

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

The Sierra Nevada AmeriCorps Partnership (SNAP) proposes to have 28 AmeriCorps members who will restore impaired watersheds and increase community stewardship in the Sierra Nevada. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for restoring 800 acres and educating and outreaching to 12,000 individuals. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 2,825 volunteers to improve ecological function and increase community stewardship of the watersheds. SNAP will focus on the CNCS focus area of Environmental Stewardship. The CNCS investment of \$364,009 will be matched with \$386,825 in private funds.

## Rationale and Approach/Program Design

PROBLEM/NEED: Historic and current pressures on the Sierra Nevada region have created a critical need to restore and assess impaired watersheds and improve community stewardship through education and volunteer mobilization. In California, the vast majority of freshwater ecosystems are anchored in the watersheds of the Sierra Nevada. This 400-mile range is the geographic backbone of California. It encompasses over 33,000 square miles, 22 counties, and 24 major watersheds. These watersheds provide California with 60% of its developed water supply. Sierra water quality and ecosystem health are in crisis. According to The State of Sierra Waters (Sierra Business Council 2007), every Sierra watershed but one has been identified as significantly impaired in some way. Mercury, arsenic, high sediment loads, fecal coliform, and trash flow into our rivers and threaten public health. Seventy-nine percent of the rivers in the region have had stretches periodically closed or public health warnings issued for fishing, according to the CalEPA's Environmental Health Hazard Assessment; and 75 % have had stretches at one time listed as impacted for drinking (Looking to the Source: Watersheds of the Sierra Nevada, 2011). According to the State Water Resources Control Board, the Sierra has a total of 535 impaired river miles and 252,044 impaired acres of reservoirs or lakes. Sierra watershed restoration is a significant community need and a perfect opportunity for AmeriCorps members to positively impact watersheds that are currently unaddressed, have tangible and measurable impacts, and get things done for the people of California. In order to protect and restore Sierra watersheds, the combination of on-the-ground restoration and community education that the SNAP program provides is essential and unique.

Limited funding has made it impossible to restore all the impaired watersheds of the Sierra. The rural character of the Sierra and the economic situation the region faces has created a unique and tremendous need for AmeriCorps capacity to address impaired watersheds. The Sierra Nevada region

## Narratives

accounts for about 22% of California's land area, but less than 7% of the state's population. This has left the region under-represented at the state and federal level. Statewide resources have consistently overlooked the Sierra region: only recently has more than 1% of the state funding from natural resource bonds gone to the region. Additionally, local philanthropy has lagged as the Sierra Nevada receives just \$26 per capita in philanthropic giving, compared to a statewide average of \$108 (State of the Sierra, Sierra Business Council, 2007). While 2012 data is available (<http://philanthropy.com/article/Interactive-Explore-How/149107/#advanced>), there are not resources available to analyze the data for the Sierra region. The Sierra Nevada region is home to a disproportionately large number of disadvantaged communities, with much of our region's income at or below 80% of the statewide median household income (U.S. Census, 2010). Over 40% of the range's communities and nearly 70% of our individual residents live in disadvantaged communities, based on their median household income (Sierra Nevada Alliance GIS/Census analysis, 2013). The Sierra Nevada AmeriCorps Partnership (SNAP) addresses the need to restore Sierra Nevada watersheds to provide residents and all of California healthy watersheds that produce clean drinking water, outstanding recreation opportunities, and healthy ecosystems to support one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world.

A standardized method to select high-needs beneficiaries is not feasible for this program; and the entire region is high-need due to its ecological impairment. The highest-needs beneficiaries (impaired watershed sites for restoration and assessment) will be determined by each SNAP partner site and approved by the SNAP program. This process has worked exceedingly well for the SNAP Program over the last nine years. Each SNAP partner site will determine what types of restoration and assessment projects are undertaken by members based on their local needs, technical expertise available, and funding. SNAP partner sites employ expert staff with years of experience in the field of watershed restoration and assessment and have extensive practical, academic, and field experience. Because there is so much ecological variation across the Sierra, the assessment protocol will vary across host sites, as well as the watershed restoration treatment prescribed. For example, a site located in Lake Tahoe may prioritize invasive species removal as key to the health of a crucial meadow, while a site located in Nevada City may prioritize stream bank stabilization projects. Each project must meet approval by SNAP through submission of service plan applications each year. An independent host-site selection committee will select SNAP host sites largely based on the priority of restoration and assessment needed in impaired watersheds and the amount the proposed projects deal specifically with SNAP's highest need beneficiaries.

## Narratives

THEORY OF CHANGE: To meet the need to restore and assess impaired watersheds and improve community stewardship in the Sierra Nevada region, SNAP will place 28 members with community-based organizations and local agencies. Members will restore and leverage the service of volunteers to restore a total of 2,450 impaired watershed acres over the next three years. Seventy-five percent of the acres restored directly by SNAP members will improve ecological function by at least 20%. With the focus on watershed restoration and assessment through on-the-ground service, education, and community volunteerism, the SNAP program and members are positioned to make great impacts on Sierra Watersheds and its freshwater ecosystems. To ensure that each member has maximum impact on their watershed, each member's service will be different based on the needs of their specific watershed. AmeriCorps Member service plans will include a combination of five main elements: watershed restoration and assessment, watershed education and outreach, volunteer recruitment and support, resource attainment, and member training.

