship, education, and volunteer projects. Upon completion of each environmental stewardship project, all project sponsors will be asked to complete a survey that will verify outputs and will assess AmeriCorps member performance in relation to agency standards. Project sponsors will also be asked if the project would have gone uncompleted if it were not for the AmeriCorps members as well as if the project was a cost-effective means to increase the community infrastructure for the tourism economy.

AmeriCorps members will complete at least forty environmental stewardship projects that will result in the creation or maintenance of 150 miles of trail and the creation or maintenance of eight miles of fence as measured by weekly report forms. This performance measure coincides with the National Performance Measure in Environmental Stewardship (EN5). The UCC expects 95% of forty project sponsors will indicate through an evaluation that the project was completed in a satisfactory manner that met their agency's standards; the project could not have been completed without the UCC; and the project was a cost-effective means to increase the community infrastructure for the tourism economy.

The UCC will also annually select at least twelve veterans to AmeriCorps positions (quarter-time minimum) serving with conservation field crews as tracked by enrollment paperwork. This performance measure coincides with CNCS Strategic Plan Objective 2: Veterans Engaged in Service (V2). The UCC expects that 75% of these AmeriCorps members on veterans crews will indicate in an exit survey that due to their term of service that they were reconnected to career and higher education opportunities.

The UCC will expect to repeat these outputs and outcomes on an annual basis for the three year grant cycle. Impact regarding cost-effective strengthening of tourist economy infrastructure through environmental stewardship, education, and service projects will be measured and publicized through quarterly progress reports, an annual report, press releases, and UCC website. The UCC will also work with the Public Lands Service Coalition and partners like the National Park Service (NPS) to complete studies that compare the cost-effectiveness of corps. In fall 2012 a study with these partners showed that "using conservation crews instead of NPS crews saved 65%" and "the savings using conservation corps instead of contractor crews were even more significant with an average savings of 83% and over \$130,000 per project." A previous study conducted by the NPS Facility Maintenance Division and the Public Lands Service Coalition in fall 2011 found "that using conservation corps could save up to 44% over using NPS crews."

In the 2011-2012 grant year the UCC met all of its performance targets and demonstrated

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compliance. During this grant year eleven full-time, eleven half-time, six reduced half-time, 59 quarter-time, and nine minimum-time AmeriCorps members serving on UCC conservation field crews exceeded goals to create or maintain 100 miles of trail and maintain or construct six miles of fence. AmeriCorps members created or maintained 230.95 miles of trail and maintained 29.49 miles of fence. 27 of 28 project sponsors (96.4%) indicated that they were satisfied with the service of AmeriCorps members and that the project would not have been completed without them. This exceeded the projected goal of 95% of project sponsors indicating satisfaction and that the project would not have been completed without UCC AmeriCorps members. UCC AmeriCorps members recruited 2,989 volunteers that exceeded the goal of 1,060 volunteers. Ten full-time, ten half-time, one reduced half-time, twelve quarter-time, and two minimum-time AmeriCorps members reached 40,215 students with environmental education presentations that exceeded the goal of 14,000 students.

### d. Member Recruitment

The UCC will use a variety of recruitment methods to continue attracting a diverse group of highly qualified local and national applicants. Based on past successful recruiting efforts, underrepresented low-income minority students will be recruited from local high schools and community multicultural organizations such as Latinos in Action for the Bilingual Youth Corps program. UCC will follow up on past successes in this program's leadership development by promoting high school age corpsmembers into AmeriCorps positions once they become eligible. Current and past Bilingual Youth Corps members will also play a leadership role in these recruiting efforts by making presentations aimed at high school and college peer groups. The UCC will work with local and state veterans service organizations, particularly the Utah State University (USU) Veterans Resource Office, to recruit from this population. The UCC shall also continue to utilize the Utah Department of Veterans Affairs, Logan and Salt Lake Independent Living Centers, USU Disability Resource Center, USU Center for Persons with Disabilities, Common Ground Outdoor Adventures, and other disability organizations to recruit and select AmeriCorps members with disabilities for inclusive survey crews.

