

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

The Mt. Adams Institute (MAI)'s VetsWork: Environment program will address the CNCS focus areas of Veterans and Military Families and Environmental Stewardship by engaging 25 veterans to serve as members enrolled in a job training program focused on public lands issues in the states of Oregon (OR) and Washington (WA). VetsWork (VW) members will serve rural and urban communities throughout the Pacific Northwest.

VW will begin in January, 2014 and will end in December, 2016. The expected outcomes of this program are three-fold: First, members will develop skills, knowledge and professional networks, which will help them secure permanent employment. Second, members will effectively improve public lands by supporting natural resources management projects. Third, members will increase the capacity of natural resources management agencies and organizations by leveraging over 750 volunteers, including fellow veterans, to support public lands projects. The CNCS investment of \$325,000 will be matched with \$475,000 of community support.

## Rationale and Approach

A. NEED -- VW will address two significant problems in WA and OR communities: 1. the high levels of unemployment experienced by military veterans through a job training program that prepares them for careers in the natural resources management arena; and 2. the critical needs of public lands by focusing the activities of the job training program on environmental stewardship issues.

The evidence that military veterans need support to help them transition to civilian life is clear and alarming. It indicates that:

1. Veterans have a much more difficult time finding employment than civilians in WA and OR, especially younger male veterans:

\* 13.9% of Gulf War Era II Veterans and 10% of all veterans in the state of WA are unemployed as compared to the WA state unemployment rate of 8.2%; 24.1% of Gulf War Era II Veterans and 11.5% of all veterans in OR are unemployed as compared to the state's unemployment rate of 8.6% (Joint Economic Committee (JEC) November 2012 Report).

\* Across the nation, young male veterans (those ages 18 to 24) who served during Gulf War Era II had an unemployment rate of 29.1% in 2011, 12% higher than young male nonveterans. The rate for male veterans age 25 to 34 was also higher than the rate for their nonveteran counterparts -- 13.4% and 9.5%, respectively (Bureau of Labor, March 2012 report).

2. Unemployment is directly related to social issues like homelessness, suicide and substance abuse,

## Narratives

which are challenges affecting the veteran community:

\* More than 25% of the U.S. homeless population is made up of military veterans (Homelessness Institute Research Study, January 2011).

\* U.S. veterans average one suicide every 36 hours. A total of 454 veterans committed suicide in the U.S. in 2011, an increase of 25% since 2005 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) report).

\* A study of Army soldiers screened three to four months after returning from deployment to Iraq showed that 27% met criteria for alcohol abuse and were at increased risk for related harmful behaviors such as drinking and driving and using illicit drugs (National Institute on Drug Abuse, April 2011 report).

3. The current provider of services to veterans, the VA, needs community assistance to reach more veterans. Only 1/3 of veterans are registering for services with the VA, which provides health care, employment and other transition services. This indicates that veterans are either unaware of the services available or that these traditional services are no longer meeting their needs (Veterans Health Administration Outreach Office).

4. These issues will continue to grow as more veterans transition to civilian life in the next 10 years. Currently there are more than 630,000 veterans in WA; 330,000 veterans in OR (VA) and Bureau of Labor Statistics estimate that one million veterans will leave the military between 2011 and 2016.

In addition to the pressing issues facing veterans in WA and OR, public lands are also imperiled. Their endangered status impacts the two states substantially given the large public lands base in the Pacific Northwest. In WA, 42% of land is public; in OR, 60% is public. The latest data available from U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) and congressional testimony indicate that in 2009 the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management had a combined deferred maintenance backlog of over 10 billion dollars; in 2010, the National Park Service had a backlog of over 9 billion dollars.

Deferred maintenance has resulted in decreased public access due to the closure of visitor centers and campgrounds for safety reasons, the decline of hiking trails and parks, and a lack of staff to engage visitors. Meanwhile, interest in public lands among visitors is increasing. According to the Center for American Progress report, 591 million people visit lands managed by the Department of Interior and the Forest Service annually. These numbers rise when the economy is struggling, as public lands provide venues for low-cost recreational activities. It is clear that without the proper resources allocated for upkeep, the country is facing a severe decline in proper maintenance and access to its public lands.

Additionally, federal land management agencies such as the Forest Service are mandated to hire

## Narratives

veterans, yet they are struggling to successfully integrate them into their workforce. Many of the difficulties stem from the cultural differences between the military and civilian workforces, misunderstandings about how to support a veteran with a war injury such as traumatic brain injury (TBI) and/or post-traumatic stress (PTS), and an inadequate amount of in-house support to help the transition for both parties. Evidence suggests that many of these difficulties can be overcome with the help of job training programs and third-party support.

Veterans and public lands issues exist throughout WA and OR, thus VW will operate in communities across the region. Many of these places will be rural, such as Glenwood, WA, home of the Conboy National Wildlife Refuge. Glenwood exemplifies most small towns in the region characterized by few economic development opportunities, a dwindling population (457) and close proximity to public land.