>WATERSHED RESTORATION assures the preservation of existing healthy conditions by removing threats, protecting the watershed from future threats, and eliminating continuing causes of watershed degradation. Assessment conducted by members will monitor restoration needs and progress in order to evaluate ongoing restoration and stewardship efforts. Sierra watersheds are impaired chemically, biologically and physically, so there is a range of watershed restoration activities that will occur. See Logic Model for detailed list. Members will leverage volunteers to restore an average of 87.5 acres per member per year and members themselves will restore 650 acres over three years. The duration and dosage of the members' individual activities will vary depending on the project -- from single-day restoration projects to monthly assessment projects. Members use fifteen restoration categories in pre- and post-assessment, which have been reviewed by experts to ensure these activities have evidence of improving watershed ecological function. Due to geographic variation, the duration and timing of the field season for members will vary. During non-field season months, members will be planning for their field projects.

>WATERSHED EDUCATION AND OUTREACH inspires individuals to become stewards of the watersheds. Specific outcomes are identified in the Performance Measures and the Logic Model, but in summary: members will educate an average of 192 students and community members per year; 75% of which will increase their knowledge by at least 25%. Members will outreach to approximately 279 individuals each year, and 90% will increase their understanding on the environmental topic.

>VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND SUPPORT will leverage the service of volunteers to make the maximum impact on Sierra watersheds. The program will have members recruiting and supporting

## Narratives

volunteers to participate in restoration, monitoring and education activities. See Logic Model for specifics, but broadly: members will engage ongoing and one-time volunteers to achieve and enhance performance measures. With the help of volunteers, members will leverage 9,406 new volunteers to restore 2,450 acres of watershed.

>RESOURCE ATTAINMENT will help under-resourced SNAP partner organizations, which lack capacity to fulfill all of their watershed restoration and assessment goals. Members will participate in a limited amount of resource attainment of in-kind and cash support; they will not write any federal grants. All in-kind and cash resource attainment will directly benefit their direct service. Dosage will vary by host site, see Logic Model for details.

>MEMBER TRAINING - see Member Training section, below.

These five key service components will enable the SNAP program to leverage members, volunteers and SNAP partner organizations to restore 2,450 acres of impaired watersheds through member service and improved community stewardship as a result of effective education and volunteer mobilization by the members.

Over the nine-year history of the SNAP program, members have restored and leveraged the efforts of community volunteers to restore a total of 12,220 acres -- an area the size of 12 Golden Gate Parks or almost three Yosemite Valleys. Members alone have restored 1,639 acres, 70% of which improved ecological function by at least 20%. Since 2012, acres restored by members have been evaluated using the Ecological Assessment Protocol based on the UC Davis model: Rapid Bioassessment Protocols for Use in Streams and Wadeable Rivers (Barbour, Gerritsen, Snyder, & Stribling, 1999) an evaluation tool designed for SNAP by academic advisors (see PMW for list of advisors). SNAP has leading watershed restoration practitioners at each host site determining the individualized plans for the restoration activities based on years of evaluation, research, and practical field experience.

EVIDENCE BASE: SNAP has had a measureable ecosystem and community impact, and can provide a developed evidence base for moderate evidence. There are many studies that support the effectiveness of watershed restoration and assessment, environmental education, and capacity building activities that SNAP members participate in. The following evidence comes from peer-reviewed journals, professional best practices publications, and evaluations.

>STUDY, EXPERIMENTAL: Environmental Stewardship Outcomes from Year-Long Invasive Species Restoration Projects in Middle School. Dresner & Fischer (2013) conducted a relevant experimental study of a program that uses a similar intervention to the SNAP program. This well-designed and well-implemented experimental study compares outcomes between the group receiving

## Narratives

the SNAP-like intervention and a similar population that does not receive the SNAP-like intervention and shows a statistically significant ( $P < 0.0005$ ) positive correlation between a year-long place based education program involving invasive plant removal and restoration and increased environmental stewardship scores. Middle school students underwent a pre- and post-test on environmental stewardship attitudes, and scores were compared between students who participated in the program and comparable classes that did not. The researchers used two classes of 6th-8th graders that were given the intervention and three control classes in their sample. Participants receiving the intervention were surveyed using a 30 question form using a five-point Likert-type scale and showed significantly higher scores compared to the control group ( $F = 5.48$ ,  $P = 0.02$ ). Additionally, students and parents participated in focus groups after the program that showed evidence of actual change in behavior outside of the classroom. Students who received the intervention in the experimental group of this study were highly motivated and continued to both inform and inspire their families to help remove invasive species outside of school in their own communities. Many SNAP members provide education intervention to students and community members through place-based education activities such as Project WET- an action-oriented water education curriculum, field trips, adopt-a-stream projects, field internships, and others.

>STUDY, EVALUATION: Summary of SNAP Program Evaluation Conducted in November 2014: The SNAP program, working with the Alliance and host sites and program partners, evaluated the program for the period between October 2011 and November 2014. The program used the CV program standards to determine how the SNAP program has implemented the five CV program standards during its third funding cycle and what impact has that implementation had on the program's ability to meet the primary goals of AmeriCorps. SNAP and Alliance staff conducted the internal evaluation using interviews, records reviews, and program knowledge. The external review was conducted using an online survey tool, with 10 questions with a five-point Likert-type scale with space for additional comments based on CV program standards and 23 respondents. On average, 90% of our external reviewers agree that we are meeting or exceeding the Program Standards. For example, 91% of reviewers agree or strongly agree that the SNAP program identifies high need beneficiaries in our region; and 87% of reviewers agree or strongly agree that the SNAP program's methods (interventions) are appropriate to address the gap in watershed restoration & assessment and environmental education needs in our region. These findings are significant as they show that overall the program has done extremely well during the first two and beginning of the third years of its third funding cycle. This has resulted in the program having considerable contributions to achieving

## Narratives

AmeriCorps' four overall goals. Main areas of improvement include increasing marketing and media, developing a financial strategy for future, and designing a performance measure for monitoring and assessment activities.

**NOTICE PRIORITY:** Our program has an environmental focus, but is not a 21st Century service corps. However, it does qualify as an intermediary serving severely under-resourced communities in the Sierra Nevada region. The Sierra has an extremely small, mainly rural, population compared with its size, which has left the region under represented at the state and federal level. As described in the Problem/Need section, the region is very disadvantaged, significantly rural, and underserved. The Alliance has years of experience working with disadvantaged communities, such as a pilot project focused on disadvantaged communities served by Integrated Regional Water Management groups.

**MEMBER TRAINING:** The SNAP program has a two-stage orientation and training process to prepare members for service and life after AmeriCorps. Stage one occurs at the SNAP program's Pre-Service Orientation, a five-day Core training that occurs before members begin service. Core Training includes Mandated AmeriCorps training including prohibited activities, Member rights & responsibilities, site supervisor responsibilities, code of conduct, suspension & termination, member benefits, fundraising & non-compete rules. Members will take a quiz regarding prohibited activities, including the consequences of non-adherence. SNAP training including program services, restoration science & techniques, policies & reporting, AmeriCorps & national service history, safety & disaster preparedness, volunteer recruitment & support, resource attainment, event planning, Sierra Nevada watersheds, geography, science, and climate change, personnel policies, unlawful harassment, service ethics, progressive discipline policy & grievance procedures, AmeriCorps Service Days, and public speaking for education and outreach. Trainers will include Sierra Nevada Alliance and SNAP staff, environmental and graduate school specialists, former Members, and Site Supervisors. For stage two, which takes place over the first month of member service, each site supervisor submits an orientation plan detailing how the member will be oriented to the placement site, community they will serve, and specific service activities. SNAP staff review the orientation plans to ensure they cover all required topics. Each host site partner will provide at least 7 days of site-, region-, and project-specific training for the members on the topics required to successfully complete members' service plans. Members will receive supplementary training that will help develop professional and community development skills. Members will average at least 150 hours of training each, including three multi-day SNAP led trainings, in-house host site orientation, and supplementary SNAP training. Multi-day trainings for all SNAP members will occur in the spring and fall, including a Graduation Ceremony for members.

## Narratives

SNAP staff will inquire into the implementation of the orientation plan, the training the member has participated in, whether or not they feel prepared for their service, and if they have any specific training requests.

**MEMBER SUPERVISION:** SNAP has a two-tiered supervision approach. SNAP staff maintain regular communication with members through site visits, emails, and phone calls to determine how the member is progressing, troubleshoot any challenges, identify member needs, and offer support. SNAP staff will collect all timesheets and logs on a monthly basis and conduct an intensive review to ensure members are in compliance with all policies. SNAP staff will resolve any issues identified in accordance with policies and procedures presented during Orientation. SNAP conducts an annual site visit for each member to assess progress and satisfaction and to troubleshoot any problems. Additional site visits will be conducted if problems arise or persist. SNAP requires members to submit trimester reports and a yearly host site feedback survey providing another opportunity to voice any concerns, highlights, problems or dissatisfactions..

Each member has an on-site host site supervisor. Site supervisors provide mentoring and support to ensure members have the basic skills, knowledge and understanding of their service plan needed to conduct service and for professional development. Site supervisors are required to meet regularly with members and to provide ongoing guidance. Three member evaluations provide a structured format for the member and supervisor to discuss progress and satisfaction, and these evaluations are provided to the SNAP program. All site supervisors are required to attend a site supervisor training that occurs before they begin supervising members, usually in conjunction with the SNAP member orientation. SNAP staff is available at any time to work with supervisors to provide guidance on member management issues and supervision. Staff also check in with supervisors regularly and have at least one in-person meeting a year during site visits to discuss supervision and member satisfaction and service. SNAP staff also provides feedback to each site at the end of the service year (or during the year for cases of noncompliance) about the quality of their member supervision.

All SNAP staff is trained in the same topics as Site Supervisors and SNAP Members with extensive Sierra Nevada Alliance orientation and training. All new Alliance staff members are given a SNAP and AmeriCorps overview and are encouraged to attend the background and history of SNAP and AmeriCorps at orientation. All staff is encouraged to attend SNAP trainings, events, and graduation.

**MEMBER EXPERIENCE:** SNAP is committed to building esprit de corps for members. Members' evaluations have indicated that SNAP helps develop ethics and skills for active productive citizenship and valuable employment skills through service resulting in powerful experiences that have changed

## Narratives

lives. Manny Aquino, a retired firefighter whose service in AmeriCorps helped launch a second career said, "What an honor to be associated with this motivated cadre of bright people...Giving time and effort alongside others for a cause you believe in is a terrific experience. It makes you feel good and provides a benefit to our community." At each SNAP training, members share their service experience and civic responsibility, including a Swearing In Ceremony and Graduation Ceremony presentation on what their service meant to them. SNAP will have members partner and participate in Cesar Chavez Day, which involves training members about Cesar Chavez and his service. SNAP is a sponsor of the Great Sierra River Cleanup, which is organized by the SNAP partner the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. Members will help organize their local event, allowing them to be part of the regional and statewide effort. Members will participate in All AmeriCorps Week and put on events to educate their communities about AmeriCorps and national service. Members will also be encouraged to engage in other National Service Days. Members at different SNAP host sites often work together on service projects, fostering a sense of community and connecting members back to AmeriCorps. Each member will also write a blog entry to reflect on their service, civic engagement, and what national service means to them. This will provide members with a reflective moment, and the shared stories will inspire all members on the importance and benefits of serving. SNAP issues a weekly electronic newsletter and forwards alerts and newsletters from CalVolunteers and the CNCS. These programs and projects provide experience and skills beneficial for future employment and education.

Most SNAP recruitment is focused locally, but because the Sierra has a small population base, it can be difficult to recruit a large percentage of qualified candidates from within. One of the selling points of the SNAP program is its ability to recruit outstanding members who serve very effectively in Sierra communities. Local outreach includes sending recruitment materials to the Alliance's 96 Member Groups to distribute to their local communities throughout the Sierra, posting on regional employment boards, contacting California colleges and universities, and networking with local SNAP alumni. SNAP host sites also assist with local recruitment by conducting local outreach. There is also substantial regional and national recruitment. As a result, SNAP has increased the ratio of applications to available positions from 0.38:1 during the first year to 7:1 during the current funding cycle. In 2014, 69% of SNAP members are from California, and 38% were previously living in the Sierra.

**AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION:** SNAP will strive to ensure member service is visible in their communities. During recruitment, SNAP asks potential members why national and community service is important to them and if they are committed to wearing the AmeriCorps identification at all times while serving. The program provides AmeriCorps buttons and shirts that allow members to

## Narratives

identify as such while accruing service hours. Members must issue at least one news release about their service to attract local media coverage. Host sites are required to include "AmeriCorps Member" in members' titles, and must place a sign that identifies them as a host site with the AmeriCorps logo at their entry.

### **Organizational Capability**

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING: Since 1993, the Sierra Nevada Alliance has been protecting and restoring Sierra lands, water, wildlife and rural communities. The Alliance was founded on the need for a networking body to encourage collaboration and partnership between business, environmental and civic interests throughout the Sierra region. The Alliance has built a reputation for successful conservation programs based on collaborative processes and private/public partnerships for the benefit of natural resources. The Alliance is a 501(c)(3) organization and has more than 95 organizations that are members of its network. The Alliance's Member Group Support Program has held a successful conference for twenty years, issued mini-grants to over fifty community groups, provided numerous capacity building trainings, operated the SNAP AmeriCorps program since 2007, and provided frequent news bulletins, reports and other information on Sierra conservation. The SNAP program is an integral part of the Sierra Nevada Alliance. SNAP has created well-documented policies and procedures to ensure the program is in compliance, submits requirements in a timely manner, and has impacts on the ground. The program has received positive feedback during site visits, desk reviews, and member file checks. The program has ensured that all members have completed their term of service by the program end. Program staff also maintains consistent lines of communication with CV staff and are responsive to their requests.

All Alliance staff assists the SNAP program, and the program is very effectively managed. Gavin Feiger, Acting Executive Director (25% of time) has been with the Alliance for three years and has seven years of experience with environmental science, policy, education, volunteerism, fundraising and budgeting, and employee and program management. He provides support to the program director, oversees financials and budgeting and fundraising for the program, completes contracting, and provides any additional capacity as needed. Lynn Baumgartner, SNAP Program Director (100%) has been with the Alliance since 2010. She has experience in communication, outreach, fundraising, program management, survey design and evaluation. Lynn oversees operations of the program, completes reporting and invoicing, oversees program fundraising, conducts media outreach, ensures compliance with AmeriCorps' financial and programmatic rules and regulations, manages site supervisors & members, organizes member trainings, oversees member recruitment, collects member

## Narratives

reports and supervises the Program & Administrative Assistant. Kelly Miller, Program & Administrative Assistant (30%) supports necessary program and administrative tasks. Cami Chavez, Financial Manager (15%) is responsible for budget creation, invoicing, member payroll, member reimbursements, paying health insurance and benefit bills, ensuring financial files and have required documentation, and completing bank deposits. Currently the SNAP program is fully staffed. The Alliance Board of Directors is comprised of leaders from diverse fields and has made clear through direction to the Alliance that they feel the SNAP program and national service is an extremely effective means to complete watershed restoration and to accomplish the Alliance's mission. The Alliance has an annual operating budget of approximately \$1.5 million and has extensive experience managing public contracts having been awarded three funding cycles to date for its AmeriCorps program to administer the SNAP program. It also participated in the AmeriCorps VISTA program in 2010-2012, and is currently involved in the CivicSpark program in California. The Alliance is currently administering several private foundation grants to support its programs. The Sierra Nevada Alliance has administered over \$2 million in state grants including two grants with the State Water Resources Control Board, totaling \$690,000, to strengthen local efforts to implement non point source controls and to study Pesticide Residue in Frogs and Amphibian Declines in the California Cascades and Sierra Nevada; \$925,000 for the Integrated Watershed Management Program from the State Water Resources Control Board for Evaluating Land Use Practices in Sierra Nevada Watersheds and Their Impact on Water Quality; and in 2008, the Alliance was awarded a Department of Water Resources grant for \$363,800 to complete a watershed valuation project to create social and economic indicators to be used in conjunction with the EPA Watershed Assessment Framework. The Alliance also has a long and successful history of raising private foundation dollars to implement projects as well. Currently 37% of the Alliance budget is made of private foundation dollars and donations. SNAP involves its community partners heavily in program design. Partners include SNAP Host Sites and other key individuals and organizations, including our public partner Sierra Nevada Conservancy and the Cascade Council of Land Trusts. Education and outreach activities focus on Sierra Nevada community members, including students and many partner sites host restoration events designed to involve the local community. Feedback from Alliance Member Group surveys and interviews indicate that the SNAP program is one the Alliance's most important activities, and partners are committed to supporting the SNAP program each year. Academic and professional experts at the host sites design the member service plans each year, making sure current watershed needs are addressed. These local experts are also on hand to prescribe treatments and monitoring protocols at specific watershed sites.

## **Narratives**

The partnership reviews program updates and news, considers proposed SNAP policy changes, and guides program direction. Host sites have the opportunity to evaluate the SNAP program yearly, discussing program strengths, weaknesses, and proposing new ideas.

**COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY:** The SNAP program will work to ensure compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations at all times. This process starts with program staff who are trained on and continuously review AmeriCorps and CalVolunteers regulations. Any time the program considers changing a process or policy, staff will ensure that the new policy will be in compliance. To ensure host sites are in compliance, the SNAP program clearly identifies prohibited activities at the start of the host site selection process to inform potential sites of prohibited activities. This step discourages organizations interested in having members conduct prohibited activities such as advocacy from applying. During the host site application process, potential host sites must create and submit service plans that account for all 1,700 of their member's service hours and detail projects. SNAP closely reviews service plans to ensure activities and projects are acceptable before submitting to the host site selection committee for further review. A significant portion of site supervisor training will be spent conducting an intensive review of the prohibited activities, member contract and personnel policies, as well as other AmeriCorps and SNAP rules and regulations.

During the program, SNAP staff conducts monthly compliance checks by reviewing member timesheets and logs. During the first few months of service SNAP staff will contact members individually regarding their service activities and compliance issues on a monthly basis to ensure members service is going as expected. Staff will also inquire about compliance issues during annual site visits with members and site supervisors. The program uses a memorandum of understanding to lay out how the program will hold sites accountable for breaches in compliance. If a compliance issue arises, the program will immediately analyze the severity of the occurrence, investigate how the issue started, ensure the issue is not occurring at other sites or with other members, determine the best way to move forward, address the issue to all site supervisors and members, and develop a plan to ensure the issues does not occur in the future. Any compliance issues identified will be brought to our program officer for the best guidance on how the program will best rectify the situation and the impact the issue will have on the future of the program.

**PAST PERFORMANCE:** The SNAP program has met nearly all of the performance measures in the past three years of program operations. Watershed restoration: Exceeded acres restored in 2012-14 Programs, in 2014 restored 361 acres (150 acre goal); met % acres improved target in 2012 & 2014. We did not meet target in 2013, so SNAP strongly emphasized the importance of improving acres in

## Narratives

training by 20% and improved 77.5% acres in 2014. Education & outreach: exceeded individuals educated & outreached to target in 2012-2014 programs, in 2014 educated and outreached to 15,104 individuals (10,000 goal); met educated percent increased knowledge target in 2012-14 programs, in 2014, 88% of individuals educated increased knowledge (70% goal). Resource attainment: met resources attained goal in 2012-14 programs, in 2014 attained 253 resources (75 resources goal), did not meet percent of sites finding activities "very useful" goal in 2012-13, required host sites to only have Members participate in "very useful" activities, exceeded goal (60%) in 2014 with 80%. Volunteer management: exceeded one time and on-going volunteer recruitment in 2012-14 programs, in 2014, recruited 904 on-going volunteers (500 goal) and 2,497 one-time volunteers (2,250 goal), did not meet on-going volunteer hours in 2012, exceeded all other hour targets (one time and on-going) in 2012-14 programs, in 2014 leveraged 9,539 on-going volunteers hours (3,000 hour goal). The SNAP program has had difficulty meeting the Member Development hours target. The major causes of this are the geographic spread of the program, and lack of funding which make hosting all-member trainings challenging. Many SNAP members entered the program with a high skill base and did not meet the target of increasing their skill by the target percent in the last three years. SNAP plans to address this by hosting more webinar-based member trainings, where members will have a chance to learn useful service and career related skills from experts in the field. SNAP is applying for grants to increase training funding from private foundations, which have funded SNAP trainings in the past. If funded, we will host more regionally-based, funded restoration training and service projects.

The SNAP program did not achieve 100% member enrollment in the 2014 program. SNAP requested an increase in MSY from the historical 27 MSY to 33 MSY due to initial capacity surveys of partner organizations and regional potential partners. Capacity of partner organizations actually decreased, which caused to program to fill only 28 of 33 MSY for the 2013 program year, and requested 28 MSY for the 2014 program year and in our application for this cycle. We are confident that we can fill 28 MSY, a historically sustainable level for the program. We will expand our outreach to potential host sites, including Native American tribes, educational programs, government organizations, and environmental organizations & agencies.

The SNAP program achieved 96% member retention in the 2014 program year. In order to achieve 100% member retention, the SNAP program has corrective actions in place. The SNAP program plans to further emphasize the full service term commitment to AmeriCorps and the SNAP program in every step of the recruitment process, including service position postings, all of the interview rounds, in the initial position offer (both verbally and in writing), the member service agreement, and again

## **Narratives**

verbally before the Member Contract is signed. Additionally, if a SNAP host site that has had a member exit before successfully completing service applies to host members in the future, they must include a member retention plan that is approved by SNAP staff and participate in additional check ins with SNAP staff. SNAP staff will continue to engage in activities that have improved retention rates in the past.

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

**COST EFFECTIVENESS:** The program has secured diverse and sufficient match funding from non-federal sources for the past eight years through cash match payments from our sites, private donations to the Sierra Nevada Alliance, and private foundation funds. The Alliance will continue this method of funding to implement a successful SNAP program. In addition, the Alliance and SNAP program are considering using events to raise diverse funds and have identified additional private foundations. The program's design for the third funding cycle is based on an MSY of \$13,000, which is a lower cost per MSY than previously funded. The federal contribution of \$364,009 is matched by \$386,825 of Alliance funding and an additional \$75,464 of in-kind contributions. Additional financial commitments will be made once our 2016 host sites are identified as all host site applicants must identify their cash match funding sources.

**BUDEGT ADEQUACY:** The budget adequately meets the needs of the program by supporting program operations, staffing and AmeriCorps members. The budget is directly linked to supporting costs associated with meeting our proposed outputs and outcomes. The budget will support staffing designed with a full-time Program Director and 30% time Program & Administrative Associate to run day to day program operations; 25% of the Sierra Nevada Alliance's Executive Director's time for program oversight; 15% of the Alliance's fiscal staff to assist on the fiscal side of the program; as well as 17 site supervisors mentoring members on site approximately 20% of their time. This design has worked extremely well in the past to ensure that members are well supervised & meeting targets, SNAP is in compliance with all AmeriCorps rules & regulations, and financial aspects of the program are completed on time and correctly.

### **Evaluation Summary or Plan**

**THEORY OF CHANGE:** Historic and current pressures on the Sierra Nevada region have created a critical need to restore and assess impaired watersheds and improve community stewardship through education and volunteer mobilization. The SNAP program will place 28 members with community-based organizations and local agencies to assess and restore impaired watersheds focusing on impaired

## Narratives

freshwater ecosystems. Members will restore and leverage the service of volunteers to restore a total of 2,450 impaired watershed acres over the next three years. Seventy-five percent of the acres restored directly by SNAP members will improve ecological function by at least 20%. With the focus on watershed restoration and assessment through on-the-ground service, education, and community volunteerism, the SNAP program and members are positioned to make great impacts on Sierra Watersheds and its fresh water ecosystems. To ensure that each member has maximum impact on their watershed, each member's service will be different based on the needs of their specific watershed. AmeriCorps Member service plans will include a combination of five main elements: watershed restoration and assessment, watershed education and outreach, volunteer recruitment and support, resource attainment, and member training.

Watershed restoration assures the preservation of existing healthy conditions by removing threats, protecting the watershed from future threats, and eliminating continuing causes of watershed degradation. Assessment conducted by members will monitor restoration needs and progress in order to evaluate ongoing restoration and stewardship efforts. Sierra watersheds are impaired chemically, biologically and physically, so there is a range of watershed restoration activities that need to occur. See Logic Model for detailed list of activities. Members will leverage volunteers to restore an average of 87.5 acres per member per year. The duration and dosage of the members' individual activities will vary greatly depending on the project -- from single-day restoration projects to monthly assessment projects. Due to geographic variation, the duration and timing of the field season for members will vary. During non-field season months, members will be planning for their field projects.

Members will conduct environmental education and outreach to inspire individuals to become stewards of the watersheds. Twenty-six of the 28 SNAP members will engage students and community members in place-based watershed education. Education and outreach are defined in the relevant Performance Measures. Specific outcomes are identified in the Performance Measures and the Logic Model, but in summary: members will educate an average of 192 students and community members per year; 75% of which will increase their knowledge by at least 25%. And, Members will outreach to approximately 279 individuals each year, and 90% will increase their understanding on the environmental topic.

The SNAP program will leverage the service of volunteers to make the maximum impact on Sierra watersheds. The program will have members recruiting and supporting volunteers to participate in restoration, monitoring and education activities. With the help of volunteers, members will leverage 9,406 new volunteers to restore 2,450 acres of watershed. Twenty-six of 28 members will participate

## Narratives

in volunteer management during their full service term. See Logic Model for examples. Because the Sierra is under-resourced and many SNAP partner organizations lack capacity to fulfill all of their watershed restoration and assessment goals, members will participate in a limited amount of resource attainment. Members will not write any federal grants, and all resource attainment will directly benefit their direct service. Dosage will vary by host site. See Logic Model for more details.

Members deserve to be appropriately trained to perform the services assigned, to gain professional and community development skills, and to enhance their AmeriCorps experience. SNAP Members will receive the training needed to provide quality service to the community and Sierra watersheds and be successful in the SNAP program. Before beginning service, members will receive Core Training including which covers all mandated AmeriCorps training, program training needed for success, and individualized host site training. Throughout the year, members will receive supplementary training that will help develop professional and community development skills. Members will average at least 150 hours of training each, including three multi-day SNAP led trainings, in house host site orientation, and supplementary SNAP training via webinars or regional events. See PMW for detailed list of training topics. These five key service components will enable the SNAP program to leverage members, volunteers and SNAP partner organizations to restore 2,450 acres of impaired watersheds through member service and improved community stewardship as a result of effective education and volunteer mobilization by the members.

Outcomes: The SNAP program will restore 2,450 acres of impaired Sierra watersheds over 3 years. Seventy-five percent of the acres that receive treatment by members (489 of 650) will improve by at least 20% according to the Ecological Assessment Protocol. The SNAP program will educate 15,000 students and community members, 80% of which will increase their knowledge by at least 25%, and it will outreach to 21,750 individuals, 90% of which will increase their knowledge on the topic. Over three years, 45 SNAP partner organizations will increase their capacity to restore watersheds of the Sierra and increase community engagement through the resources attained and volunteers recruited and leveraged by the SNAP program.

HYPOTHESIS: The SNAP program restores impaired watershed acres, increasing the ecological function of Sierra watersheds and increasing community engagement through volunteerism and environmental education.

PROPOSED RESEARCH DESIGN: The SNAP Partnership will research and present different

## Narratives

evaluation methods during Year One and will decide upon the evaluation method at the conclusion of Year One. Evaluation will take place during Year Two with follow up during Year Three. Final conclusions and report will be available at the conclusion of Year Three. One likely method of evaluation is to design and implement an in-depth web survey of partner sites and SNAP members and alumni regarding observed quantitative impacts from the SNAP program in watershed restoration and assessment, environmental education and outreach, volunteer recruitment, training, and capacity building at partner sites. Evaluator will work with SNAP program director to design the survey instrument. Further in depth interviews will be conducted with SNAP key partners for supporting qualitative data.

**EVALUATOR QUALIFICATIONS:** Evaluator will not be someone employed full time in the SNAP program. Evaluator will have professional experience with environmental non-profit program evaluation. Evaluator will work with SNAP program director to design survey instrument. The SNAP program director has extensive survey design and implementation experience in an academic and professional setting<sup>1,2</sup>.

**BUDGET:** \$500 for consultant fees paid for by Alliance non-foundation funds.

### REFERENCES:

1 Engeman, C.D., Baumgartner, L., Carr, B.M., Fish, A.M., Meyerhofer, J.D., Satterfield, T.A.,...Herr Harthorn, B. (2012). Governance implications of nanomaterials companies' inconsistent risk perceptions and safety practices. *Journal of Nanoparticle Research*, 14(749).

2 Engeman, C.D., Baumgartner, L., Carr, B.M., Fish, A.M., Meyerhofer, J.D., Satterfield, T.A.,...Herr Harthorn, B. (2013). The Hierarchy of Environmental Health and Safety Practices in the U.S. Nanotechnology Workplace. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene*, 10(9).

### Amendment Justification

Not applicable.

### Clarification Summary

Decrease to MSY

This is our fourth AmeriCorps grant application and each year the CNCS share has decreased. We

## Narratives

budgeted in this original application for \$11,120 in Host Site cash match per member. We uploaded a new budget in response to these clarifications, increasing the cash match to \$11,146, bringing the MSY down to \$12,975. Our host sites work largely in disadvantaged communities within a disadvantaged region; therefore, increasing host site cash match creates a significant hardship for sites. Each year we apply for additional supplemental funding in the form of grants and individual donations to help keep MSY as low as possible and members affordable to partners.

### A. Programmatic clarification

1. The application explains that restoration activities will be individualized for each host site. Please describe specifically how each member's individual service activities will be determined.

Response: Each member's individual service activities will be determined through a three step process. The impaired watershed sites are first identified by potential SNAP host site staff and experts during the host site application period. Each SNAP host site will determine what types of restoration and assessment projects are undertaken by SNAP members based on their local community and watershed needs, technical expertise available to the site and partner agencies, and available funding. The potential restoration sites are included in the Member Service Plan that is part of the host site application. The service plans are reviewed by the Host Site Selection Committee which consists of watershed experts, Alliance board members, community stakeholders and SNAP AmeriCorps alumni. SNAP staff review, edit and approve all member service plans before host sites are selected. Changes to member service plans must be approved by SNAP staff. Due to the great amount ecological variation across the Sierra, the assessment protocol varies across host sites as well as the watershed restoration treatment prescribed. For example, a site located in Lake Tahoe may prioritize invasive species removal as key to the health of a crucial meadow in the Truckee River watershed, while a site located in Nevada City may prioritize stream bank stabilization projects on the Yuba River. This selection process has worked exceedingly well over the past nine years of the SNAP

2. Please confirm that AmeriCorps members will not spend more than ten percent of the term of service performing fundraising activities, as described in § 2520.40, including the raising of funds and in-kind resources.

Response: Members will not spend more than 10% of the term of service on fundraising activities. This policy is reiterated at the Member Pre-Service Orientation and Site Supervisor Orientation and language is included in the members' contracts and orientation materials. Fundraising hours are tracked monthly to ensure members are notified when they are approaching the 10% limit.

## Narratives

### C. Performance Measure Clarification

1. Please delete the Capacity Building performance measures, as these do not represent the main goals of the program. You may continue to track these results for your own programmatic purposes but do not need to report them to CNCS in the performance measures. You will have the opportunity to report the number of volunteers in the demographics section of the grantee progress report.

Response: Done

2. EN3: Describe what specific environmental stewardship and/or environmentally conscious practices that individuals will be educated or trained on by members. Also, include what the minimum amount of training/education is for an individual to be counted for this measure and how the program will track that amount. In addition, describe how the tracking system will ensure that the individuals will not be double counted in this measure.

Response: SNAP members participate in two types of education sessions -- educational presentations and outreach. Educational presentations are conducted in a classroom or out of the classroom (service learning style) in schools and in the community. Presentations are at least 30 minutes in length and cover at least four environmental education topics. Educational outreach sessions occur at outreach events such as tabling, workshops, and short presentations where a longer educational presentation is not a possibility. Educational outreach sessions have a duration of at least 10 minutes and cover at least one environmental education topic. Members provide education on topics such as: water conservation, litter removal, fertilizer use, sediment runoff, erosion control, invasive species removal, native plant propagation, forest restoration, fire safe practices, watershed friendly landscaping, trail maintenance, environmental public health and safety, and low impact recreation.

Members track both types of education sessions in an Outreach and Education Log which is reviewed monthly by their host site supervisor and SNAP staff. SNAP members conduct outreach and education on a wide variety of topics to a wide variety of different community and school groups; therefore, the information they share varies and rarely are presentations identical. In the unlikely instance that a member presents the same information, attendees will be asked not to complete a SNAP survey or pre and post test. Quality control is further managed by site supervisors and SNAP staff who review individual logs to ensure attendees are not double counted. The watershed education tracking log lists the topics covered and the population presented to in each presentation or outreach session, so sessions

## Narratives

given more than once can be tracked to further prevent double counting.

3. EN3.1: In the Described Instrument field, please describe the "Presentation-style" pre-post test methodology instead of providing a link. Provide more information on the "Outreach style" data collection plan, including how it will assess a change in the actual knowledge of the participants (versus an opinion of the level of knowledge). For both styles, please explain what environmental stewardship and/or environmentally conscious practices will be targeted for an increase in knowledge. Also, include information on how the selected pre-post test(s) are reliable and valid.

Response: The "presentation style" pre-post test methodology includes a four-question survey relating to the four topics covered during the presentation asking individuals to rank their knowledge on those topics on a scale of 1 to 4 before and after the presentation. The "outreach style" data collection plan includes a survey members give to individuals after the outreach session which assesses their increase knowledge using a three-point scale. The survey asks participants if they increased their knowledge "none" "some" or "well". Pre and post tests and outreach surveys are highly specific for each presentation. They are designed by site supervisors and members' host sites specifically for their individualized education programs.

The survey and pre post test method has been successfully used by the SNAP program for the last 6 years and was recommended by environmental education experts such as the University of California Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center, and S. Kay Rockwell and Harriet Kohn at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as published in the Journal of Extension whose methodology the SNAP survey was based on. Each host site addresses specific watershed and environmental issues, so environmental stewardship practices will be individualized to each host site. Some specific examples are noted in the previous response.

3. EN4: Describe how the program will ensure that each acre is only counted once during the program year, per the CNCS Performance Measures Instructions.

Response: SNAP ensures that each acre is counted only once during the program year. This begins with member and site supervisor training where it is outlined in the handbook and further explained. This guideline is also noted on the Restoration Log instructions. Restoration Logs are reviewed by site supervisors and SNAP staff monthly for quality assurance.

## Narratives

4. EN4.1: Instead of listing the reference, fully explain the program's data collection plan for this measure. Include information on how and when the data will be collected, who will determine that the acres are improved to an acceptable level, how each acre will be counted only once, and how acres reported as improved are tied directly to the acres members treat.

Response: Members collect data on site and log it in the Restoration Log every time they work on a restoration project. The format of the document is an excel spreadsheet with the following datasets: the name of the project, project location, number of acres restored, pre- and post-scores using the Ecological Assessment Protocol, name of pre and post photo and a description of the site and treatments performed. Host site staff and members assess the acres before and after treatment using the Ecological Assessment Protocol based on the UC Davis model: Rapid Bioassessment Protocols for Use in Streams and Wadeable Rivers and adapted for the SNAP Program by Fraiser Shilling, PhD Watershed Assessment and Adaptive Management, UC Davis; Luke Hunt, PhD Biology, Stanford University; Robert Johnston, M.S Resources Management, University of Nevada Reno; John E. Reuter, PhD Ecology, UC Davis; and Sudeep Chandra, PhD Ecology UC Davis. Host site staff assign a pre-score between 1-12 on two of 14 objective categories (0-24 points total). After treatment, host site staff assign a post-score between 1-12 on the same two objective categories (0-24 total). Categories are bank stability, bare ground, grazing animal exclusion, channel flow, fish/aquatic habitats, fuels reduction, human recreation impact, infiltration vs impermeable area, invasive species, macroinvertebrates observed, native vegetation, off highway vehicle exclusion, soil quality, trail building, and trash removal. Members take a before and after picture which is stored at the member's host site. The target is to increase the score by 20%. Restoration Logs are reviewed monthly by site supervisors and SNAP staff.

5. The application mentions multiple activities that may apply to streams or waterways. Please consider adding National Performance Measures related to waterways (i.e., EN5/5.1) or explain why the program has chosen not to track the results of these activities specifically.

Response: SNAP focuses on impaired watershed acres restored which encompasses overall watershed improvement. EN5/5.1 does not include critical acreage within the watershed that impacts the health of streams and rivers, such as mountain meadows.

D. Strategic Engagement Slots

## Narratives

### STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT SLOTS:

1. What percentage of your slots will be targeted to recruiting members with disabilities? What is your program's plan, if any, for outreach and recruitment of members of the disability community?

Response: Four percent of slots will be targeted to recruiting members with disabilities. The Sierra Nevada Alliance and the SNAP Program are equal opportunity employers and state this on all recruitment materials. The Alliance has a robust and proved reasonable accommodation policy on which host sites receive training. We're not requesting for additional strategic engagement slots at this time.

E. MSY with No Program Funds Attached Clarification:Response: No request at this time.

### Continuation Changes

Not applicable.

### Grant Characteristics