The UCC publicizes its AmeriCorps positions to national applicants through the AmeriCorps website, national outdoor job websites like CoolWorks.com and idealist.org, the returned Peace Corps volunteer newsletter, regional newspapers like High Country News and Mountain Gazette, and the UCC webpage and Facebook site. The UCC also recruits members in affected communities throughout the state by way of local newspapers, radio stations, high school and university presentations, and career fairs.

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### e. Member Training

The UCC will continue to refine innovative member training and provide skills that will allow members to become engaged citizens, gain college credit, and pursue career and educational goals. Before all UCC staff and AmeriCorps members begin service, they must be cleared through a criminal background check. All UCC staff and AmeriCorps members having access to vulnerable populations must complete a fingerprinted FBI background check before service begins. UCC will give an AmeriCorps orientation presentation to all AmeriCorps members and supervisors from project sponsors including the topics of national service and UCC history, prohibited member activities, drug-free workplace, sexual harassment training, and grievance policy. AmeriCorps member contracts and project sponsor letters of agreement will also have the signing party specifically acknowledge the topics of prohibited member activities, drug-free workplace, sexual harassment training, and grievance policy. This training will also cover how generated volunteers will be made aware of and adhere to rules regarding prohibited activities.

AmeriCorps members completing seasonal environmental stewardship projects will be trained by UCC staff and project sponsors in skill areas including safety, team-building, Leave No Trace Outdoor Ethics, conflict resolution, and Wilderness Advanced First Aid/CPR, trail maintenance, fence building, chainsaw certification, use of GPS, wilderness medicine, emergency response, search and rescue, and noxious weed identification and removal. These AmeriCorps members will take part in a USU college credit discussion-based course that will provide information, presentations, and discussion to foster responsibility, understanding, and appreciation of our nation's public lands while developing a deeper sense of place for the public lands they will serve in Utah. UCC staff, as well faculty from the USU College of Natural Resources, will present such topics as the history of public land management in the United States, current issues in land management, and natural history and ecology of Utah. AmeriCorps members will meet for two one-hour sessions per week to read selected readings, complete journal assignments, and participate in focused discussion groups.

AmeriCorps members individually placed at non-profit project sponsors will be trained by UCC staff, project sponsor staff, and USU College of Natural Resources faculty in the areas of volunteer recruitment and management, natural science education, curriculum development, presentation skills, and classroom/group management before and during their terms of service. Members have the option to complete graduate level environmental education courses and Utah Environmental Education Certification Program through Utah Society for Environmental Education.

The UCC is committed to training and developing all AmeriCorps members to be engaged citizens

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with the tools to be the conservation leaders of the future. AmeriCorps members will participate in a series group discussions to examine what citizenship, constitutional rights, and national service mean for them. UCC staff will assign readings as part of the member training curriculum to further integrate the concept of citizenship into their national service experience. AmeriCorps members with the UCC will have the chance to serve and learn as part of a diverse team of AmeriCorps members made up of individuals from all over the country, veterans, persons with disabilities, and underserved minority populations.

### f. Member Supervision

Site supervisors are selected through the project sponsor completing a letter of agreement that outlines project goals, staff, and available resources. UCC staff members will oversee these site supervisors. These UCC staff members have been selected based on their qualifications in outdoor leadership, wilderness medicine, technical skills, conflict-resolution, and risk management. After a competitive selection process for project sites is completed, UCC staff will visit site supervisors to orient them to the mission, goals, and guidelines of the UCC and AmeriCorps to ensure compliance with AmeriCorps regulations.

Site supervisors will ensure compliance with AmeriCorps prohibited activities, non-displacement, and other AmeriCorps provisions. Site supervisors for both conservation field crews and individually placed AmeriCorps members will be responsible for orienting the AmeriCorps member(s) to the importance of the project and the AmeriCorps member(s)' role in that project. Site supervisors in both cases will also be responsible for verifying progress of AmeriCorps member(s) towards desired goals or outcomes and completing a project sponsor evaluation upon completion of service.

Site supervisors from public land management project sponsors will supervise conservation field crews on a daily basis to ensure project goals are met and the work completed meets agency standards. UCC staff will work in conjunction with these site supervisors to provide frequent site visits to ensure adequate oversight of as well as adherence to prohibited activities policies and UCC risk management protocols. Individually placed AmeriCorps members will be supervised by site supervisors with oversight from UCC staff.

Site supervisors for both conservation field crews and individually placed AmeriCorps members will receive both initial and ongoing support from UCC staff. New project sponsors will be visited personally by UCC staff to review AmeriCorps prohibited activities, non-displacement, and other AmeriCorps provisions. UCC staff will review this information with existing individual placement and environmental stewardship project sponsors through regularly-scheduled site visits. UCC staff will also

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hold quarterly meetings for individual placement non-profit AmeriCorps members and project sponsors.

### g. Member Experience

Throughout the year, members will have multiple opportunities to provide feedback to UCC staff to enable powerful service experiences and improve the program. Both members serving on conservation field crews and individually placed at non-profit organizations will have the option to take a part in three-credit college courses through the USU College of Natural Resources that incorporate reading, discussion, and reflection. UCC staff will lead all AmeriCorps members in ongoing feedback and reflection activities to have members further reflect upon their terms of service and plans for future civic participation. At the end of the year all AmeriCorps members will complete a comprehensive exit evaluation that will allow for feedback on all aspects of the program. Through these evaluations, a Texas A&M researcher Mat Duerden found that participants of conservation corps, including the UCC, had stronger intentions for future community engagement and more positive attitudes toward public lands as a result of their corps experience versus a control group with no corps experience.

At the beginning of service all UCC AmeriCorps members will participate in a presentation and discussion regarding national service led by UCC staff. This information will enable them to better articulate what it means to be an AmeriCorps member with the UCC when interacting with community members, project sponsors, and the general public. All UCC members will be required to be identified as AmeriCorps members while in service. UCC conservation field crews will have standard uniforms with the AmeriCorps logo on all items. Individually placed UCC members will be required to wear an AmeriCorps lapel pin. All sites where individual placements serve will also have an AmeriCorps logo prominently displayed.

All UCC AmeriCorps members will have a chance to attend training sessions developed by the Utah Commission on Volunteers that will expose these members to other AmeriCorps members serving throughout the state. These training sessions will give UCC AmeriCorps members the chance to network with AmeriCorps State and AmeriCorps VISTA members from throughout the state as well as reflect on their terms of service. AmeriCorps members from nearby programs and local community volunteers will also be recruited to participate in annual service events like National Public Lands Day with project sponsors to promote cross-stream collaboration and increase AmeriCorps recognition and identity. In the past these projects have included constructing new trails close to urban areas as well as constructing fence to restore ecologically sensitive areas within urban watersheds. Furthermore, UCC AmeriCorps members will have a chance to interact with other AmeriCorps members serving at other

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conservation corps throughout the nation through The Corps Network.

### h. Volunteer Generation

AmeriCorps members will be directly responsible for recruiting both one-time and ongoing volunteers for both environmental stewardship and environmental education projects. AmeriCorps members will work directly with project sponsor site supervisors and UCC staff to properly train, manage, support, and retain these volunteers. UCC staff will monitor all volunteer activities to ensure that volunteers are not recruited for or engage in prohibited or unallowable activities.

UCC conservation field crews will continue to directly engage public volunteers at a number of service events including National Trails Day, Winter Trails Day, and Public Lands Day. These service projects are selected by the UCC and an existing project sponsor to allow the public to address environmental stewardship needs and increase the tourism infrastructure of the local community. UCC staff and AmeriCorps members will train and lead one-time volunteers in risk management and safety protocols when completing environmental stewardship projects.

Individually placed UCC AmeriCorps members will collaborate with their sponsoring nonprofit agency to maximize volunteer recruitment and use established agency procedures to train ongoing volunteers. This effort has traditionally increased the capacity, scope, and impact of these non-profits through volunteers participating in the planning, teaching, and support of expanded environmental education programs.

### i. Organizational Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

The UCC started operation in 2001 due to funding from an AmeriCorps grant and maintains a strong AmeriCorps identity as well as a commitment to branding national service. All UCC service gear and public materials have both the UCC and AmeriCorps logos prominently featured. As per AmeriCorps regulations, UCC requires all service sites to display the AmeriCorps logo prominently. The front page of UCC's website [www.usu.edu/ucc](http://www.usu.edu/ucc) directly links to [www.americorps.gov](http://www.americorps.gov)

## Organizational Capability

### 2. Organizational Capability

#### a. Organizational Background and Staffing

The mission of the UCC is to develop the conservation leaders of tomorrow through service and education. In 1999, a steering committee of USU faculty and staff, public land managers, AmeriCorps members, AmeriCorps alumni, local educators, volunteers, and non-profit directors explored how the creation of a conservation corps could benefit the community and environment through a mission that would address needs in environmental stewardship, education, and volunteer generation. The

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steering committee wrote a successful AmeriCorps grant proposal in the winter of 2000 and the UCC began operation at USU's Outdoor Recreation Center in January 2001.

The UCC focus on high impact environmental stewardship projects, a diverse cadre of members, and high quality programs has led to its reputation of being one of the most innovative corps in the nation. The UCC created its inclusive crew in 2007, the Bilingual Youth Corps in 2008, and the veterans crew in 2010. During its first decade 535 AmeriCorps members have been responsible for creating or maintaining over 1,420 miles of trail; constructing or maintaining 127 miles of fence; restoring over 8,210 acres of habitat on public lands; reaching over 112,000 students with environmental education activities; and recruiting 9,531 volunteers serving over 32,300 hours to support conservation and education projects.

Sean Damitz, the co-founder of the UCC and primary contact for this grant application, will continue as director for a thirteenth year. The director's duties will include leveraging multiple funding sources and working with USU to monitor fiscal and contractual compliance. Sean Damitz has a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from St. Norbert College and a Master's degree in Technical Communication from USU. From November 1998 through November 2000, Damitz served as an AmeriCorps VISTA at the USU Val R. Christensen Service Center. He reports to the USU Executive Director for Student Involvement.

Kate Stephens will continue as the program director for a twelfth year and is the secondary contact for this grant application. Kate is an adjunct faculty member for USU College of Natural Resources and oversees all programmatic compliance for the program including managing all staff, overseeing training and technical assistance for all staff, tracking the program outcomes and outputs, submitting progress reports, leading staff in developing and orientating project sponsors, and ensuring service site compliance. Kate Stephens has her Bachelor's degree from Southwestern University in Psychology and Sociology and her Master's degree in Environmental Education and Wilderness Leadership from Prescott College. Before her position with the UCC, she served as a VISTA, AmeriCorps VISTA Leader, and a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ecuador. She reports to the director and supervises four program coordinators (Dave Bastian, Adam Stoldal, Adam Trunzo, and Chris Brothersen).

Dave Bastian will continue as a program coordinator for a sixth year and will be responsible for scheduling conservation field crews as well as orienting and monitoring environmental stewardship project sponsors regarding AmeriCorps rules, regulations, and prohibited activities. Dave Bastian served as the director of operations for Save Our Canyons and the membership and outreach coordinator for the Utah Rivers Council before UCC.

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Program coordinators Adam Stoldal, Adam Trunzo, and Chris Brothersen will train and manage all field crews as well as orient, train, and monitor project sponsor site supervisors. Both have served as AmeriCorps members and have extensive training in wilderness medicine, outdoor leadership, conflict-resolution, risk management, and technical skills for completing environmental stewardship projects.

At the time of writing this proposal, two UCC staff assistant positions are in the process of being filled. Four years of office work required and a Bachelor's degree or two years of comparable experience is preferred for this position. The ideal candidates will possess strong interpersonal skills; professional computer experience with word processing and spreadsheet creation/management emphasis; and ability to accurately enter data entry with minimal supervision.

The UCC provides extensive training and development opportunities for staff with a dedicated line item in its annual budget. UCC staff that oversee conservation field crews have access to regular First Aid/CPR, technical skills, and wilderness medicine training in order to renew current certifications and train AmeriCorps members. UCC staff members also have access to fiscal and professional development as well as academic credit through USU. Utah Commission on Volunteers also provides ongoing training to UCC and other State AmeriCorps program staff. This robust plan for staff training as well as having access to USU facilities, staff, and faculty allow for excellent AmeriCorps member training.

UCC staff members have multiple years of experience completing both internal and external evaluation. The UCC has completed the ECO (Excellence in Corps Operations) peer review process through The Corps Network in 2004 and renewed in 2009. This peer review process uses a set of nationwide standards to assess the organization's programmatic and fiscal health as well as delivering suggestions for improvement and highlighting best practices. In addition, UCC staff have partnered with the Public Lands Service Coalition to complete the previously mentioned evaluations regarding corps member experience outcomes and cost effectiveness.

In 2006, UCC staff internally drafted a five year strategic plan with feedback from an advisory board. In 2012, UCC staff worked with consultants from Win-ar-zic & Associates to complete another five year strategic plan. The UCC is currently applying for Corps Center of Excellence (CCE) provisional accreditation. The CCE Provisional Accreditation is based upon the program standards recommended by the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Federal Advisory Committee to the Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar. UCC programs have received regular evaluations from USU faculty completing research projects. UCC also has a dedicated line item in its annual budget for

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evaluation.

The UCC has been an AmeriCorps State grantee for twelve years. UCC staff members have also administered additional AmeriCorps State funding to start the Access to Service and Aggie Blue Bikes (community sustainable transportation) programs. UCC has also successfully implemented and administered an AmeriCorps Recovery grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service in 2009-2010 that allowed the program to dramatically increase its programmatic capacity through expanded partnerships.

The UCC is a department within and receives oversight from the USU Division of Student Services. The UCC also receives support from USU Controller's, Sponsored Programs, and Risk Management offices to manage AmeriCorps funding. Outside of USU, the UCC receives support from the independent 501(c)3 nonprofit organization Utah Conservation Corps Friends. The UCC has been managed well by USU as evidenced by its senior staff (Sean Damitz and Kate Stephens) both serving in their respective positions for more than a decade. The UCC has annually met both its fiscal and programmatic goals since inception. UCC AmeriCorps members have been highly trained, properly managed, and have been given the meaningful service assignments as evidenced by high enrollment and retention rates. The UCC had an enrollment rate 100% and retention rate of 96.2% on the 2011-2012 grant 09ACHUT0010001.

### b. Sustainability

The UCC will use multiple strategies to ensure its impact in the community beyond the presence of federal support. AmeriCorps members placed at non-profit project sponsors will build capacity of those organizations through expanding volunteer efforts and promoting innovative environmental education programming that reaches thousands of students. These capacity-building efforts will ensure more long-term volunteer support, a more diverse group of stakeholders, and more potential donors for the organization. Furthermore, funding from these relationships has also offset AmeriCorps member costs allowing the UCC to gain capacity to be an effective and innovative intermediary organization.

The UCC will continue working with multiple partners in leveraging diverse non-federal funding sources to support conservation field crews. UCC staff are annually engaged in several grant-writing and fundraising efforts, like its partnership with local non-profit Youth Discovery Inc. in the funding of the Bilingual Youth Corps, to leverage non-federal support with AmeriCorps funding. The USU Vice President for Student Services and Research has also negotiated with UCC an ongoing indirect cost rate of 8% on all agreements that had risen to as much as 31.9% in previous years. This will

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ensure maximization of project sponsor funds supporting AmeriCorps members and building the capacity of the UCC.

Stakeholders for the UCC include project sponsors such as National Park Service units, National Forests, Bureau of Land Management Field Offices, Utah State Parks units, cities, counties, and non-profits to implement ongoing environmental stewardship and environmental education efforts. The UCC also considers current members, alumni, USU staff and faculty, and members of Utah Conservation Corps Friends critical stakeholders in its mission.

Through regular meetings, surveys, and evaluations, UCC solicits feedback from stakeholders to guide ongoing programmatic decisions as well as annual and strategic planning. UCC members are required debrief projects on a weekly basis and are given a comprehensive feedback survey at the end of their terms of service. All UCC project sponsors are given the chance to provide feedback via project sponsor evaluation forms completed at the end of each project. UCC staff, alumni, USU administrators, project sponsors, and Utah Conservation Corps Friends have all been involved in recent strategic planning efforts facilitated by Win-ar-zic & Associates. This strategic plan released in 2012 directs UCC to a more sustainable future that includes further diversifying revenue sources, maintaining high quality programs, strengthening organizations, and increasing visibility.

### c. Compliance and Accountability

All individual placement project sponsors will participate in a mandatory meeting with UCC staff before AmeriCorps members begin to orient and update those project sponsors on AmeriCorps rules, regulations, and prohibited activities. UCC staff will meet individually with environmental stewardship project sponsors before the project begins to discuss the scope of work of the needed project. All letters of agreements with project sponsors will include the list of AmeriCorps member prohibited activities and non-displacement AmeriCorps provisions. UCC staff will conduct regular site visits to both individually placement and environmental stewardship project sponsors to conduct risk management assessments and ensure AmeriCorps rules and regulations compliance. Individually placed AmeriCorps members will meet as a group with the program coordinator on a quarterly basis to update skills, complete training sessions, and review outputs.

Project sponsors that are sited as noncompliant with AmeriCorps or UCC rules and regulations will be suspended from receiving UCC assistance for at least one year. UCC AmeriCorps members that are found to be out of compliance will be subject to warnings, suspension, and termination as per their member contracts. If the UCC as an organization is found to be out of compliance, it shall work with the UCOV to repay any warranted restitution and correct policies and procedures as needed.

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### Demonstrated Compliance, Enrollment, and Retention

The UCC and service site locations have never been cited for compliance issues or areas of weakness/risk. In the 2009-2010 grant year the UCC enrolled 100% and retained 96.6% of its AmeriCorps slots (24.46 MSY) on grant 09ACHUT0010001. In the 2009-2010 grant year the UCC enrolled 98.1% and retained 90.2% of its AmeriCorps slots (18.62 MSY) on grant 09RCHUT0020002 (AmeriCorps Recovery grant). In the 2010-2011 grant year the UCC enrolled 100% of its AmeriCorps slots and had a 90.5% retention rate. The UCC had an enrollment rate 100% and retention rate of 96.2% on the 2011-2012 grant 09ACHUT0010001. The UCC will continue adequately training staff members, AmeriCorps members, and project sponsors to increase AmeriCorps member satisfaction and continue a high retention rate.

### Operating Sites and Member Service Sites

UCC staff will solicit past, current, and potential project sponsors during fall 2013. All new and continuing environmental stewardship project sponsors will need to complete a letter of agreement verifying how the project addresses critical environmental stewardship needs, demonstrates financial support, and impacts local tourism infrastructure. Non-profit project sponsors will apply on an annual basis for individually placed AmeriCorps members from the UCC and are selected based on impact in environmental education and volunteer generation, capacity to support the AmeriCorps member(s), and ability provide cash match for member costs. UCC staff will select projects based on how well project sponsor applicants meet the above criteria as well as AmeriCorps regulations 45 CFR §2522.475 and §2522.450.

Once selected, project sponsors enter into a letter of agreement with the UCC outlining cash match, expected programmatic outcomes, scope of work for the AmeriCorps member(s), prohibited member activities, drug-free workplace, sexual harassment training, and grievance policy. After selection, UCC staff will visit project sponsors at least a month in advance of their project to orient site supervisors to the mission, goals, and guidelines of the UCC and AmeriCorps to ensure compliance to AmeriCorps regulations. At this time a project timeline will be established as well as a detailed scope of service tasks and UCC staff will assess programmatic and financial capabilities of the project sponsor. This selection process establishes funding relationships needed to complete AmeriCorps service projects. Project sponsors will not be selected until December 2013.

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

3. Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy
  - a. Cost Effectiveness

## Narratives

The cost per MSY for this request is \$12,749 that is below the maximum of \$13,300. This is a reduction from \$13,019 cost per MSY in the 2012-2013 grant year and is due to the UCC requesting more education award-only positions and increasing match from a diversifying project sponsor base. In 2012, AmeriCorps funding accounted for 29% of the total organizational funding for UCC. The UCC is currently receiving a state formula award for the 2012-2013 grant year for \$232,286 that will be supplemented with a \$201,778 award from the CNCS. The UCC completed a three year competitive AmeriCorps grant that with an average annual award of \$440,000. The UCC also successfully applied for and completed an AmeriCorps Recovery grant in 2009-2010.

The UCC has built its financial and programmatic capacity over several years to increase its share of the costs while exceeding program goals. As mentioned previously, the program has annually exceeded goals set forth in performance measures while expanding and diversifying its project sponsor and funding base. In 2011-2012, the UCC's cash match exceeded the required match by \$23,861.55 and the program has many resources available to match future AmeriCorps grants at the 1:1 level.

For 2014, the UCC already has a commitment of \$122,000 from USU student fees to support the AmeriCorps members serving individual placements with Aggie Blue Bikes and student sustainability programs in 2014. Another commitment of \$73,880 will come from waived indirect costs from USU. Based on funding from previous years, the UCC will leverage AmeriCorps funding with \$400,000 from the federal project sponsors such as National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and USDA Forest Service; \$42,647 from Utah State Parks; and \$140,000 from nonprofit environmental education project sponsors like Utah Society for Environmental Education. The UCC will secure these cash match commitments through gaining multi-year funding from project sponsors of ongoing projects and soliciting new project sponsors based on the program's reputation and referrals from past project sponsors. The UCC will also continue to gain foundational support that has supported initiatives like the Bilingual Youth Corps, veterans crews, and inclusive crews.

As noted previously, conservation corps programs like the UCC have been noted to be a cost-effective means to complete environmental stewardship projects. A fall 2012 analysis conducted by the National Park Service (NPS) Facility Maintenance Division determined that "using conservation crews instead of NPS crews saved 65%" and "the savings using conservation corps instead of contractor crews were even more significant with an average savings of 83% and over \$130,000 per project." A previous study conducted by the NPS Facility Maintenance Division and the Public Lands Service Coalition in fall 2011 found "that using conservation corps could save up to 44% over using NPS crews."

## Narratives

### b. Budget Adequacy

The UCC's budget estimates clear and reasonable expenses that will allow for the completion of program activities as well as desired outputs and outcomes. Member costs account for 80.6% of the total proposed budget from the CNCS share. The grantee share, obtained from a diversity of project sponsors, covers the majority of staff salaries and other operating expenses. The salaries and benefits line items will adequately support a staff of eight full-time employees that will provide sufficient support and oversight of programmatic and fiscal requirements. The UCC budget reflects appropriate expenses for a statewide conservation corps in training and transporting both staff and AmeriCorps members. The costs of criminal history checks and FBI checks are covered in the budget for both staff and AmeriCorps members. UCC's fiscal sponsor, USU, waives a large portion of indirect costs and provides further support to the program through office space, staff development and training, and access to state motorpool. USU provides additional oversight of the program by the Vice President of Student Services, Risk Management, Controller's, and Sponsored Programs offices.

### Evaluation Summary or Plan

Evaluations included in narrative for this proposal including "2011 PLSC Evaluation", "2012 PLSC Evaluation", and "NPS Conservation Corps Cost Effectiveness Survey" have been sent to staff from Utah Commission on Volunteers. The UCC plans to partner again with the Public Lands Service Corps (PLSC) in 2013-2014 to complete similar evaluations regarding corps member experience outcomes and cost effectiveness of conservation corps. These evaluations will measure the cost effectiveness of the UCC addressing the environmental stewardship needs. These evaluation will also measure the effectiveness of developing the employment-related skills and civic engagement attitudes of UCC's AmeriCorps members in an effort to build the conservation leaders of tomorrow.

### Amendment Justification

N/A

### Clarification Summary

N/A

### Continuation Changes

N/A