VW is focusing on veterans and public lands because both are critical issues that must be addressed for the sake of Pacific Northwest communities. Both have a direct impact on the economic health and livability of our communities; and each has a solution that can be tied to the other.

VW members will develop job skills and build professional networks while addressing the critical needs of public lands. VW staff will provide training and resource support to both VW members and partnering agencies (sponsor sites) that address the barriers to a successful integration into the civilian workforce. In the end, both VW members and VW sponsor sites will benefit as measured by increased opportunities for employment, increased hiring pool of known candidates and increased capacity to address public lands issues.

B. MEMBERS AS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MEANS -- VW will recruit veterans to fill 25 full-time, 1700 hour AmeriCorps positions. Members will serve for 11 months and will focus their service on: 1. Developing workforce skills, knowledge and professional networks in the natural resources management field; 2. Addressing critical public lands/environmental issues; 3. Recruiting, training and coordinating volunteers to improve public lands; 4. Educating citizens about environmental concepts, such as sustaining natural resources and preserving a healthy environment. For example, members will serve as:

- \* Habitat Restoration and Volunteer Coordinator at Tualatin National Wildlife Refuge (TNWR). This position will work alongside TNWR staff to learn skills related to habitat restoration and to recruit and train volunteers for the habitat restoration and other biological programs.

- \* Bat Preservation Coordinator at Oregon Caves National Monument. The coordinator will oversee a bat education and protection program by creating educational tools and conducting outreach efforts

## Narratives

to area schools and community groups, as well as developing online educational tools.

\* Youth and Volunteer Program Coordinator at the National Forest Foundation and Mt. Baker Snoqualmie National Forest. This position will assist these organizations in developing strategic stewardship programs on the forest. The coordinator will recruit for and lead volunteer events and help design and implement youth service-learning and community engagement strategies on the forest.

The majority of these positions will emphasize engaging volunteers to increase the sites' capacity to positively impact communities. Members will recruit volunteers from the communities they serve, with a specific focus on engaging other veterans and their families. Volunteers will assist members on stewardship projects such as creek-side restoration plantings, educational programs such as the national Let's Go Fishing day and with national days of service, such as September 11th.

Veterans are ideal members given their practical skills, their commitment to service and their mission-driven work ethic rooted in their military experience. Recent interviews of returning veterans conducted by Civic Assets, a nonprofit organization that serves veterans, indicates that veterans are highly motivated to serve and that environmental service is of interest to them.

C. EVIDENCED BASED & COMMUNITY IMPACT -- VW was designed based on empirical and anecdotal evidence which indicates that: 1. Job training programs are an effective model for improving employability of their participants; 2. Public sector jobs, especially those that focus on environmental positions, are of high interest to veterans as they transition to civilian life; 3. Service is a viable transition pathway for veterans to civilian life but there is a shortage of AmeriCorps programs that focus on the environment and offer positions other than entry level, field based positions; 4. Veterans, especially those with war related injuries, are more likely to succeed in securing civilian employment when they participate in a transition program that supports them with skill trainings, workplace assistance and hands-on experience in a genuine position. Natural resources management positions also may contain some therapeutic qualities for individuals that have been injured by war; 5. AmeriCorps is a proven capacity builder of public lands agencies, which have a critical need for skilled employees that can fill management positions in the next five to ten years.

VW was designed as a job-training program because it is an effective intervention. Studies and federal data show that people who have undergone training have an easier time finding jobs than those who haven't, even if the new jobs are unrelated to their training. The Wall Street Journal reported in June, 2011 that 77% of those who received training through the federal dislocated-worker program had jobs within three months of finishing.

## Narratives

VW focuses its activity on public lands and natural resources management issues because evidence proves that veterans are drawn to this particular career path. Veterans have a recognized history of serving in the public sector at rates higher than the general public. Furthermore, they indicate a high interest in environmental careers. The Bureau of Labor Statistics and military exit surveys report:

- \* Gulf War Era II Veterans were about twice as likely to work in the public sector in 2011 as were non veterans--27% and 14%, respectively.

- \* Regardless of the period of service, many veterans with a service-connected disability work in the public sector. In August 2011, 34% of employed veterans with a disability worked in federal, state, or local government, compared with 19% of veterans with no disability and 14% of nonveterans.

- \* In a survey of Operation Iraqi Freedom/Enduring Freedom veterans in 2009, 69% of veterans indicated that environmental conservation service positions were of great interest to them.

Service is an important component of a successful transition from military to civilian life. In her book *Fields of Combat, Understanding PTSD among Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan*, Erin Finley documents the experiences of veterans living with post-traumatic stress. In an interview with National Public Radio in June 2011, Finley stated that the most successful veterans she interviewed have focused on serving others in their post military careers.

Within the environmental field, there is a need to expand AmeriCorps programs that offer a variety of service opportunities for veterans. Based on interviews with staff from two current AmeriCorps programs in WA, WA Vet Corps (WVC) and WA Conservation Corps (WCC), both of which have service models that center around on-the-ground restoration projects implemented by members serving on teams, veterans have expressed a desire for natural resources opportunities that utilize more developed aspects of their skills and knowledge base. Mark Fischer, WVC Director, said, "some veterans need individual placements within the natural resources arena that contain more responsibility, and thus provide veterans with a vehicle to demonstrate their talents beyond pulling blackberries or building hiking trails."

VW's program model revolves around placing members in positions of responsibility within an agency or organization and then supporting them through high quality trainings and personal contact. This model was successfully implemented by VW staff at their previous AmeriCorps program. It is corroborated by a VA report from February, 2012 that states, "Veterans with post-traumatic stress (PTS) who participated in an evidence-based supported employment program . . . where they were placed in real-life competitive jobs, not in sheltered or set aside jobs were nearly three times more likely to gain competitive employment than those who received a standard vocational rehabilitation

## Narratives

program."

Positions in the environmental field are also known to have additional therapeutic benefits, as noted in the November 2011 edition of The Land Letter where National Park Service Director Jonathan Jarvis wrote, "the national parks and green spaces are an important but often overlooked variable in the American public health equation. Not only do parks provide opportunities for physical activity, but being in the natural world has also been shown to reduce stress and improve healing rates."

AmeriCorps members are a proven capacity builder for natural resources management agencies in the Pacific Northwest. Their ability to recruit volunteers, engage community members and coordinate projects has positively impacted public lands since the beginning of AmeriCorps. While working at other AmeriCorps programs, VW's staff experienced that over 90% of agency partners reported that AmeriCorps members dramatically increased their ability to meet objectives through volunteer recruitment, program development and database management and creation.

In addition to the immediate impact of AmeriCorps members' service, there is the potential for long term benefits for both the members and partnering agencies in regards to employment. Current projections from the human resources department of the Forest Service indicate that 31% of supervisory positions will be vacated in the next four years, including 25% of its senior leadership. These numbers demonstrate that there will be opportunity for veterans to secure good jobs within the agencies as more positions become open due to retirement and advancement of current personnel.

The impact of the AmeriCorps investment will allow VW to implement our innovative programming model (individual placement with an environmental focus) to help veterans increase their employment opportunities through the acquisition of specific skills, knowledge and connections necessary to obtain full time employment as well as positively impact the stewardship of public lands.

VW will address both the Tier 1 performance measure: Veterans and Military Families (V2: Number of veterans engaged in service opportunities as a National Service Participant or volunteer) and the Tier 2 priority measure: Environmental Stewardship and Capacity Building (EN4: Number of acres of national parks, state parks, city parks, county parks or other public and tribal lands that are improved). By the end of the three-year grant cycle, VW will have positively addressed the high unemployment levels of veterans by increasing the members' likelihood of obtaining employment with land management agencies/organizations:

\* 90% of VW members will indicate that they have acquired the requisite skills and knowledge to qualify for employment with land management agencies/organizations; they have developed a professional network within the field that will benefit their career path; and that they have a better

## Narratives

understanding of their desired career path.

VW will also have positively impacted other aspects of the members' lives:

\* 95% of VW members will indicate that their AmeriCorps service experience positively impacted their mental/physical wellbeing and/or their role within their communities as well as increase their ability to engage civically.

In regards to environmental stewardship, 95% of sponsor sites will indicate that the service provided by VW members will have dramatically increased their capacity to manage public lands as measured by 7,500 acres of public lands improved and 750 volunteers recruited, trained and managed on projects that improve public lands. Additionally, 90% of sponsors will indicate that VW increased their awareness of specific veterans that they would like to employ if positions are available.

MAI has established tools and data collection systems to track and evaluate progress toward meeting performance measures. Information is systematically collected from members, sponsors and other community stakeholders through service site project reports, participant surveys, volunteer tracking logs, project evaluation forms and pre and post term member surveys. VW will generate an annual progress report that summarizes the performance measures accomplishments. Performance measure targets were developed through communication with community partners, stakeholders and potential sponsor sites.

D. MEMBER RECRUITMENT -- VW staff will recruit and select members in partnership with the sponsor site supervisors. Potential members will be recruited through the AmeriCorps and VW websites, veterans resource groups and other online recruitment sites. Sponsors will be encouraged to recruit applicants through their own local channels. VW will utilize local resources to promote members from within Northwest communities such as advertising at local colleges, military bases and local job sites. VW will conduct the initial selection process and prioritize candidates based on sponsors' needs and AmeriCorps eligibility. Top candidates will have a second interview with the sponsor site. If approved by the sponsor, VW will officially offer the position to the candidate and begin the enrollment process.

Veterans are a traditionally underrepresented population in AmeriCorps. As part of the AmeriCorps planning grant, VW staff has developed relationships with organizations that already serve veterans in the Pacific Northwest, including WA Vet Corps, WA Conservation Corps, Veterans Green Jobs, WA and OR Department of Veterans Affairs and Civic Assets. These partners will assist our recruitment efforts by marketing VW within their audiences, identifying specific candidates and sharing outreach efforts. VW staff has met with veterans groups at the federal, state and local levels to share

## Narratives

information about the program and to glean the best recruiting, training and support practices for this target group.

VW is committed to the recruitment of a diverse member corps. Staff will participate in trainings through the OR based Center for Diversity & the Environment that explore diversity issues and provide tools that staff can use to help ensure diversity within the program.

VW will ensure the member's success through an extensive recruitment and interview process that will help define the veterans' expectations for the year, through our member and sponsor training program and through frequent contact between members and VW staff.

E. MEMBER TRAINING -- VW's training and development program is a key component of the experience that prepares members for effective service. Before members begin at their sponsor site they will participate in a week of orientation. The orientation will be structured to promote a successful start to their service by focusing on the following goals: 1. Orient members to AmeriCorps, the program and staff; 2. Begin to develop a strong team of members that can depend on each and collaborate well together throughout the term; 3. Introduce the members to key program components including: ethic of service, personal connection to the natural world, leadership skills and personal / professional skills development.

To orient members to AmeriCorps and to VW, staff will provide training on the following: 1. History of AmeriCorps and national service; 2. VW and Mt. Adams Institute overview; 3. Program expectations / Member rights and responsibilities / Program calendar; 4. Policies and procedures (including prohibited activities) / Timesheets & reporting requirements; 5. AmeriCorps ambassadors training; 6. First aid & CPR training; 7. Team building / Esprit de corps; and 8. Natural resources management topics.

The process of educating members about their placement site, the community they will serve and their service begins before orientation during the recruitment period. All members will be interviewed by their sponsor site, ensuring that they will have an opportunity to learn firsthand about these items prior to accepting a position. VW staff will send a checklist to all sponsors with ideas about the type of information to share with applicants. During orientation, VW staff will build upon that awareness by conducting a joint member/sponsor training that focuses on: 1. Building an effective team / Goal setting / Developing a work plan; 2. Values based management / Conflict resolution; 3. Cultural differences between the military and civilian work environments.

Training topics are determined by VW staff based on previous experience with AmeriCorps, a survey of sponsor sites and ongoing feedback from members. Members will receive a baseline of information

## Narratives

and skills during the orientation, but the bulk of the training will be ongoing throughout the service term. This model allows VW staff to adjust as specific needs arise and tracks with the educational theory that individuals are better served by training that continues throughout an experience.

Members submit topic requests prior to formal trainings and also evaluate sessions after they occur.

Ongoing training includes member-driven training, in which members select and facilitate trainings for their fellow members. After orientation, members will meet in regional pods every 4-6 weeks. These meetings incorporate both reflection and training. With support and guidance from the Program Director, members will be responsible for selecting the training venue, topic and outside trainer (if necessary). This format provides both leadership opportunities for members as well as providing them with the support to determine what type of training they need at that point in their service.

VW staff will provide three formal workshops for the entire group. These will occur in April, July and October and be 2-3 days in length. Topics include: Conflict resolution; Volunteer recruitment and management; Organizational strategies revisited; Public speaking and engagement; Utilizing social media effectively; Life after AmeriCorps; Sustaining motivation; Successful career transitions; Wrapping up projects with success. These skills, in addition to specific training on effective interview skills, resume/cover letter writing and job networking, will enhance their opportunity to secure employment upon completion of the program.

Members will also receive training at their sponsor sites that will provide them with the skills and knowledge necessary for their specific role. Site training will vary depending upon the type of position, knowledge and experience of the member, and overall complexity of the projects for which the member will be responsible.

VW is in the process of establishing a partnership with a local college to set up a monthly training course that will provide members with the opportunity to earn academic credit in the natural resources management field. This component would start them on the course of earning a college degree and prepare them for entry to the Pathways Program, which is the new federal employment track for students.

VW is serious about grant compliance and thus will share information about prohibited activities regularly. During the recruitment period, applicants will receive information about prohibited activities before and during interviews. At orientation, members and sponsors will receive training on prohibited activities and guidance on how to pass that information to generated volunteers. Member and sponsor contracts include a prohibited activities section as do the member and sponsor

## Narratives

handbooks. Furthermore, members are reminded of the prohibited activities on an on-going basis. VW follows up the information sharing by monitoring for compliance. The Program Director does this through site visits, review of monthly site reports, time sheets and phone and email communication.

F. MEMBER SUPERVISION -- VW members will be supervised and supported by a specific person at each sponsor site, the site supervisor. VW will encourage sites to select an individual that is a veteran and/or has experience working with veterans. To ensure that members receive the appropriate support, VW staff will work closely with site supervisors. They will receive informational packets on how to welcome, orient and support their member at their site. They will be required to attend a full day training focused on effective supervision, AmeriCorps history, policies, procedures and prohibited activities, tips on supporting members and military culture. Sponsors will also receive training on supporting members that suffer from PTS and TBI, which is a likely scenario given the statistics. Sponsors and members will be encouraged to have weekly meetings to discuss project logistics, provide professional development and foster a positive working relationship. Additionally, at the beginning of the term, members and sponsors will be required to submit a service plan of work to the VW's Program Director that includes monthly goals and a service calendar that includes trainings and member / sponsor meetings. VW staff will provide site supervisors with resources and tools throughout the term to help ensure quality supervision and support for the members.

VW staff will have regular contact with members and sponsors throughout the service term. This contact will include phone calls, emails and the aforementioned trainings. Also, sites will receive a minimum of one site visit and members will engage in two formal evaluations with their sponsor and VW staff. In the event of any issue, VW staff will increase its presence and support until the issue is resolved.

G. MEMBER EXPERIENCE -- VW has a proven programmatic approach to creating a powerful AmeriCorps experience that positively impacts communities and promotes life-long civic engagement. The design is bolstered by an experienced AmeriCorps staff and a unique operations hub that immerses members in the outdoors and facilitates team building exercises during orientation and training periods. VW's model is based on three important components: 1. VW will partner with high quality sponsor sites that provide service positions that will have a significant community impact, and understand the spirit and operating parameters of AmeriCorps; 2. VW will facilitate a training program for members that promotes an "esprit de corps", personal reflection, a sound understanding of their roles as AmeriCorps members and the skills and knowledge necessary to be effective in their positions; 3. VW will actively connect our members to other participants of the local and national

## Narratives

service movement through our connections with the state commissions in OR and WA and facilitate activities that encourage civic engagement.

Sponsor sites will play a fundamental role in the overall experience for members, as the majority of the service term will occur at these locations. To ensure sponsors are sufficiently structured to support an AmeriCorps member, VW will utilize a Request for Proposal (RFP) process that identifies and selects the most competent organizations. Additionally, VW will require sponsors to attend the aforementioned sponsor orientation. Throughout the service term, VW staff will monitor and support the local sponsor sites through site visits, phone and email contact and inviting them to participate in additional trainings as interested. By helping create a positive environment at the sponsor sites, VW addresses one important aspect of the service experience.

AmeriCorps members excel in their positions when they feel a strong connection to their fellow members. This is especially important for veterans who are accustomed to operating on teams. This "esprit de corps" supports them during the challenging moments of service and fosters resource sharing. Thus, VW will facilitate the development of relationships among members. Prior to orientation, members will be connected through VW's social media networks (Facebook page, blog, website and group emails). The five day orientation will help further build trust and camaraderie amongst the members. This is a critical event that sets the tone for the service term, lays the foundation for a strong team identity, promotes a full understanding of AmeriCorps, and clarifies each person's role as a member of the group.

After orientation, members will meet in regional pods every 4-6 weeks to share stories of their experience with peers, provide insights to overcoming site challenges and receive additional member coordinated training. Pod meetings are an effective tool for individual / group reflection and the continued development of the group. They also allow members to take charge of their own development, which is an important skill for life long civic engagement as it allows them to self-identify what they need to become more effective in their communities. Additionally, members will be connected to one another through the aforementioned social media networks, where they will be encouraged to provide updates on their projects and promote cross site volunteer opportunities. VW will require members to submit quarterly service reflections that will get posted on these platforms.

During orientation, VW members and sponsors will receive training on being AmeriCorps ambassadors within their local, regional and national communities. This training includes the history of the national service movement and AmeriCorps. They will learn how to effectively engage the media to promote their projects and the AmeriCorps.

## Narratives

In addition to the methods described above, which will help connect members to one another, VW will actively link members to other participants of the local and national service movement through our connection with the state commissions in OR and WA and through CNCS sponsored events and service days. Members will participate in the commissions' events, such as the Kick Off, as feasible. VW staff will participate in state commission meetings, attend the National Conference on Volunteering and Service and utilize other professional development opportunities offered by Corporation affiliated technical assistance providers to gather resources to strengthen members' connection to national service.

VW will require all members to complete a Community Action Project (CAP). CAP allows members to identify a community need that interests them, develop a solution to the issue and implement a project to address it. It is completely member driven, with training support and guidance provide by VW staff.

By connecting VW members to each other, facilitating quality service experiences and trainings and by providing participants with multiple avenues of civic engagement, we will help our members build a thorough understanding of and a strong connection to the national service movement.

H. VOLUNTEER GENERATION -- Volunteer generation is an important component of the program as it provides both the human resources needed to accomplish projects and an opportunity to engage more people in community service. VW members will be trained in volunteer recruitment and management and be responsible for coordinating volunteers at most service sites. They will learn how to recruit volunteers, create service projects that engage and retain volunteers and be responsible for managing and celebrating the volunteers' service. These skills, tools and knowledge will help members build the capacity of their sponsor sites. As a result, members will annually engage 750 volunteers that will contribute 5,000 hours of volunteer service, thus expanding the reach and impact of the sponsoring organizations.

Volunteers will be recruited to serve on projects that meet specific community needs as determined by sponsor sites. Volunteers will perform a variety of tasks, including trail building, invasive species removal, tree planting, environmental education and helping to organize other volunteers. VW members will place a specific emphasis on recruiting other veterans and their families. They will be successful as anecdotal research indicates that the best recruiters of veterans are other veterans given their shared cultural understanding. This will increase the number of veterans serving as volunteers on projects as well as raise awareness of public lands as a place to recreate, be a steward of and as a possible career track.

## Narratives

In addition to the aforementioned trainings, VW staff will provide members with tools to help them structure volunteer training and resources to help them ensure that volunteers are only engaged in appropriate activities. Resources will include information on how to: write volunteer position descriptions; create a volunteer contract that identifies prohibited and unallowable activities; interview and screen volunteers; train and evaluate volunteers.

I. AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION -- VW is committed to branding national service. Members and sponsors will participate in the aforementioned AmeriCorps Ambassador training and receive promotional material to utilize at their office and on the publications and social media sites. Members will be provided AmeriCorps identifiers and clothing to wear during service. VW staff will send out branding reminders as well as help prepare, collect and disseminate media on the members' AmeriCorps service.

### **Organizational Capability**

A. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND -- VW is a program of the Mt. Adams Institute (MAI). MAI's mission is to strengthen the connection between people and the natural world through education, service learning, career development and research. The organization was founded in 2011 by a group of people that previously worked for other AmeriCorps programs. MAI is a recipient of a 2012 AmeriCorps planning grant through its fiscal sponsor, Columbia Gorge Earth Center. The design period of VW was supported by this funding. In addition to VW, MAI operates educational and summer employment programs, including Outdoor Adventures, Forest Youth Success, and Wilderness Rangers.

MAI is well situated to implement VW given its staff's 20+ years of combined experience with AmeriCorps as well as its strong relationships with both the OR and WA Commissions for National and Community Service. Furthermore, MAI staff has an established history with many of the natural resources management agencies, such as the Forest Service, who will be sponsors of VW members.

MAI is governed by a board of directors that meets regularly to direct organizational activity, monitor financial activity and supervise the performance of its Executive Director (ED). The ED is responsible for implementing programs that meet the strategic objectives of the organization as determined by the board as well as responsible for providing direction and supervision to all MAI staff members. MAI staff members will work collaboratively with the board and program partners to ensure the success of the VW program. MAI Board President, Jeanne Bennett, is the Executive Director of the Southwest WA Workforce Development Council. Her experience and professional network is a key resource for understanding and securing new resources for the program.

## Narratives

MAI's fiscal responsibilities are handled by the accounting firm of Friend and Reagan, P.C., a local company with experience with county, state and federal dollars, including large amounts of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds.

MAI Executive Director, Brendan Norman, will oversee the successful implementation of VW. Mr. Norman will be responsible for the budget, AmeriCorps programmatic and fiscal compliance and supervising MAI staff. He has 15+ years of experience with AmeriCorps programs beginning as a member in 1996 and most recently serving as Director of the Northwest Service Academy--Mt. Adams Center (NWSA). Mr. Norman has extensive knowledge of program design and management, fiscal requirements, grant reporting and experiential education. While working at NWSA, he successfully administered more than \$10,000,000 worth of federal funds from the Corporation, the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. National Wildlife Refuge and state and local funding sources. He has managed AmeriCorps programs with annual budgets over \$1.5 million. He also helped design a similar AmeriCorps program to the one proposed, which placed members with federal, state and local natural resources management agencies to address environmental stewardship issues.

MAI Program Director, Amanda Lawrence, will manage VW, including securing relationships with sponsoring organizations, training and supporting members, supervising and supporting sponsor sites, ensuring compliance with program requirements and paperwork/timesheets and reporting program outcomes. Ms. Lawrence has eight years of AmeriCorps experience, beginning as a member in 2000. She worked for three years as the NWSA Recruitment Coordinator and spent her last four years as the NWSA Intern Program Coordinator, in which she was responsible for programming, management and fiscal oversight of 30+ AmeriCorps members annually. Ms. Lawrence is well versed in sponsor site selection process, sponsor recruitment, site and member relations, contract management, reporting, budget management and conflict resolution. Ms. Lawrence has formal training as an educator. She has also been responsible for developing VW under the planning grant, and creating partnerships between natural resource agencies and veterans support organizations that will ensure the success of VW.

If funded, MAI will hire a Member Support Coordinator in the summer of 2013. This position will coordinate the recruitment operations and member files, provide direct support to members and assist with administrative duties. Ideally, this person will be a veteran with previous experience with AmeriCorps. To that end, MAI has already started networking to identify potential candidates.

MAI will require all staff to engage in annual training that clearly outlines programmatic and fiscal requirements of this project. Staff will participate in technical assistance and training opportunities

## Narratives

offered by the state commissions of OR and WA, such as monthly AmeriCorps Directors meetings and the annual Network NW conference. Furthermore, staff will participate in professional development that hones their skill sets and keeps them informed of service changes and innovations.

MAI will place a special training emphasis on developing the skills to successfully support underrepresented populations in member positions. We have developed partnerships with the WA and OR Department of Veterans Affairs, which has agreed to provide veterans specific training to both the staff and project sponsor sites. Much of this training will focus on understanding military culture and the conditions that veterans are accustomed to operating within. Additionally, they will share additional resources for supporting veterans with disabilities, especially Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress (PTS). The importance of having training resources that understand the needs of the veteran population cannot be understated.

The benefit of prior experience will allow the staff to incorporate best practices, a proven training curriculum and a network of talented trainers into the VW training and development program for members. We have also developed partnerships with the other AmeriCorps programs that currently serve veterans in order to collaborate on effective practices and, possibly, joint trainings for our members. For natural resources management specific content, we will utilize our established network of industry professionals to deliver relevant skills and information trainings. The entire training and development program will be enhanced by a pending partnership with Mt. Hood Community College, which, when finalized, will provide content training for academic credit.

Additionally, MAI has a unique training facility that can house all of the members during trainings. The campus is located in Trout Lake, WA on the Mt. Adams Ranger District of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. These resources are important as they allow the MAI staff to engage AmeriCorps members in training activities similar to the project activities that members will design and lead at their site.

MAI staff has experience completing CNCS annual progress reports and conducting annual program reviews which examine program strengths/weaknesses. Additionally, staff has participated in internal and external desk audits and is prepared to support the efforts of an external evaluator. Mr. Norman has experience supporting external evaluation efforts at both of his former AmeriCorps programs.

MAI's staff has 20+ years of experience administering federal funds and AmeriCorps grants. Mr. Norman has served on the staff of two other AmeriCorps funded organizations (I Have A Dream Foundation and NWSA) and has a thorough understanding of the policies, fiscal and operational systems that are required to run an exemplary program.

## Narratives

MAI has experience managing other federal and state grant funded programs, including being an AmeriCorps subgrantee of the Corps Network and a recipient of a 2012 AmeriCorps planning grant. Additionally, MAI has co-administered a summer workforce development program for local youth funded by the Department of Agriculture and delivered environmental education programming to local schools through a 21st Century Learning Grant.

B. SUSTAINABILITY -- During the course of the planning grant, MAI staff built stakeholder support and secured financial resources from partners to implement VW. The staff has held more than 20 meetings with partners and supporters to gauge interest, solicit program design input and obtain external resources. In October, 2012, MAI initiated a successful pre Request for Proposal (RFP) process to a select group of potential sponsor sites that tentatively filled 1/3 of the requested member slots. If awarded the grant, MAI will launch a larger RFP process in mid June, 2013. Notification will go out to more than 1,000 potential sponsor sites that are in our current database. All selected sponsor sites will contribute a cash match to support the program implementation.

MAI staff have experience utilizing a similar RFP process for securing both sponsor sites and matching dollars for previous AmeriCorps programs that they operated. Furthermore, many of the potential sponsor sites are former partners and thus believe in MAI's ability to operate a quality program.

The planning period demonstrated that community stakeholder support is strong. MAI has experienced success generating both individual donor funds for implementing the project as well as receiving commitments of training and resource support from agencies/organizations that serve veterans. Supporters understand that helping veterans transition successfully to civilian life honors their commitment to the country as well as helps mitigate many socio-economic issues that occur when veterans struggle with reengaging in their communities.

MAI intends to operate as a broad based venture with reduced dependency on federal funds as it matures as an organization. The staff is experienced in raising funds for AmeriCorps programs and is able to leverage professional relationships it has maintained since operating their last AmeriCorps program. Partners are reassured by the fact that the staff has experience running AmeriCorps program, navigating the contracting and financial landscape of federal agencies and delivering high quality trainings and programming. Although MAI is a young organization, it has a firm foundation from which to build and a large support network that will contribute to long-term sustainability.

MAI's plan is to be a self-sustaining organization within 10 years and is developing other revenue streams that will support that goal. One of MAI's key assets is its campus located in the gateway

## Narratives

mountain town of Trout Lake, WA, an area frequented by tourists and educational groups. In coordination with the U.S. Forest Service, MAI will deliver an environmental education program on a fee for service basis. MAI will also operate a facility rental program, in which groups of up to 50 people can utilize its campus for educational events, workshops and research base camps. MAI's board of directors will assist with both organizational development and fundraising; already an individual donor program has sought financial assistance from more than 600 supporters. Furthermore, additional financial support is being sought from a mix of national, regional and state foundations as well as from private donors and fundraising events.

MAI will strive to ensure that the program's impact continues beyond the presence of federal support by helping sponsor sites build their capacity to deliver programming that can be sustained over time by volunteers. AmeriCorps members will support, develop or refine volunteer management systems at their sites and will provide a steady supply of people willing to be engaged in their community. Furthermore, MAI will assist sponsor sites in generating recognition of their activities and thus garnering further community support.

MAI's community partners and stakeholders include the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Land Management, National Parks, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, OR and WA Department of Veterans Affairs, Civic Assets, WA State Veterans Corps; local conservation districts such as the Underwood Conservation District, Hood River Water and Soil District, and Snohomish Conservation District; nonprofit organizations such as Mountains To Sound Greenway, Olympic Land Trust, and Farmland Trust; city agencies such as Spokane Urban Forestry; state agencies such as WA Department of Natural Resources; and local colleges, schools and school districts.

Partners and stakeholders have been asked to share their input regarding the program design through email conversations, individual meetings and phone calls. Throughout the planning period, staff met with veterans groups to compile best practices on recruiting, working with and supporting veterans. MAI also met with natural resources agencies at the national, regional and state levels, and community organizations to generate interest in the program. These audiences will continue to be engaged as the program is implemented. Their involvement and support of the program will contribute to long term sustainability in the form of future sponsor sites of VW members, as ambassadors and proponents of the program and as sources of potential funding and other program support resources.

C. COMPLIANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY -- MAI is well suited to operate in compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations. Our staff has developed and implemented systems for other

## Narratives

AmeriCorps programs that never experienced a major compliance issue during their tenure. Additionally, we will maintain strong relationships with the OR and WA State Commissions and our Program Officer to stay abreast of any changes.

MAI staff will ensure programmatic compliance at the sponsor service sites in four ways. 1. MAI's sponsor application process will screen out sites that lack the infrastructure to adequately meet programmatic standards. 2. All members will be made aware of all prohibited activities and programmatic requirements and be instructed to contact MAI staff in instances of uncertainty. 3. All sponsors will be required to attend the aforementioned sponsor orientation, where they will learn of all programmatic requirements. 4. MAI staff will maintain weekly contact and conduct site visits to ensure that sites are in compliance. In the event that sites are at risk of noncompliance, MAI staff will implement a site improvement plan, as well as notify the AmeriCorps program officer in the event of major issues.

MAI has been in frequent contact with both the WA and OR State commissions both informally and formally via phone, email and meetings through their consultation process.

Members will serve at sponsoring sites, which will consist of natural resources management agencies and nonprofit organizations in the states of OR and WA. Proposed sites were listed above in the community partners' paragraph and include most federal land agencies. MAI will utilize a RFP process to select specific sponsor sites. The RFP will ask organizations to address their programmatic and financial capabilities as well as respond to questions regarding quality, innovations, sustainability, leadership, past performance, community involvement, and programming activities supporting veterans. Once MAI receives notification of funding, we will initiate this process. The RFP will be sent out to a list of more than 1,000 potential sponsors mid June 2013. Submissions will be reviewed the first week of August by a diverse team of community readers that will include MAI staff and board members. Selected sites will be notified by August 13, 2013.

### **Budget/Cost Effectiveness**

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES -- MAI is located in Klickitat County, WA, in the town of Trout Lake. Trout Lake has a Beale Code of 9 as it is in a rural area of less than 2,500 people and not adjacent to a metropolitan area. Many of our partnering sponsor sites will be located in similar rural and/or under resourced communities.

B. BUDGET ADEQUACY -- VW's budget is based on the staff's experience operating AmeriCorps programs that have utilized a similar program design. It is designed to adequately support the program activities that will be carried out to achieve the desired outputs and outcomes. MAI

## Narratives

understands that the fixed amount grant is intended to only cover a portion of the project's operating expenses and will generate the remainder of the revenue through a sponsor site match of \$19,000 per member. The sponsor match, coupled with the Corporation's fixed amount contribution of \$13,000 per member, creates a \$800,000 program budget which allows MAI to meet all of the AmeriCorps provisions regarding living allowances, background checks, health care and adequate supervision to ensure compliance with prohibited activities. In addition, it supports a training and development program that both creates effective members and inspires life-long civic engagement.

In October, 2012, MAI staff released a pre-RFP to a select group of potential sponsors to gauge interest in VW. The result was encouraging: MAI received proposals for a third of its requested 25 MSY slots. Given the limited scope of that query, MAI is confident that the full RFP process that will be implemented upon funding notice will result in more applications than slots.

VW is a cost effective program that will lead to participants' increased ability to secure permanent employment and increase environmental stewardship of public lands. VW's cost is in line with similar individual placement programs that operate in the Pacific Northwest such as the Student Conservation Association and Resource Assistance for Rural Environments. The budget allows for additional training resources needed to effectively support the veterans' population as well operate rural placements throughout a two state region.

### **Evaluation Summary or Plan**

N/A

### **Amendment Justification**

N/A

### **Clarification Summary**

N/A

### **Continuation Changes**

N/A