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Executive Summary

The Maine Conservation Corps proposes to have 86 AmeriCorps members who will undergo job readiness training while improving ecosystems throughout the State of Maine. At the end of the each program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for treating or constructing 125 miles of trails or waterways, and disadvantaged individuals, veteran and disabled individuals, serving as AmeriCorps members will, within 30 days of their term ending, procure employment, enroll in service to the military or other National Service program, or further their education. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage 700 community volunteers who will engage in environmental improvement projects. This program will concentrate on the CNCS focus areas of Economic Opportunity (O2, Number of economically disadvantaged individuals receiving job training and other skill development services), Veterans and Military Families (V2, Number of veterans engaged in service opportunities as National Service Participant or volunteer), and Environmental Stewardship (EN5, Number of miles of trails or waterways [owned/maintained by national, state, county, city or tribal governments] that are treated and/or constructed). The CNCS investment of \$403,135 will be matched with \$1,148,080.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

1. PROBLEM/NEED:

Maine's median resident age is the highest in the nation. As the population continues to age out of the workforce, many organizations are looking for skilled workers to fill these vacating positions. A primary focus of the Maine Conservation Corps (MCC) for 2016-2018 will be engaging underemployed, unemployed, disadvantaged youth and veterans in conservation service projects. While enrolled with MCC, members will not only gain environmental experience but will also be provided with targeted job readiness training. This training will align members with job openings created by the upcoming retirement of the current workforce. On December 23, 2014, The Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information released "Maine Workforce Outlook 2012 to 2022", which also highlights projected growth in job openings in carpentry, groundskeeping, and other maintenance and construction careers. While engaged in service with MCC, members will benefit not only from workforce readiness development, but also be immersed in technical skills-based projects strengthening their qualification into these growing fields.

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Opportunity Nation released a study in 2014, "Connecting Youth and Strengthening Communities" on the benefits of connecting youth (ages 16-24 in this study) with civic engagement activities. This study found three positive outcomes of engaging youth in service: building social capital and valuable skills can facilitate upward mobility for young Americans, better prepare workers for jobs, and strengthen the economic resilience of states. The research showed that civic engagement can lead to positive educational and career outcomes for low-income youth. The MCC will be targeting youth in Maine and across the country with its program.

Maine is considered a rural state: total population is estimated at just over 1.3 million residents. In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau classified Maine as the most rural state in the nation, with 61.3% of residents living in non-urban areas. A 2013 study from Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), "Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment: Does Volunteering Increase Odds of Finding a Job for the Out of Work," found for individuals living in rural states a strong positive correlation between volunteering and successfully finding employment. In January of 2015, Maine Governor Paul R. LePage released a Maine State Budget Briefing that detailed his commitment to attracting young people to the State and engaging them civically to promote and grow communities statewide. MCC's evaluation proves that we attract young people to the State and provide opportunity for civic engagement while delivering practical work experience.

In Maine and across the nation, there is a growing understanding that service strengthens communities by providing youth and veterans with employable skills, and that service is also connected to the greater economy. Underemployed, unemployed, disadvantaged youth, and veterans nationwide are in need of service opportunities and job readiness training. Every year MCC provides opportunities for these populations, engaging them to serve in communities in all 16 counties in Maine.

Maine has the third highest veteran population percentage of any state in the nation (14.5%). Engaging military veterans in civilian civic service has proven to be beneficial to both communities and the wellbeing of veterans themselves. A case study by the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), "The Mission Continues: A Case Study of the Well After Service Model," highlights The Mission Continues' success in positive wellbeing of both community and individuals. The CNAS study suggests that service-oriented programs (such as AmeriCorps) can have a positive effect on veteran

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wellness. MCC is committed to expanding our understanding in this relationship between veteran engagement and overall community health.

As a reflection of CNCS' national priority of engaging veterans in service, the MCC has worked to develop 70 contacts with veterans groups throughout Maine. MCC started specifically working with veterans in 2013, offering means for developing a purposeful career by providing a pathway to civilian job opportunities to veterans recently leaving direct military service. In the same year, the MCC became the first Corps in the nation to be approved for the use of GI Bill benefits for eligible veterans, a process that requires ongoing discussion, planning, and reprioritizing of our traditional model, and requires yearly reviews and updates. MCC is fully committed to modelling our program to utilize the talents of veterans and accommodate their unique needs.

2. THEORY OF CHANGE AND LOGIC MODEL:

All MCC members will have an environmental focus: Maine ecosystems will be improved through monitoring waterways, providing public education, constructing sustainable trails, tracking and eradicating invasive species, and other similar projects. While members are engaged in conservation projects, MCC staff will conduct several stages of training to develop and improve the job readiness skills of members. Volunteers will be leveraged by individual members and teams to contribute to and continue the environmental efforts of AmeriCorps members. These volunteers will be coordinated and tracked by the MCC Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator. Volunteers will benefit from increased community involvement and learning technical environmental skills, and will influence Maine's lands and waters in a positive manner.

Unemployed, underemployed, disadvantaged youth and veterans will exhibit increased knowledge of soft skills (e.g. conflict resolution, team work, and communication), technical skills (e.g. rigging, stone work, chainsaw use, carpentry, laboratory techniques), and job readiness skills (e.g. interview techniques, resume writing, knowledge of state and federal job applications, networking, and job search techniques) after the completion of their terms. These skills, along with learned workplace behaviors (e.g. reliability, responsibility, accountability, and the ability to follow directions) will combine to increase the likelihood of the member to gain employment, serve an additional National Service term, join the military, or enroll in a post-secondary institution.

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By engaging members in service throughout the state, and providing conservation education and training, the MCC will have a significant impact on both members and communities statewide. Healthy ecosystems in Maine-both aquatic and terrestrial- are a goal that the MCC has continually worked for during the duration of operation. Engaging citizens of Maine will strengthen communities and prioritize conservation awareness within individuals.

3. EVIDENCE BASE:

MCC is using strong evidence to highlight the need of the community as well as the ability of MCC to administer a successful program. One study, released by CNCS in 2013, "Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment: Does Volunteering Increase Odds of Finding a Job for the Out of Work" notes a statistically significant and highly stable association between volunteering and employment. By working with Career Centers throughout the state (see letter of commitment between MCC and Department of Labor representative Joan Dolan), MCC will specifically focus on providing skills needed to succeed in the workforce. The CNCS study references the fact that if members are gaining or updating skills that are needed in the workplace through their volunteer activities, those skills make them more attractive to employers, increasing their chances of becoming employed. This study found through tracking (from 2002-2012) a sample of 70,535 individuals that were either unemployed or not in the labor force but interested in working, that volunteering is associated with a 27% increased likelihood of employment (highly statistically significant at the 99.9% confidence level), and volunteers in rural areas have a 55% higher likelihood of employment.

"Civic Pathways Out of Poverty and Into Opportunity", a narrative published by the Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement in 2010 notes that service effectively develops both hard and soft skill sets that enable success in higher education, the workforce, and in the community and home life. This study notes that relationships created through organizing, civic engagement, and service opportunities "develop support networks, strengthening social capital and a young person's potential for success throughout higher education and careers." Similarly, the National Conference on Citizenship published a 2012 Issue Brief, "Civic Health and Unemployment II: The Case Builds," that states not only does civic engagement appear to protect against unemployment, it also contributes to overall economic resilience.

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Since 1983, MCC has worked to make members' terms of service worthwhile and enjoyable. In 2014, MCC contracted Joseph R. O' Brien to conduct a program evaluation based on MCC Alumni. The evaluation focused on several key components related to MCC service, including: changes in employment status, changes in education level, soft skill development, changes in participation in national service, and an exploration of member residency status in Maine after their term of service with MCC. The data indicates that member outcomes improved in nearly all measureable areas: employment rose 26.4% post-service, participants reported high levels of change in all soft skills (such as confidence and team work), nearly half of respondents reported that they went on to serve another AmeriCorps term, and 22% of initially non-resident members remained in the state after the completion of their terms of service.

MCC's success as a program stems from the ability to promote positive change in statewide communities and in members. As outlined in the logic model, MCC is concentrating on member-based performance measures. There are programs nationwide that are successful in implementing member-oriented programs. An AmeriCorps program based in Maryland, Civic Works, launched the Environmental Workforce Development program in 1998. Civic Works' 2013 Annual Report highlights that 90% of B'more Green program graduates have secured employment. B'more Green is a workforce development program providing individuals with opportunity to find employment through training programs.

In Tennessee, Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee hosts the CAC AmeriCorps, a program that focus' on environmental service learning while improving air and water quality, providing education to schools, conducting conservation activities, and growing food. This program has been in successful operation since 2008.

4. NOTICE PRIORITY:

MCC has designed a program based on community need and program experience that aligns with three 2015 funding priorities. By focusing specifically on job training and other skill development services (Economic Opportunity) in disadvantaged populations and veterans (V2), members will exit MCC service with a greater breadth of skills and confidence that can be used to gain employment, return to school, sign up for an additional term of service, or enter into military service. As a member

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of the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, MCC will continue to provide and expand upon the high quality of service to our partner organizations by training our members to improve waterways and/or trails (EN5).

5. MEMBER TRAINING:

MCC has two Training Coordinators completely dedicated to member training. Environmental Stewards (ES) will have an initial 2-week intensive training period with MCC before starting at their Host Sites. All members in the ES program will return for face-to-face training sessions at least once every two weeks for the duration of their term. This will ensure veterans in this program can use their GI Bill benefits, via the Maine State Approving Agency for Veterans Education Programs. Training topics will include soft skills (such as conflict resolution, leadership, interview skills, public speaking) and hard skills (such as resume writing, First Aid/CPR, National Incident Management Systems, chainsaw operation, Global Information System). Progress on all subjects will be tracked through periodic assessments by staff.

Six Field Team (FT) Leaders will undergo an established, successful 11-week training program during a 300-hour term of service. Topics include those discussed above as well as methods for developing lesson plans and teaching skills to Team Members during the field season. Upon successful completion of this 300 hour term of service, Team Leaders will be hired as staff. The two Training Coordinators will approve all lesson plans and directly oversee the scheduling of initial training, tracking of field training, and contracting outside vendors that are experts in specific fields (such as Invasive Plant Identification, Technical Trail Skills, Chainsaw Safety, Wilderness First Responder, and Department of Labor Career Center operatives). Program Coordinators carefully plan the amount of time members will spend in training, prior to the onset of enrollments, to ensure member training does not surpass the 20% allotment.

All members will receive an individualized Member Agreement for review prior to their start date. The first day of member orientation will be dedicated to reviewing MCC's rules and CNCS prohibited activities, as well as reviewing CNCS benefits for members, including childcare reimbursement for 1700-hour members, education awards, and health care. Volunteers in the field will receive an initial orientation by their MCC AmeriCorps leader for each project.

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6. MEMBER SUPERVISION:

In the Organization Capability narrative of this proposal (section C. 1), MCC outlines all full time and seasonal staff. The classification of 'staff' refers to the individuals in our program that are not enrolled as AmeriCorps members, and therefore can provide supervision to AmeriCorps members. For example, Senior Team Leaders, while not official state employees, are grant staff for administrative purposes. Staff and Host Site Supervisors receive orientation and training from MCC Program Coordinators and Director in the supervision of AmeriCorps members and CNCS prohibited activities. Members serving in the ES program will have regular interactions and guidance from their Host Site Supervisors. ES members and Host Site Supervisors will be contacted on a regular basis by the ES Program Coordinator and Training Coordinator, who will review expectations and provide updates on policies and procedures. FT Members will be supervised at all times by FT Leaders. FT Leaders undergo 11 weeks (3 weeks for returning leaders) of training specifically geared toward team dynamics, accountability, job readiness training, reporting, and other skills relevant to leadership. Senior Team Leaders provide an additional layer of support and expertise to the FT program.

All members and site supervisors will be provided guidance and support throughout the season from FT and ES Program Coordinators. MCC uses approved program forms to monitor member and site progress, including Site Visit Forms, monitoring reports, member mid- and/or end-term evaluations, and regular check-ins (including working alongside members at a site). Staff will be trained on proper AmeriCorps procedures in accordance to CNCS guidelines. MCC Program Coordinators will review all reports, and maintain a tracking spreadsheet to ensure accountability.

7. MEMBER EXPERIENCE:

MCC AmeriCorps members will gain skills and experience as a result of the training outlined above. As a major focus of this program, the skills, knowledge and abilities members gain through a term of service with MCC can be utilized by the member and will be valued by future employers.

Each year, MCC reviews hundreds of applications. An experienced reviewer can immediately tell if an applicant has had training in constructing a resume or in filling out an application. A major goal of

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this program will be to significantly improve members' employability from the start of their terms to the end of their terms, through the training provided during their time as MCC AmeriCorps members.

All MCC members will reflect on their service through weekly timesheets, which ask for a narrative for each day of service. MCC will promote opportunities for members to volunteer and engage in service in communities throughout the state. MCC will provide opportunities for members to reflect on their terms of service at bi-annual recognition ceremonies. MCC Field Teams will be made up of members of diverse backgrounds: unemployed and disadvantaged members will be able to gain mentorship from veterans and team leaders, and establish positive connections with one another.

MCC requires member participation in Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, Earth Day, and the September 11 National Day of Service and Remembrance. Each year, MCC staff and members brainstorm to plan appropriate and significant projects for these identified service days. Members are also required to attend both the AmeriCorps member conference and the Blaine House Conference on Service and Volunteerism, and will also attend further priority events set by the Maine Commission for Community Service (MCCS). MCC will invite and collaborate with other National Service programs in the state through these events. By engaging with other AmeriCorps members in separate National Service Programs, MCC members will establish statewide connections and gain a larger understanding of the many National Service programs at work in Maine.

Every member enrolled with MCC will participate in a 'Life After AmeriCorps' workshop near the end of their term. In this workshop, MCC will present alumni resources, encourage a lifetime of service, and give information on the use of the education award and how to highlight the skills taught throughout their service terms with MCC.

Annually half of MCC AmeriCorps members are from Maine, and thus are serving within communities that they are a part of outside of their term of service. MCC has a great focus on outreach in communities through several community partners. Maine Career Centers, Veterans, Inc., Kennebec Behavioral Health, and Maine Schools and Universities are involved as recruitment sources. In 2014, MCC integrated into Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG), an organization that identifies high school students that face barriers in education and guides them on a path to productive adulthood. JMG currently operates in 76 schools throughout the state, and MCC intends to provide information

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on AmeriCorps service to this population. Though JMG students are for the most part high-school age, by offering a pathway to success after high school, MCC hopes to encourage more Maine graduates to serve in MCC or other service programs nationwide.

8. COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION:

All members will undergo an in depth orientation about the history and goals of the AmeriCorps program, to inspire pride of service as a member of National Service. Members will be trained on how to present themselves as AmeriCorps members within their service communities and to MCC partners by developing elevator speeches. All members will be provided with two MCC/AmeriCorps branded shirts. Laminated signs will be posted around FT project sites. Signs will include the CNCS, AmeriCorps, MCCS, and MCC logos as well as the phrase 'AmeriCorps Serving Here'. Each ES host site will be provided with the same sign for prominent display. Each Site Supervisor will attend an orientation which will emphasize AmeriCorps branding and information on how to present an AmeriCorps member to their staff and general public. Sample press releases with all logos will be provided for site-specific personalization and reference. All members and supervisors will be trained to notify the Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator should they be contacted by anyone from the media. MCC annually purchases various items with branding, and provides these items to members, supervisors, and the public. Examples of past promotional materials include: flashlights, carabiners, pens, pencils, Frisbees, and bandanas. MCC is represented at many career fairs and veteran events throughout the state, at which promotional materials are provided and AmeriCorps brochures are displayed.

Organizational Capability

1. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING:

MCC has six full time staff dedicated to the administration of the AmeriCorps program. The Office Associate II carries out all recruitment coordination, applicant tracking, website management, payroll, and other general secretarial duties. Two Program Coordinators have direct supervision over all AmeriCorps members and seasonal staff in the FT and ES programs, track and report performance measures, recruit partnering agencies, and other general programmatic oversight. The Director oversees grant administration, program policies and procedures, budget management, manages all members, staff, and volunteers, and is the primary liaison between MCC and MCCS. The Supervisor of

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Outdoor Recreation provides oversight to the entire MCC to ensure the program is effective and efficient: this is in addition to the supervisor's role of liaison between MCC and the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. Finally, MCC works with a Resource Administrator who compiles periodic expense reports and provides financial consultation.

In addition to the six full time staff, MCC has designed a program to include seasonal staff. Because MCC annually works with approximately 20 sites, adequate supervision of all AmeriCorps members is crucial. MCC annually hires the following: two Training Coordinators, responsible for developing and updating all curricula, recruiting and coordinating with trainers, tracking GI Bill compliance classes and events, and monitoring AmeriCorps members in the field; one Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator, who recruits and coordinates community volunteers for all MCC programs, represents the MCC at outreach events, and serves as a media contact for MCC; three Senior Team Leaders specifically work with MCC's Field Teams, rotating throughout all teams to provide technical and disciplinary support; and Team Leaders (ten in the summer and six in the fall), who will be in charge of all day-to-day functions of Field Teams, including the implementation of job-readiness training to all members. Twenty Site Supervisors at ES host sites will also be counted as staff, responsible for proposing a project for an ES and submitting it to the MCC Program Coordinator. Once a Site Supervisor's proposal is reviewed, accepted, and their position filled, the Site Supervisor provides the day-to-day oversight of the ES serving at their site. The Program Coordinator will provide ongoing supervision for the ESs and guidance for the Site Supervisors.

MCC has administered AmeriCorps grants since the inception of The National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, and is committed to and experienced in working closely with the MCCS to accomplish statewide and national priorities. MCC has experience adapting to new policies and procedures, and has been promoting civic engagement through volunteerism at the individual, community, state, and national level since 1983. Additionally, staff regularly attend continuing education trainings to increase and extend knowledge of program operation.

In March 2013, MCC sought to involve community members and partners on a larger scale, and organized an Advisory Committee to meet quarterly. The Advisory Committee consists of alums, partner representatives, prominent conservation community members, and experienced program analysts. Their role has been to help MCC develop a 5-year strategic plan, provide suggestions to address program challenges, assess internal operations and recommend adjustments as needed.

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MCC AmeriCorps members are hosted by our diverse partners-- federal, non-profit, state, and municipal-- in Maine. MCC has performed significant work in all 16 counties in Maine, recruiting and engaging volunteers from within many types of communities. In addition, MCC has reached out to connect with agencies that provide specific support and training to AmeriCorps members who are seeking to further their career prospects. MCC is proud to provide hard copy letters of support and commitment from the following partners: Walter Whitcomb, Commissioner of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry; Robert Haley, Director of the Maine State Approving Agency for Veterans Education Programs; Joan Dolan, Director of Apprenticeship & Strategic Partnerships at Maine Department of Labor; Ward Feurt, Refuge Manager at the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge; Gary Best, Acting Regional Manager, Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry; Rex Turner, Outdoor Recreation Planner with the State of Maine, Bureau of Parks and Lands; Jensen Bissell, Director of Baxter State Park Authority; Lester Kenway, President of the Maine Appalachian Trail Club; Garry Hinkley, Chair. Manchester Conservation Commission; Carrie Kinne, Executive Director of Kennebec Estuary Land Trust; and Becky Kolak, MCC AmeriCorps alumna and Education Coordinator at the Kennebec Estuary Land Trust. In addition, MCC is providing our Welcome Letter stating that MCC is a member of the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps and ServiceNation.

2. COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

MCC prevents and detects compliance issues with a combination of staff training, site monitoring, and member and supervisor reporting. All MCC AmeriCorps members and staff undergo significant training in AmeriCorps compliance-- including but not limited to Prohibited Activities, OnCorps reporting and time tracking, CNCS Criminal History Check Policy, compliance requirements, and disciplinary procedures. Each AmeriCorps site will be provided access to the MCC Handbook, updated annually with all policies reviewed in the initial orientation training. Any issues found or reported by any staff or AmeriCorps member will immediately be corrected.

MCC Staff will be held accountable for monitoring all sites for any compliance issues. MCC staff - both full time and seasonal - will conduct Site Visits to all Field Teams and ESs in the field, and fill out the appropriate MCC Site Visit form. This form is designed to highlight and resolve any non-

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compliance issues. MCC Program Coordinators and the Director will be specifically responsible for all corrective action.

Compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations, including those related to prohibited and unallowable activities, will be required by all MCC Host Site locations. Periodic Site Visits, member reporting, site supervisor reporting, and MCC staff review of all material products and community reports will ensure compliance.

3. PAST PERFORMANCE:

During the last three years of program operation, MCC has met all performance measures (PM). These include MCC proposed PM via grant applications to the CNCS as well as PM added by the MCCS. For the current 2013-2015 grant, the MCC meets 4 PM's annually: Environmental Stewardship, AmeriCorps Member Development, Expanding Services Through Increased Volunteer Involvement, and Veterans and Military Families.

In the most recent year of program operations, 2013-14, MCC achieved 98.7% enrollment (76 out of 77 slots filled). This is the first year since 2006 that MCC has not been at 100% enrollment. A 1700-hour member exited our program midway through his term. Because he was able to complete 900 hours, MCCS suggested MCC split that term into two 900 hour positions, and fill the newly created 900-hour position with another individual. By the time this 900-hour conversion was approved, MCC had to request a no-cost extension to extend the position into the following calendar year. MCC had an applicant ready to serve at the time of application for a no-cost extension, and a Host Site available. On November 14, 2014, MCC heard that the no-cost extension was not approved because the majority of the term would fall into the 2014-15 year. This delay in processing of the request was the only reason the majority of the term would fall into the 2014-15 year. MCC has a long history of 100% enrollment. The only corrective action for the future will be the careful assessment of the need to convert slots when a member needs to exit early.

For 2013-14, MCC had a retention rate of 100%. All 76 AmeriCorps members are exiting our program eligible for Education Awards.

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MCC is reporting no compliance issues. During the CNCS "grace period" for detecting inconsistencies with National Sex Offender and Criminal History Checks (NSCHC), MCC conducted an extensive self-audit and took the opportunity to update all Policies and Procedures pertaining to this check. As the NSCHC procedures have been updated significantly in the past three years, MCC reported that, as of each year, MCC was compliant. Within the past three years, the MCC Advisory Committee (recently established, as stated in section C. 1.) has thoroughly reviewed any possible areas of weakness, continually reviewed all procedures, and created a Strategic Plan to move MCC forward.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

1. COST EFFECTIVENESS

The MCC is requesting \$ 13,001 per member service year (MSY), which constitutes a slight increase from previous years. The Senior Team Leaders and Team Leaders (staff) will be supervising AmeriCorps members from disadvantaged youth and veteran populations. MCC believes this will require an increase in experience levels of staff and therefore we have increased their salary. Furthermore, MCC Team Leaders have historically been AmeriCorps members with living allowances and benefits supplemented by CNCS funds. Transitioning leaders to staff members was a strategic move to increase the supervisory level of MCC, but has significantly increased the personnel section of the budget. General inflation, increased insurance costs and an increase in members' living allowances are also factors of the increases request.

MCC has successfully secured a minimum of \$915,531 in match, predominantly cash, during prior grant years. The inclusion of in kind contributions will further elevate MCC's ability to acquire match.

2. BUDGET ADEQUACY

This budget supports the goals of the MCC and its members. AmeriCorps grant funding and partner cash match will adequately support member living allowances and health insurance coverage. Partner cash match will support all activities of the MCC program including: orientation and training; purchase of tools and equipment; staff salaries and general operating expenses.

The operating budget will allow MCC and its members to achieve identified community needs that form the basis of the program model and performance measures.

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The MCC will secure \$1.1 million in non-Corporation sources. MCC has successfully secured a minimum of 70% cash match contributions in prior grant years. To do so, MCC informs and collaborates with community host sites and partners to help them obtain grant funding from sources such as Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund, Land for Maine's Future, the Quimby Family Foundation, and Recreational Trails Program (RTP). In fact, the MCC is the recognized youth corps organization for RTP in Maine. This successful relationship between RTP and MCC was recently highlighted during a US Department of Transportation and CNCS webinar entitled, "Creating Access to Opportunity." The MCC receives federal matching funds from the Department of the Interior for projects on federal lands such as the Appalachian Trail and Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge. The MCC receives additional funds from county and municipal sources. Several local non-profits also support MCC through private fundraising Partners and host sites use these funding streams to collaborate with MCC on a fee for service basis. In recent years, the MCC received direct funding from the Quimby Family Foundation and the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund. The MCC will continue to seek direct awards to augment partner contributions. Financial support for the MCC's staff also comes from the Maine General Fund.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

In the fourth quarter of 2014 MCC's lead evaluation author, Joseph R. O'Brien, in conjunction with additional program staff created a three year evaluation plan. This plan, available in detail as a hard copy attached to this application, will attempt to examine short-term member outcomes in the areas of job readiness, soft skills development, and career and education opportunity awareness.

Research questions will examine the program's ability to improve member resume writing skills, personal career interest assessments, career and education opportunity awareness, and assess workplace performance and soft skill development over the course of the program. Using a non-experimental pre/post evaluative design, members will be assessed using a standardized testing template developed by Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS), an internationally recognized nonprofit organization focused on assessment and development of basic skills in youth and adults. The template will be modified by the evaluation consultant and program staff for the unique needs of the program. Data will be collected from members when they begin the program, and then again near the end of their terms of service. The majority of data will be collected by the direct supervisors of the members. Training of supervisors will standardize data collection protocols to

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minimize inconsistencies. Additionally partners and supervisors will be surveyed to assess community impact information.

The evaluation will span two and a half years, from initial planning and scheduling to the final report, during which time all information will be reviewed by the Advisory Committee. In the first year program staff and the evaluation consultant will discuss detailed implementation of design tools and strategies. Data collection will also begin in the first year in order to assess any weaknesses in the evaluative tools and allow time to make necessary adjustments. The majority of data will be gathered in years two and three. In the third quarter of year three, data will be analyzed and interpreted by the evaluation consultant and an evaluation report will be written. Program staff will use this report to better understand program strengths and identify areas for improvement, for inclusion in future grant submissions, and potentially as a public relations or recruitment instrument.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

A. Programmatic clarification items

1. The six (6) members who receive 11 weeks of training accomplish more than of 5 ½ weeks of direct service which doubles as practical on-the-job training. The training integrates service activities such as: timber bridge building, boardwalk construction, water diversion structures, stone staircases, trail corridor widening, erosion control/improvement, and trail layout projects. Practical training also incorporates leadership instruction and practice. These six (6) Trail Training members conduct direct service activities in partnership with state, federal, and non-profit agencies, improving ease of public access and the quality of trails throughout Maine. The program is cognizant of and stays well below the 20% aggregate training limitation. In fact, MCC staff has developed a calculation of aggregate training for this program model. If all members serve just the minimum number of service hours required, the aggregate training will constitute 16.12% of service time.

2. MCC complies with state agency human resource policies and employee union agreements ensuring that displacement does not occur. On page 5 of the original narrative (under section 5: Member Training), 300 hour members enrolled were referred to as 'Team Leaders' in error. These 300

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hour members are Trail Training members, not Team Leaders. MCC Team Leaders are seasonal staff, and MCC opens the ten (10) Team Leader positions to AmeriCorps Alums with significant conservation experience. Trail Training members who complete service successfully become Alums eligible for this consideration. MCC Alums are overwhelmingly the applicants for seasonal staff positions. MCC Team Leaders are not in the MSY count for member support section of the budget. The ten (10) positions are open for all Alums, and Trail Training member alums are considered equally with all applicants.

3. The 11 week practical training is not required for Team Leaders, it is for Trail Training members as described above. Typically, we have ten (10) seasonal staff Team Leaders annually, and the Field Team season is broken into summer and fall sessions. All ten (10) Team Leader positions are filled in the summer, and six (6) Team Leaders extend their seasonal employment through the fall. In terms of the discrepancy of training, a criteria for employment of a Team Leader is conservation leadership training or an equivalent experience. MCC Team Leaders may be alums of the 11 week program MCC offers 300 hour members, or they may come with similar experience gained from other Corps or conservation organizations.

4. MCC members receive upfront technical, environmental and interpersonal skills training to prepare them for their service term. The minimum one week, 40 hour, training for all members includes: an introduction to National Service and AmeriCorps, First Aid and CPR, Communication, Diversity, Leave No Trace as well as other topics listed in section 5 of the narrative: Member Training. During the field season, Members are engaged in 40 hour service weeks: a session is one week, and members accomplish an average of 38 hours of direct service each week. The remaining 2 hours consist of training in job readiness (e.g. resume writing, interview skills) and technical trainings relevant to their service site (e.g. rigging, invasive species removal). Technical trainings are practiced during environmental stewardship activities, which take place within a team structure or under supervision of the host site. High quality supervision from staff provides supportive and corrective feedback, ample implementation and practice, as well as time for reflection. The supportive environment and service schedule also naturally develops appropriate workplace behaviors and expands upon upfront interpersonal trainings in a continual, constant dosage (e.g. teamwork, communication, conflict resolution, problem solving, being responsible and reliable).

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5. American Trails released a report in 2012 that highlighted outdoor recreation as a pathway to healthy communities, stating that every year hundreds of millions of visitors go to America's parks, forests and waters to recreate. Maine has one of the highest percentages of state, federal, and non-profit managed lands in the country. For community members and visitors to be able to experience our natural resources, they need accessible and safe paths. MCC works to create the opportunity for everyone- visitor or native, high income or low income- to become invested in America's future, and by doing so improves the statewide health of our communities.

To ensure local needs are met, the MCC requires community organizations who are interested in hosting AmeriCorps members to submit Project Request Forms. One section on the form asks the organization to document the community need for the project they are requesting. A recent example of a project in which MCC was able to meet a significant community need follows: An AmeriCorps member was placed with the Penobscot River Restoration Trust and worked closely with several interested organizations, including the Penobscot Indian Nation, to coordinate the removal of the Veazie Dam on the Penobscot River near Bangor, Maine. After much coordination of volunteers, who contributed hundreds of hours of work, the Veazie Dam was removed. Not only did this endeavor open the waterway for traditional use (canoe, kayak, etc.), but the overall health of the ocean ecosystem was impacted. Andrew Goode, the vice president of the Atlantic Salmon Federation, notes that it is estimated that seventy-five percent of all Atlantic wild salmon (an endangered species since 2009) that return to the United States from Greenland enter through the Penobscot River. Their journey to spawn was seriously impeded by this major dam. It is a project that MCC is extremely proud to be a part of, and improving the river health will impact the local and native communities for generations to come.

MCC operates in all sixteen counties in Maine, therefore making our 'target community' a broad entity. Maine is a rural state, the majority of which consists of isolated, rural communities. Isolated communities often rely on the increased economic stability that a trail network provides. For example, Millinocket is an isolated town that originally sprang up in the wilderness around Maine's once booming lumber industry. The town was initially successful; so successful, in fact, that during the Great Depression not one of the paper mill workers lost their jobs. As the paper industry declined and the mill shut down, Millinocket has turned into a gateway town for the North Maine Woods and nearby Baxter State Park. MCC will partner with Baxter State Park to improve the parks' hundreds of

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miles of primitive trails. By increasing accessibility and appeal of the parks trails, as well as engaging volunteers from the Millinocket area, MCC will strengthen the community economically and socially.

There are hundreds of similar needs in communities across the state that benefit economically from access to public lands. MCC's Project Request process ensures that the need for each project is established in advance of placing members or providing service.

6. All volunteers are given an initial orientation to the project, which includes outlining prohibited activities, before they begin volunteer work. MCC's volunteer assignment agreements are signed by all volunteers, which denotes their acknowledgment of and avoidance of the outlined prohibited activities. AmeriCorps members are trained to give this orientation to volunteers by MCC program staff.

7. MCC utilizes a site selection process that ensures alignment with National Service and MCC objectives, simultaneously establishing a platform for member success and development. A request for proposals is solicited from potential partners. From these proposals, MCC chooses host sites based on the following criteria: MCC mission alignment, project need, opportunity to engage community volunteers, build capacity and potential to expand long-term sustainability as well as the site's ability to adequately support the member. After sites are selected, recruitment is initiated by posting individualized ads for each host site.

Environmental Steward applicants are initially screened by MCC for qualifications relevant to individual positions and given a preliminary interview to determine skills, knowledge, and abilities. This information and applicants' personal preferences are used to match individuals with host sites. Eligible applications are then forwarded to Host Site supervisors at the 20 individual sites for secondary interviews. The Hosts Site supervisors then interview and select the member to serve at their site. Interviews are done over the phone unless the applicant lives locally and prefers to have a face-to-face interview. Accommodation for disabilities is also taken into account based on the position descriptions specific to each site.

8. MCC has been increasing recruitment in the opportunity youth sector and plans to decrease efforts to recruit college students on break. As mentioned in the narrative section, MCC is working with Job's for Maine's Graduates (JMG), a program that targets youth who face barriers to education. Because

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MCC is a state agency, there are also direct contacts established with both the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Labor (DOL). DHHS is behind a movement in Maine to get able-bodied adults off of welfare services and into volunteer service or employment. MCC is working to become one option, through the network of partners built since 1983, to become a pathway to meaningful employment to these populations.

Additionally, Maine has a number of AmeriCorps programs that work with and directly mentor the opportunity youth population in an educator role. MCC will be connecting with youth that are students or mentees in these programs to offer an alternate setting to continue their learning and training and provide a way for them to give back to the community. Maine also has a significant refugee population: MCC will reach out to these communities to promote volunteer opportunities that could lead to AmeriCorps service.

MCC plans on supporting opportunity youth through many existing programmatic elements as well as by further developing established trainings. MCC was founded in 1983 and for the greater part of the first 15 years of existence, it was designed as a way for youth that were not successful in their community to become engaged. This included youth who were first-time offenders as well as drug and alcohol abusers. In this grant, MCC is going back to its roots in focusing on engaging opportunity youth in service as a pathway to training, improved employment opportunities, and a way to increase community health. Maine has a natural resource economy and MCC has a large role to play in reconnecting youth to responsible life: teaching people workforce skills such as conflict resolution, workplace behavior, and accepted practices will increase employability. MCC's will build upon its historical success in managing AmeriCorps members in a rural environment to more fully engage opportunity youth and prepare them for their future opportunities.

9. Members can apply to one position or another, but also have the option of being considered for both the field team member and environmental steward program. Member placement is based on each individual's personal preference, with qualifications involved to a certain extent. Field Team members' service activities focus on improving trails as part of a cooperative team, predominantly in remote settings and providing the opportunity to develop a variety of employment skills. Environmental Stewards do accomplish some trail improvements; however their roles primarily revolve around engaging communities and generating volunteers to accomplish service projects, especially in community settings. Additionally, Environmental Stewards are also involved in other conservation projects, including environmental education, water quality monitoring, wildlife preservation, and

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ecosystem restoration.

B. Budget Clarification

1. The Executive Summary and Budget Narrative have been revised. The MSY configuration and number of members engaged in each performance measures will remain unchanged.
2. After careful consideration, the MCC has reduced the cost per MSY to \$11,508. Because MCC will be focusing on the professional and personal development of opportunity youth and veterans, there must be increased supervision when in the field. Projects are located in remote locations, far from MCC headquarters, requiring our Team Leaders to be MCC staff, possessing strong leadership ability, exceptional instructional and decision-making skills, patience and perseverance, and the ability to bring individuals from varying backgrounds together into strong functional teams. It would be negligent of MCC to allow our members to be in remote locations without constant high quality supervision. Thus, while the cost per MSY in the budget is less than originally proposed, it is still higher than listed in the clarification document. MCC has completely shifted the focus of our entire program, and cannot stay at a cost per MSY established four years ago for a different program model due to the nature of our projects and the safety of our members.
3. A copy of the current NICRA has been provided to the Maine Commission for Community Service.

C. Performance Measure Clarification

1. MCC has revised the performance measures in accordance with the review panel's recommendations. MCC also ensures veterans counted in the veteran performance measure are not double-counted in the economic opportunity performance measure.

All other changes (clarification questions 2-6) were made in the Performance Measures screen in eGrants.

D. Strategic Engagement Slots

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1. By partnering with groups that work closely with disadvantaged populations and veteran and disability service organizations for recruitment (i.e. Veterans, Inc., Kennebec Behavioral Health, Learning Disability Assoc. of Maine) the MCC anticipates increasing the representation of members with disabilities. To ensure the members of this population are targeted for recruitment and engagement, we are requesting strategic engagement slots. MCC's goal is to increase representation of individuals with disabilities to 25% of our members.

2. The MCC is moving to create service opportunities for disadvantaged individuals and veterans, two populations which overlap with the disability community. Current venues for recruiting disadvantaged populations will also provide the opportunity to recruit and engage disabled individuals. MCC will also expand its incorporation of disabled individuals by reaching out to the University of Maine's Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies (CCIDS) as well as Maine's Vocational Rehabilitation program and disability service organizations. In previous years, MCC and CCIDS have partnered to provide community volunteer opportunities to disabled populations. Expanding this former relationship to encompass the full engagement of disabled individuals as AmeriCorps members is an exciting prospect. The organizational structure of MCC provides constant supervision and extensive training to ensure the success of all members. Specifically, staff receives training in disability disclosure, reasonable accommodations, and position descriptions are ADA compliant. Furthermore, the program affirmatively addresses disability accommodations in staff and member training. MCC will also utilize the expertise of partners, such as Kennebec Behavioral Health and CCIDS to further educate staff and elevate the retention of disabled populations. To bring this vision to fruition, the MCC is requesting an additional 4.56 MSYs to be funded at the requested \$11,508 per MSY: 1 Full Time, 5 One-Year Half-Time, and 4 Quarter Time members. These members will serve in either the Environmental Steward or Field Team Program. These members are included in the budget, performance measures, and executive summary.

E. MSY with No Program Funds Attached Clarification:

MCC is not requesting MSY with No Program Funds

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics