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Executive Summary

The Minnesota (MN) GreenCorps proposes to have 40 AmeriCorps members who will carry out environmental stewardship projects that build community resilience by increasing energy efficiency and renewable energy use, and improving ecosystems in host communities located throughout the state. Projects are identified by communities, with priority given to projects serving disadvantaged populations and addressing the greatest threats. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for educating or training 16,000 youth and adults; providing capacity building services to 100 public and community based organizations; retrofitting and conserving energy in 15 public structures; treating 56 acres of public lands; and recycling 16 tons of waste. Overall, 480 activities and program outputs will be achieved. Within 30 days after finishing, 12 of 40 members will have secured employment in green jobs. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 600 volunteers. This program will focus on the CNCS focus area of Environmental Stewardship, and is within the funding priority of Environment - 21st Century Service Corps. The CNCS investment of \$440,365 will be matched with \$705,403: \$705,403 in public funding and \$0 private funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

PROBLEM/NEED

Communities across Minnesota and beyond are facing new and complex challenges as a result of our changing climate, and urgently need to prepare for the likelihood of more frequent and intense weather events and other environmental impacts. This need was recognized with the signing of an Executive Order on Climate Preparedness on November 1, 2013. The National Climate Assessment, a report prepared by 13 federal government agencies and a 60 member panel of scientific experts, indicates there will be significant impacts on human health, water, energy, transportation, agriculture, forests, and ecosystems (National Climate Assessment Report, U.S. Global Change Research Program, 2014).

Minnesota weather facts in recent years are striking. June 2014 was Minnesota's wettest month of the modern record. Severe storms led to floods, damage to trees and property, and the largest power outage in the history of our state's main electric utility, which left a half million people without power. Record rains were followed by a month-long dry spell. 2013 saw the 24 hour statewide daily snowfall record broken with 15.4 inches. A devastating April ice storm hit southwest Minnesota, causing 71

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million dollars in damage, and clean-up efforts that took 2 ½ months. In 2012, 76 counties declared severe to extreme drought and 55 declared flood emergencies, with significant overlap of both; over 700 warm temperature records were set in one month; and the third 1000-year flash flood occurred since September 2004. (Seeing Patterns: Mark Seeley Charts Minnesota's Changing Climate, University of Minnesota Extension, 2013). Extreme rain events in northeastern and east central Minnesota in the summer of 2012 resulted in nine counties being declared federal disaster areas and over \$100 million in damages.

According to scientific research, this trend is likely to continue (Minnesota and Climate Change: Our Tomorrow Starts Today, Minnesota Environmental Quality Board). The impacts of our changing climate will affect Minnesota's land, water, and air resources, and create challenges for stormwater infrastructure and water quality, solid waste management, and urban tree canopies. Well-documented environmental challenges such as urban stormwater runoff, air pollution from automobiles, and increasing fossil fuel consumption will likely be exacerbated.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) anticipates that the Midwest may experience increases in amount, frequency, and intensity of precipitation that are likely to exceed the design capacity of existing stormwater management systems. The washing of sediments, nutrients, pollutants, trash, animal waste, and other materials into rivers and lakes will have environmental consequences and make water supplies unsafe, or in need of costly water treatment (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Climate Change Adaptation Plan, 2014). Both observed climate data as well as future projections indicate increases in very heavy precipitation in Minnesota. Thunderstorms are responsible for making land-locked Minnesota the 14th most expensive state for homeowners insurance (Weather Related Claims and Your Homeowners' Insurance Premiums: They ARE Linked! Insurance Federation of Minnesota). Minnesota ranked fourth highest among states for insured catastrophic losses in 2013 (Insurance Information Institute, Catastrophes: U.S.).

The EPA warns that in response to temperature increases, "habitat ranges of many North American species are moving northward in latitude and upward in elevation" (Ecosystem Impacts and Adaptation, EPA.). These range shifts may threaten critical habitat or stress certain native species, making them more vulnerable to pests and disease. The severity and urgency of this concern to Minnesota is underscored by the impending loss of ash trees to the invasive Emerald Ash Borer, as ash

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trees make up 15% of the trees in Minnesota communities and 7% of trees in Minnesota forests.

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has analyzed state vulnerability to climate hazards, including determining which parts of the state face the greatest number of these threats, and identifying the counties where populations most vulnerable to these threats live. Specific climate hazards facing Minnesota include extreme heat events, air pollution, vector-borne diseases, flooding and flash flooding, and drought. Their data shows that excessive heat warnings and advisories have been most frequent in central and southern Minnesota. Particle pollution and ozone, which are primary sources of health concerns related to air pollution, are higher in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Parts of the state with the greatest number of flash floods include northeast and southeast Minnesota, while drought is experienced variably across the state (Minnesota Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment, MDH).

Disadvantaged communities, including children, the elderly, the sick and disabled, the poor, and communities of color, are especially vulnerable to and disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change. Populations most vulnerable to extreme heat, flooding, and extreme weather events include persons over 65 or less than 5 years in age, as well as individuals or families with incomes at or below the poverty line, such as the 11% of Minnesotans living in poverty (Population Reference Bureau, U.S Census Bureau).

Air pollution is a priority environmental risk in the U.S., as urban outdoor air pollution is one of the top ten causes of death in high-income nations (Global health risks: mortality and burden of disease attributable to selected major risks, World Health Organization, 2009). A recent study of exposure to nitrogen dioxide, one of seven key air pollutants monitored by the EPA, found that people of color are exposed to 38 percent higher levels compared to white people. Breathing NO₂, which comes from sources like vehicle exhaust and power plants, is linked to asthma symptoms and heart disease. Minnesota has the 15th largest gap in exposure to this harmful pollutant between whites and non-whites, and people of color are exposed to about 45 percent more NO₂ than whites, according to the study (National patterns in environmental injustice and inequality: Outdoor NO₂ air pollution in the United States, Clark et al, 2014).

Minnesota's economy and quality of life are founded on the wealth and diversity of its natural

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resources. Through MN GreenCorps service, state and local resources are leveraged to assist communities with priority environmental stewardship and capacity building projects. Minnesota communities need assistance now, at the local level, to build their resilience to extreme events and reduce future impacts on the natural environment and human health. The need for programs like MN GreenCorps is clear from Recommendation 7.3 of the President's State, Local, and Tribal Leaders Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience: Recommendations to the President (November 2014) which supports creating a Climate Resilience Corps to boost community capacity.

AMERICORPS MEMBERS AS MEANS TO SOLVE COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

MN GreenCorps presents a unique opportunity to address serious environmental challenges and improve community resilience through a highly structured, partnership-based program. Projects are selected through an open, statewide competitive process. Geographic diversity and underserved communities are prioritized. Findings from our comprehensive evaluation support this model: "The MN GreenCorps structure which requires host site-designed and member-driven projects encourages member initiative and ensures specific environmental needs of Minnesota communities are met" (MN GreenCorps Program Evaluation, 2013). The projects are designed to be collaborative and sustainable after member involvement, as has been demonstrated by the 88% of supervisors who said that project activities have been completely or partially sustained since their member completed his/her service.

For the three year grant period, MN GreenCorps is requesting 40 full-time AmeriCorps members each year who will serve 1,700 hours with up to 40 host organizations across the state. Host sites may be local units of government, nonprofit organizations, or educational institutions, including school districts. Member projects incorporate a variety of evidence-based best management practices in energy conservation, public land environmental stewardship, and recycling. The projects are carefully designed to have positive environmental impacts, be sustainable long-term at the community level, and build the capacity of communities to adapt and become more resilient to threats posed by a changing climate. Priority will be given to host sites in geographic areas that face the greatest number of climate hazards and contain the most vulnerable populations, using MDH's analysis of statewide climate vulnerability. For this current service year, all 40 members are serving in a county which either contains six to twelve different vulnerable population types or five to nine climate hazard types occurring above the median for Minnesota counties: 31 are serving in counties that meet the criterion for vulnerable population types, and 23 are serving in counties that meet both criteria (Minnesota

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Climate Vulnerability Assessment 2014, MDH).

The MN GreenCorps program involves three types of activities in a comprehensive approach to tackling community-identified environmental stewardship projects. Members (1) assess the local circumstances and gather data, (2) engage community and organizational members, and (3) implement locally appropriate solutions consistent with evidence-based environmental best practices. Hands-on, direct service activities facilitate job skill development, promote an ethic of service, and improve natural and urban environments, in accordance with the 21st Century Service Corps goals.

(1) Assess -- MN GreenCorps members will assess current circumstances through data collection, benchmarking, and analysis to help guide decision-making, identify areas of greatest concern, and prioritize projects. Examples include:

- * Members will be trained in using the State of Minnesota's Buildings, Benchmarks, and Beyond (B3) Database to enter actual energy use data for public buildings and assess conservation opportunities. Similar to EPA's Energy Star Portfolio Manager, B3 has benchmarks for numerous public building types, based on Minnesota's climate and architecture. B3 creates a baseline of actual energy use, which the members will use to implement continuous improvement efforts and monitor outcomes that can be sustained after service ends. Buildings that consistently benchmark performance save energy, averaging an annual savings of 2.4%. (Data Trends: Benchmarking and Energy Savings, EPA, 2012). According to B3, potential annual energy savings for all public sector buildings in Minnesota total \$32,350,000 (State of Minnesota B3 Benchmarking, , Statistics > Potential Savings, 2014).

- * Members will conduct tree surveys to help host communities understand and document the makeup of their urban forests. Evidence shows that tree surveys are an effective tool for promoting sustainable community forestry practices, achieving accurate FEMA reimbursement after a natural disaster, and identifying susceptibility to catastrophic events caused by natural forces, humans, or invasive pests (Minnesota DNR Community Tree Survey, 2012). Members will also conduct tree inventories to demonstrate vulnerability to invasive Emerald Ash Borer which threatens communities' tree populations. In the face of such threats from the changing climate, collection of this data is essential for guiding management decisions.

- * Members will monitor the quantity of waste that can be reduced, recycled or composted. They will assess performance of waste prevention and recycling efforts using best practices to administer waste sorts, evaluate capture rates for recyclables, and conduct recycling system assessments. This data will

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be used to capture high volumes of waste through recycling or composting programs, to design systems that result in less waste being generated, and to communicate with the public, custodial staffs, procurement personnel, and facility managers about opportunities to improve recycling.

(2) Engage -- MN GreenCorps members will educate and train citizens and community groups in environmental stewardship and/or environmentally-conscious efforts, including how natural environments function, and how to change behavior and manage resources to improve sustainability. Members will utilize trainings, presentations, campaigns, events, and social media. Lessons will be focused on decreasing energy consumption, utilizing green infrastructure best practices and waste prevention and recycling initiatives that improve and protect our air, water, and land while building community resilience.

Examples of activities include home energy and water conservation campaigns, tree planting and maintenance, recycling collection events, bicycle repair and learn-to ride classes, and growing fresh produce. Members will mobilize volunteers through service learning, providing participants the opportunity for hands-on learning while giving back to their communities. Engaging community members provides a local source of knowledge, energy, and commitment, and provides an avenue for members' projects to be sustained long after their service is completed.

(3) Implement -- Members will implement environmental stewardship projects and programs using best practices that lead to ongoing energy efficiency savings, , and ecosystem improvements, and waste reduction. Examples include:

- * Members will facilitate energy efficiency retrofits in public buildings, implementing upgrades for equipment, lighting, and heating and cooling systems, and matching operating schedules with actual occupant requirements. Scheduling can have profound effects on energy use and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, preventing equipment from running when not necessary (O&M First! Five O&M Ideas on How to Save Money in Your Buildings NOW!, U.S. Department of Energy, Federal Energy Management Program, 2004). More efficient buildings reduce emissions, increase resilience to extreme heat, keep energy dollars in the local economy, and support green jobs.

- * Members will improve at-risk ecosystems through treatment of public lands and implementation of green infrastructure best practices. These efforts include planting native plants and trees, removing invasive species, installing rain gardens and other stormwater management systems, and developing

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and implementing management plans to improve ecosystem health and prepare for invasive pests. The use of trees and vegetation in the urban environment brings many benefits, including lower energy use, reduced air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, protection from harmful exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays, decreased stormwater runoff, potential reduced pavement maintenance, and other quality-of-life benefits." (Reducing Urban Heat Islands: Compendium of Strategies - Trees and Vegetation draft, EPA, 2013). "[Green infrastructure] provides economic co-benefits, including aesthetics and a range of ecosystem benefits beyond flood protection such as water quality and wildlife habitat" (Economic Assessment of Green Infrastructure Strategies for Climate Change Adaptation: Pilot Studies in The Great Lakes Region, prepared for NOAA, 2014).

* Members will integrate sustainable waste management practices into daily operations at public buildings, including schools, park facilities, and government offices. New waste reduction, organics management, and recycling programs will be launched, and existing systems will be improved. Reducing waste and increasing recycling conserves energy and reduces air and water pollution.

Professional Development and Green Jobs

In accordance with the goals of the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, MN GreenCorps will provide members with practical, structured, and focused professional experiences, helping them secure green jobs upon the completion of their service. Members will receive high quality guidance, mentoring, and training from professionals in the environmental field. Data from the MN GreenCorps program evaluation shows that "a large majority of members over the first four years of the program (80%) have gone on to employment or education directly or somewhat related to the environment or sustainability issues. 78% of alumni said their time in MN GreenCorps played a role in helping them get their desired job". For the 2013-14 program year, 19 of our 28 members secured employment in green jobs within a month and a half of finishing the program. Nine of those were hired by their host sites or other members' host sites.

EVIDENCE BASE

*A comprehensive Minnesota GreenCorps Evaluation Report (November 2013) was completed by a team of independent evaluators using both pre-existing information the program had collected since its inception, and new data collected from all internal and external stakeholders through surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Survey response rates were 70+ percent. This evaluation places MN GreenCorps in the Preliminary Evidence Level.

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*The City Resilience Framework (CRF) report (Rockefeller Foundation and ARUP, April 2014) establishes an evidence-based definition of resilience that brings together over 150 sources of literature, fourteen city case studies and fieldwork in six cities, documented in three research reports -- Volume 1: Desk Study, Volume 2: Field Data Analysis, and Volume 3: Urban Measurement. MN GreenCorps delivers outcomes on all four of the resilience categories and seven of the 12 indicators identified by the CRF research. This study moves MN GreenCorps to the Moderate Evidence Level.

*Carbon Dioxide Reduction through Urban Forestry: Guidelines for Professional and Volunteer Tree Planters (McPherson and Simpson, USDA, January 1999) quantifies positive net carbon savings from urban tree planting according to climate zone, age of housing stock, tree cover, proximity to buildings, etc.; discusses ancillary benefits for stormwater; and provides detailed program design and implementation guidelines for community forestry programs which are directly comparable to MN GreenCorps interventions. This study places MN GreenCorps firmly in the Moderate Evidence Level.

NOTICE PRIORITY

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) received notification on October 15, 2014 that it is formally recognized as a 21st Century Conservation Service Corps membership organization. MN GreenCorps provides service, training, education and employment opportunities for 40 young Americans, including low income and disadvantaged youth. MN GreenCorps activities include working to protect, restore, and enhance public and tribal lands and waters, while spurring economic development and outdoor recreation. Through service to America, MN GreenCorps helps develop a generation of skilled workers, educated and active citizens, future leaders, and stewards of natural and cultural resources, communities and the nation.

MEMBER TRAINING

MN GreenCorps members are trained and supported by state agency staff with experience in community environmental work, and receive day-to-day training from their host site supervisors.

* Orientation -- The program service year begins in September with a thorough three-day training and orientation, where members will receive an overview of AmeriCorps, ServeMinnesota and MN GreenCorps, and review administrative systems and program policies, including rules regarding prohibited activities. The training includes skills development exercises for community engagement and team building, an overview of key dates and program timelines, training on performance measurement and reporting, and technical training in their respective topic areas. Host site

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supervisors join the members to discuss work plans and logistics for the start of their service.

* Quarterly Trainings -- Members are brought together on a quarterly basis (typically in December, March, June, and August) for one or two-day trainings. Topics include: civic engagement/citizenship, personal strengths identification, working across personality types, data collection and survey design, leadership, communication, public speaking, and volunteer management. In addition, members receive project-specific training and participate in team-building activities. The final quarterly training focuses on "Life after AmeriCorps," including job searching, interviewing, resume writing, networking, a career panel of professionals, and graduate school information.

* Site-specific Training -- Members receive an orientation and ongoing training from their host communities. Host sites play a critical role in the training and supervision of members, and are responsible for overseeing member compliance with the position description, work plan, and program rules. In preparation for this role, host site supervisors attend an orientation and training session at the beginning of the service year.

* Mentor Training and Technical Assistance -- Members receive technical training from subject matter experts. Examples include: using building energy benchmarking databases, conducting waste sorts, implementing composting systems, capturing stormwater pollutants, and proper tree planting and care. All members receive training on how to engage community members, launch and manage campaigns, and effectively conduct public education and outreach. Subject matter experts from MPCA and partner state agencies serve as mentors, providing technical assistance and maintaining regular contact with members throughout the service year. The ratio of mentors to members is 1:1.5.

* Adherence to Rules -- Program participants formally agree to abide by program rules and requirements, including those regarding prohibited activities, by signing member and host site agreements with MPCA before the beginning of the service year. Both members and host sites receive a manual detailing all aspects of participation in the program, including complete information on rules regarding prohibited activities. Additionally, program staff conduct host site visits at least twice annually, during which prohibited activities are discussed to ensure understanding and compliance. MN GreenCorps members are prohibited from mobilizing volunteers to participate in any activities restricted by AmeriCorps.

MEMBER SUPERVISION

MN GreenCorps provides members with multiple layers of support and guidance from MPCA program staff, mentors/subject matter experts, and host-site supervisors to ensure members have the

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resources they need to be successful. Site supervisors participate in host site orientation training at the start of the service year, covering position responsibilities, reporting, program policies and requirements, and AmeriCorps regulations, priorities, and expectations. Supervisor responsibilities are delineated in the host site application guidance document and the host site agreement. Program staff regularly contact host site supervisors to check in on the member's progress. Host site supervisors provide primary day-to-day supervision of members, oversee member compliance with position descriptions and work plans, participate in disciplinary procedures as needed, approve time sheets, review members' quarterly and final reports, complete mid- and end-of-year performance appraisals, advise MPCA on member training and travel issues, correct poor performance and reporting issues, and report to MPCA any work-related issues.

MEMBER EXPERIENCE

Members receive training and mentorship from seasoned environmental professionals, and gain technical skills relevant to their service and future green jobs. MN GreenCorps ensures that host sites provide a supportive environment for member professional development. Project-based service that prioritizes the greatest community need/impact ensures members are given a meaningful experience with resume-building accomplishments and valuable project management skills. Reporting requirements throughout the service year provide members with quantifiable accomplishments to share with future employers.

Self-reflection and team-building are important components of MN GreenCorps. Quarterly reports and online reflection logs offer members regular opportunities for self-reflection. Members also reflect on their experience during site visits. Quarterly trainings dedicate time for members to reflect with each other on successes, challenges, and goals. Trainings include teambuilding activities for the entire cohort. Member participation in topic groups increases esprit de corps through topic-specific trainings, conference calls, shared Google calendars, and volunteering on each other's service projects. Program staff facilitate connections between current members and alumni.

Active citizenship is a theme of each member training, and includes a session on "Perspectives on Community Involvement and the Ethics of Service". Program staff notify members about additional service opportunities, trainings, and AmeriCorps affiliated events, such as Mayor's Day of Recognition for Service and Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service. Selected MN GreenCorps members serve on the

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InterCorps Council of Minnesota and notify their fellow members of opportunities. Members are encouraged to accrue up to 100 hours of their service through civic engagement and public and community service, and to vote.

Member recruitment efforts solicit interest from diverse populations, and are focused in host communities throughout the state. Recruitment is handled through a wide range of existing networks including career website postings, environmental networks, websites and newsletters, career fairs, social media, press releases, host sites, and alumni networks.

COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION

The MN GreenCorps website clearly states that we are an AmeriCorps grantee and prominently displays the AmeriCorps logo. All member service gear, application forms, recruitment materials, member and host site agreements, orientation materials, member curriculum materials, signs, banners, and press releases related to the program use the AmeriCorps logo. A training session at orientation provides a descriptive history of AmeriCorps and MN GreenCorps. The member manual, provided to each member, also contains this information. Members are provided with gear displaying both the MN GreenCorps and AmeriCorps logos, including a pin to be worn daily.

Every site is required to display a sign showing they are hosting an AmeriCorps member, which includes the AmeriCorps name and logo. Host sites and members are provided with a media guide with language and tips to ensure they accurately portray the program when writing or speaking to the public about their participation in the program. This includes a reminder to always identify the MN GreenCorps program as an AmeriCorps program, as well as information on the Corporation for National and Community Service and ServeMinnesota. We make the AmeriCorps logo available to all program participants for use on communications about the program.

Organizational Capability

MPCA has been protecting Minnesota's air, land, and water since 1967 as the state's main environmental agency. Comprised of over 900 staff, the MPCA possesses significant depth of experience and capabilities across an array of scientific disciplines within the environmental field. MPCA has a rich history of success establishing and supporting assistance and outreach.

MPCA has decades of experience applying for, administering, and reporting on federal grants. MPCA

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has administered grant funding for six years of MN GreenCorps, which includes state and CNCS funds. MN GreenCorps is implemented by one full-time coordinator and two full-time program associates, with additional support from numerous agency professionals and administrative staff.

The coordinator has a bachelor's degree in Anthropology and French, and has completed graduate work in Natural Resources Science and Management. She has extensive experience in program management, partnership development, and working on environmental issues at a nonprofit, and has been administering the MN GreenCorps program since the winter of 2012. Both program associates are alumni of the MN GreenCorps program (one for two years), and have been assisting with coordination as program staff since the summer of 2013. One has a degree in Environmental Studies and Architecture, the other in Environmental Studies with a focus on Soil Science.

These three staff provide a program staff to member ratio of 1:13.3 and will be responsible for all aspects of program administration during the next grant cycle. Additional MPCA staff members provide support in meeting budget, contract, fiscal, communications, and other needs. The MPCA's Human Resources department plays an integral role in the member recruitment, application, and selection process to ensure a fair and open process for hiring, as well as providing support for benefits management and resolving member personnel issues.

The program leverages other MPCA staff who serve as subject experts and mentors with expertise on current environmental issues and research on cutting edge best management practices. Partnerships have been established with professional staff from the MN Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Health, Natural Resources, and Transportation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota, and the University of Minnesota. These program partners participate in program tasks such as helping design and modify position descriptions, assisting in selection of host site projects, assisting with member selection, and providing training and mentoring for members.

COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Program staff educate members and supervisors about AmeriCorps rules and regulations and offer reminders during site visits and trainings, and through performance evaluations. Close communication with both members and supervisors is maintained to detect instances of risk or noncompliance, timesheet descriptions of member activities are monitored carefully, and training

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topics may be modified to address issues. Our state commission provides an additional level of oversight through its monitoring visits and checks. Furthermore, the Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor "shall see that all provisions of law respecting the appropriate and economic use of public funds are complied with and may, as part of a financial audit or separately, investigate allegations of noncompliance."

If instances of risk or noncompliance were to be identified, MPCA would immediately notify our state commission and work with their staff to determine the appropriate course of action. Immediate steps would be taken to correct the infraction, and a corrective action plan would be written to prevent future occurrences. MPCA Human Resources staff would collaborate on determining and delivering disciplinary measures, if necessary.

PAST PERFORMANCE FOR CURRENT GRANTEES

MN GreenCorps has successfully increased environmental stewardship in communities throughout Minnesota and has fostered environmental projects in every geographic area of the state. During the past three service years, MN GreenCorps has exceeded all of our performance measure targets in Environmental Awareness and Change, Environmental Stewardship, and Waste and Recycling. Average annual achievements include: 312 energy assessments conducted (target 50); 6,713 green infrastructure spaces assessed (target 1,000); 27,681 community members engaged or educated (target 3,500); 260 green technologies implemented (target 50); 23,876 youth under 25 educated (target 1,000), 4,015 youth with increased knowledge or who changed behavior (target 30%/300); 132 sites received recycling technical assistance (target 20); a 43% increase in recycling (target 10%) and a 48% reduction in waste in participating communities (target 10%). MN GreenCorps members also successfully mobilized an average of 1,000 volunteers each service year.

No compliance issues or areas of weakness/risk were identified during the last three years of program operation at the MPCA or at service site locations. MN GreenCorps enrolled 100% of the slots received during our last full year of operation. During program year 2013-14, 1 of our 28 members exited early, resulting in a 96.6% retention rate. The one member who exited early did so to take a full-time professional job in the environmental field. Striving for 100% retention, program staff continue to emphasize the benefits to members of completing their service, honoring their commitment, seeing their projects through to completion, and being part of the AmeriCorps network.

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Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

The total cost of the proposed MN GreenCorps program is \$1,146,938. The budget has been determined to be sufficient by MPCA program staff and fiscal experts, based on the experience of operating the program for the previous six years. The proposed cost for CNCS per MSY is \$11,595. CNCS's contribution will be matched with \$443,139 in-kind and cash from MPCA, and an additional \$220,000 in-kind from host sites. This strong match demonstrates a serious commitment of resources from MPCA and a belief in the effectiveness and importance of the program.

The CNCS cost per MSY has been low for the first six years of the program, and although still low for this application, has been raised by \$245 per member. To comply with new health care requirements, health insurance costs for members have doubled. This, along with the increase to the minimum member stipend, necessitated an increase. To minimize the increase, strategies are being implemented to offset costs in other areas, such as member travel and training. MPCA is committing additional state funds to an already substantial cash match.

Over the next program year, we will continue exploring possibilities for additional state fund allocations to MN GreenCorps from partner state agencies. These conversations will include Minnesota's Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Health, Natural Resources, and Transportation. We have also begun discussions with Blue Cross Blue Shield's Center for Prevention for future financial investment in the program.

MN GreenCorps is a highly cost-effective investment. The primary alternate model would be for host organizations to hire or reassign staff. However, economic and organizational realities make this alternative challenging, if not impossible. In comparison, state and local governments estimate between \$75,000 and \$100,000 is required to cover salary, benefits, and indirect costs associated per newly created position. Using these estimates, this model would cost \$3-4 million annually.

Minnesota state government recognizes numerous co-benefits resulting from MN GreenCorps service. Members provide a unique opportunity to reach disadvantaged communities in ways that otherwise would not be possible by state and local government. Additionally, MN GreenCorps trains and develops members for careers in public service and elsewhere. Other alternative models do not accrue similar co-benefits.

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Evaluation Summary or Plan

MN GreenCorps builds community resilience and the capacity to respond to environmental threats, especially those related to climate change. Members carry out environmental projects in host communities located throughout the state, and engage community members in assessing current environmental conditions through data collection, benchmarking and analysis, and implementing environmental best practices. As a result of members' efforts, each service year: 15 public structures will be retrofitted to improve energy efficiency; at least trained 12 members will be placed in green jobs within 30 days of the end of their service; 16,000 community members will receive education and training in environmental stewardship and/or environmentally-conscious practices; 56 acres of public and tribal land will be treated; 16 tons of materials will be recycled; 100 community organizations will receive capacity building services; and 480 activities and program outputs will be achieved as a result of capacity building services provided by members.

MPCA conducts an end-of-service program evaluation each year. Members and host site supervisors are surveyed to evaluate experiences and the overall impact of the program, and to look for areas of improvement. Additional feedback is also gathered periodically through training evaluations, site visits, and other communication with sites and members. For the current service year, MPCA also is implementing a pre-post organizational assessment tool for host sites that measures capacity in the area of program and service delivery. Finally, a comprehensive and independently conducted program evaluation is conducted at the end of each grant cycle. A copy of the report from the evaluation of the first four years of the program (Minnesota GreenCorps Program Evaluation, November 2013) is provided.

A similar independent and comprehensive program evaluation will be conducted after the next grant cycle. The program evaluation will identify the program inputs, assess how effectively the program has been delivered, evaluate the success of expected program outcomes during the service year, document the extent to which program/project activities and environmental outcomes are sustained after service, determine what benefits MPCA, the State of Minnesota, and AmeriCorps obtain for the investment in MN GreenCorps, and provide recommendations for improvement. In addition, MPCA is excited to engage with CNCS on the Corporation's goal to "plan and implement a climate change taxonomy to categorize and measure climate change adaptation impact of current efforts" (CNCS Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2014), so this work may further inform the research questions and

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design for program evaluation of MN GreenCorps.

The competitive public selection process for the program evaluation will seek talented independent evaluator(s) rated highest on the following criteria: expressed understanding of project objectives; quality and completeness of workplan and timelines; experience and qualifications of key personnel including relevant training and evaluation work and examples of similar evaluation studies conducted; knowledge of AmeriCorps. MPCA spent \$60,000 on the last program evaluation and expects to have a comparable budget for the next one.

Evaluators will have access to program documents, reports, surveys, site visit notes, and other sources of information related to the MN GreenCorps Program, including detailed narratives and quantified data for member outputs and outcomes from their assessment, engagement and implementation activities throughout the service year from information in our online reporting system, MN GreenCorps OnCorps Quarterly Reports. In addition to use of existing information, evaluators will use develop research tools such as surveys, focus group protocols, phone or in-person interviews, site visit protocols, observation, and other techniques to assess how effectively the program has been executed and delivered, and to identify program strengths. Evaluators will gather information and input from as many former and current members and host site supervisors, program staff, and other stakeholder groups (including but not limited to ServeMinnesota staff, state agency partners, and MPCA leadership) as possible.

MN GreenCorps program staff will utilize the results of the pre-post assessments, end-of-service and comprehensive program evaluations, as well as other feedback gathered throughout each service year, to continuously improve the program. Information gathered during the service year will be used on an ongoing basis to improve trainings and support, increase effectiveness of member efforts, and ensure that the program is meeting the needs of both members and host communities. Information gathered through end-of-service and comprehensive evaluations will be used to guide programmatic decisions and make improvements, including improving fine-tuning data collection and reporting systems, enhancing communications strategies, and fine-tuning member and host site selection and training processes, and communications strategies.

Amendment Justification

N/A

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Clarification Summary

A. Programmatic clarification items:

1. Members will be provided with gear displaying both the MN GreenCorps and AmeriCorps logos, including one long sleeve "professional" shirt, one short sleeve t-shirt, and also a pin to be worn daily.
2. The competitive host site selection process begins with an application period starting in March and ending in early May. After the application period closes, review teams made up of MPCA and other state agency staff review and score applications using established criteria. Host site semi-finalists are selected for interviews with review teams in mid to late May. Finalists from each team are reviewed to ensure balanced statewide distribution of resources and an emphasis on serving disadvantaged communities. Applicants are notified of their status in mid-June.
3. Members will mobilize volunteers through service learning, providing participants the opportunity for hands-on learning while giving back to their communities. Training will be provided to members to ensure the mobilized volunteer efforts do not violate prohibited activities, and volunteers will only be recruited to perform specific, supervised tasks that are in line with allowable activities.

B. Budget Clarification:

2. We are proposing to increase the Grantee cash match by \$9,814, resulting in a decreased cost per MSY of \$245 per member.
3. & 4. Funding for member travel contributes to the program's goal of professional development and its ability to meet our Green Jobs performance measure. The travel funds ensure that members attend orientation and the four required trainings, and also allow members to attend additional trainings that expand their skills and increase their qualifications for future employment in the environmental field. The travel funds cover mileage costs associated with travel to required Minnesota GreenCorps trainings and other training opportunities throughout the state for all members. Approximately twenty percent of members are placed in locations more than 60 miles from required Minnesota GreenCorps trainings, member travel funds cover their mileage and accommodations costs associated with attending.
5. Host site operating costs: Office space (\$800), computer (\$ 400), internet/telephone (\$ 300) =

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\$1,500/FT member

C. Performance Measure Clarification

1. Members receive a variety of trainings throughout the service year, including but not limited to:

- *Master recycler/composter certification
- *Master water stewards certification
- *Watershed game instructor accreditation
- *Forest Pest First Detector
- *Certified tree inspectors
- *Certified Energy Auditor In Training
- *Urban farming certification
- *League of American Bicyclists' Certified Bike Instructor
- *Building Operator Certification Level 1

Members may also receive technical training on resume-building skills such as Geographic Information systems (GIS), Minimum Impact Development Standards (MIDS) for green infrastructure, B3 Benchmarking to track energy and water utility data, and tree and plant identification. These certification and training opportunities enhance the competitiveness of Minnesota GreenCorps alumni in applying for green jobs.

2. When possible, members will utilize pre and post surveys of participants to track pledges of intent to change behavior in classrooms and at workshops where lessons have been delivered. Members will also make efforts to collect pledges to change behavior during hands-on activities. In many cases, members will be able to assess actual changes in behavior by visiting sites and identifying the number of individuals that changed behavior (for example, in a school where a composting program is implemented, a member may be able to determine how many students actually start composting after an educational presentation).

3. The program determined the outcome target by defining the types of member activities that will contribute to the number of individuals receiving education or training, (trainings, classes, workshops, presentations, technical assistance sessions). Additionally, the program considered the likelihood that many of these activities would be one-time events and activities whereby members would be unable to follow-up to determine changes in behavior or intent to change behavior within one year of the event.

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The program also considered that in previous members' experiences, the timeframe of an 11-month term of service limited the amount of time available for the required means of calculating the data, namely designing, administering and tracking surveys. The prioritization of member activities involving engagement and implementation were also factors considered in the designation of the outcome target.

4. We have removed the capacity building performance measure and we have adjusted allocations accordingly.

5. In published research studies, intention has been shown to be the most important variable in predicting behavior change, suggesting that behaviors are often linked with one's personal motivation. For Outcome EN3.2, we contend that intent to change behavior is appropriate and sufficient to be counted.

We confirm that individuals who express intent to change, as well as engage in actual behavior change, will be counted only once. Member training is provided on survey best practices, including methodologies to avoid double-counting pledge responses with the same individuals who report engaging in actual behavior change.

6. EN6's Output and outcome targets project that a minimum of 16 tons of material will be collected, and EN6.1 estimates the same tonnage of material will be recycled. It is realistic that all material collected is recycled as member activities are deliberate in only collecting materials that are to be recycled, members do not collect non-recyclable trash. Members are trained to focus activities on recyclable materials collection, while host sites and their projects are competitively chosen based on the likelihood that member activities will be aligned with the recovery of recyclable materials. We are confident that any material collected for recycling will be recycled into new products. Recycling haulers and processors have an economic incentive to see the material recycled and are required by Minnesota Statute 115A.553 to ensure the material is sent to a recycling facility.

7. In most cases, members working to improve public lands are serving with the sponsoring agency or

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land manager. Even if this is not the case, all treatment practices will be in accordance with natural resource, forestry, or land management plans and pre-approved by the managing entity/land manager. Members use the online OnCorps Reports system to track and record treatment practices and acreage of improved land. Training will be provided to members to ensure they only count acres of parks or public land that is verified as having been improved to an acceptable level as defined by the sponsoring agency or land manager. Data reported through OnCorps Reports must be reviewed and approved by their host site supervisors and reviewed by program staff.

8. EN1 covers only retrofits of public commercial building structures to improve their energy efficiency. These public structures are managed by facilities personnel who must contract out, implement directly, and/or supervise implementation of energy efficiency retrofit measures identified or assisted by the members. These facility personnel will verify that the work is fully completed according to the scope of each retrofit project. They will review and sign off on the count of retrofitted structures contained in Quarterly reports submitted by the members, or otherwise submit a written statement of verification that the count accurately represents the number of structures with fully completed retrofit projects.

D. Strategic Engagement Slots

1. MPCA's Affirmative Action Plan strongly supports, and actively pursues, a policy of affirmative action employment and retention for protected groups experiencing underutilization in our agency. Protected groups are defined in Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 43A, as women, minorities, and persons with disabilities. The MPCA strives to increase workforce representation of women, members of ethnic/racial minority groups, and persons with disabilities in order to achieve equal representation. For Minnesota GreenCorps, we will target 7% of our proposed slots, or three (3) slots, toward the recruitment of members with disabilities.

MPCA's Affirmative Action Plan describes our program's plan for outreach and recruitment of members of the disability community. Additionally, the State of Minnesota's Diversity and Inclusion Council, established by Executive Order 15-02 in January of 2015, will work to study, educate, and develop recommendations for best practices in the area of diversity and inclusion in recruiting, retaining, and promoting state employees, in state contracting, and civic engagement for administrative agencies that comprise the Governor's Cabinet. MPCA is an agency of the Governor's

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Cabinet. Minnesota GreenCorps' plan for outreach and recruitment of members of the disability community will include this Council's best practices, and will seek further advice and support about marketing member opportunities from the Minnesota State Council on Disability.

2. We are not requesting additional MSYs to be filled by AmeriCorps members with disabilities at this time.

E. MSY with No Program Funds Attached Clarification:

We are not requesting No-Cost MSYs at this time.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics