

Narratives

Executive Summary

The Corps Network proposes to have 2670 AmeriCorps members that will work on Environmental Stewardship and Housing projects in hundreds of communities across 31 states. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for improving 30000 acres of public land, 1550 miles of trails and waterways, collecting 1700 tons of recycling, and making 35 homes more inhabitable for low-income residents. In addition, the AmeriCorps members, many of whom are Opportunity Youth, will be provided with educational and economic opportunities and will leverage an additional 5500 volunteers.

This program will focus on the CNCS focus area(s) of 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) Environmental Stewardship, Disaster Services, and Economic Opportunity. The CNCS investment of \$883,900 in admin fees will be matched with funds from federal, state, and local agencies like the National Park Service, the US Forest Service, state departments of natural resources, and city departments of parks and recreation and public housing, as well as a variety of public and private philanthropies.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

AT-RISK ECOSYSTEMS: protection of, improvement to, and increased access to America's public lands and waters. According to the US Department of Interior (America's Great Outdoors Report, 2011), public lands and waters provide essential ecosystem services that benefit all Americans. They clean our air, purify our water, absorb pollution, prevent flood and erosion, and provide habitat for diverse species of wildlife. Further, they provide Americans with opportunities for recreation and relaxation that can lead to improved physical and mental health. They also bring economic benefits by stimulating economies, creating jobs and generating revenue. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, each year, outdoor recreation contributes \$730 billion to the economy, supports 6.5 million jobs and generates \$88 billion in revenue.

Despite these important benefits, our public lands and waters face many threats from development, fragmentation, unsustainable use, pollution, and the impacts of a changing climate (USDA Natural Resources Inventory, 2007). Moreover, hundreds of thousands of acres of forest are destroyed by wildfire, insects, and disease every year. At the same time, many urban parks are unsafe or inaccessible (National Recreation and Park Association, 2012) and many of our rivers, lakes, and coasts are polluted making them non-potable, unfishable, and unsafe to swim in (US Fish Wildlife

Narratives

Service).

Simultaneously, all across the country land and water management agencies are facing steep budget cuts. For instance, the federal public land management agencies currently report backlogged maintenance needs totaling more than \$25 billion. Similar needs at state and local parks add billions to this total. Each year, only a fraction of the necessary work is completed and many facilities and public lands fall into disrepair.

For example, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, a partner of TCN EAP program American Youth Works, saw a \$20 million budget cut in 2011 that has yet to be restored. As a result, TPWD is unable to treat 97% of the invasive species that plague the state and hundreds of popular trails and parks to go without maintenance. Unchecked invasive species and backlogged maintenance, not only impacts the environmental health of the state, but further decreases the public access that is necessary for the region's growing population (Houston Chronicle, May 18, 2013). Likewise, in the Northwest region of the country, where programs like Northwest Youth Corps and Washington Conservation Corps operate, due to insect infestations and water deficits, once healthy forests need to be thinned of thousands of dead and diseased trees. Likewise, the World Wildlife Fund has identified the Upper Midwest Forest (the region between the eastern US Forestlands and the western Great Plains), which is serviced by the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa, as one of the world's most endangered ecosystems in the world.

Urban public lands do not fare any better. Many urban parks are neglected, forgotten places. As of December 2012, due to consistent and increasing budget cuts, the New York City Parks Department, had reduced its staff to 2000 as compared with 6000 employees in 1978. This unfortunate trend was shared by many other city park systems. Over the past several years, the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, a partner of the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, has suffered regular budget cuts (more than 3% a year) necessitating staff cuts of nearly 40 positions a year (LA County FY 2012 Budget Summary). Understaffed and underfunded parks become dangerous places that urban residents fear, thus continuing the cycle of neglect (Lutz, 2012).

TCN EAP programs, the majority of which are NPS/USDA-recognized 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, because of their broad geographical reach, significant experience, and unique skill sets are ideally suited to address these issues on our public lands and waters. Many of our programs, like those mentioned above, have been employing members to remove invasive species, reduce hazardous fuels, build and maintain trails and other recreational facilities, and cleanup and improve urban parks and waterways for several decades. And they do it at a significant cost savings to the project sponsor.

Narratives

According to a recent cost analysis by Booz Allen (2012), Corps can complete projects at less than half the cost of other types of labor.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE, AND RECOVERY. The condition of our public lands and waters is also impacted by climate change and natural and man-made disasters. According to recent studies, the number and severity of natural disasters taking place each year is steadily and significantly increasing. In 1970, there were 78 reported natural disasters. In 2012, there were 364, impacting approximately 217 million people (www.accuweather.com) and costing in excess of \$200 billion (www.weather.com).

The impact and frequency of man-made disasters, like the West Texas fertilizer plant explosion, have also increased. Perhaps the most notable man-made disaster in recent US history is the BP Oil Spill which killed 11 people, released 4.9 million barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico and did immeasurable damage to ecosystems and economies across the Gulf Coast. It is estimated that restoration efforts, which have only just begun, will continue for years to come (USFWS).

TCN EAP members provide critical mitigation, relief and recovery services in their own communities, states and across the country. In the 2013-2014 program year TCN EAP members from California, Minnesota, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin responded to over 150 disasters across the country. TCN has also expanded and developed Service and Conservation Corps in the Gulf States. (Gulfport MS). These members are working on projects to restore, repair, and revitalize their communities.

LESS WASTE, MORE RECYCLING. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Americans generate about 251 million tons of waste a year. Despite the fact that nearly 70% of all waste is recyclable, only 30% is recycled. For instance, only half of the 134 billion beverage containers discarded each year get recycled. Likewise, only half of all used tires (330 million a year), 23% of all e-waste (2.37 million tons a year), and just over 10% of discarded motor oil (180 million gallons a year) gets recycled. The majority of this waste goes to 1800 landfills across the country. These landfills, which are rapidly filling up, can have negative environmental impacts like surface and groundwater contamination. They are also a primary source of methane gas which, 21 times as powerful as carbon dioxide, is one of the most harmful greenhouse gasses (EPA, 2001).

Of the millions of tons of waste that do not make it to a landfill, a significant amount ends up on our roadsides and public lands. Each year the US spends nearly \$12 billion to collect only a fraction of all litter (Green ECO Services, 2008). A significant amount (7 billion tons a year) also ends up in our rivers, lakes, and oceans where it harms or kills millions of mammals, birds, and marine life (Trash

Narratives

that Kills 2001). The economic, environmental, and health impacts of waste and litter call for a much greater effort to recycle.

The California Corps, among others, have been recycling for almost 30 years. These programs provide important services to communities across the state. For instance, Los Angeles Conservation Corps "crews serve a host of local businesses and government agencies including the Rose Bowl, The Staples Center, L.A. Live, Dodger Stadium, and LAUSD schools collecting an average of 200 tons of recyclable materials each year" (<http://lacorps.org/programs/young-adult-corps/racla/>). Last year alone, the California Corps collectively recycled over 6 million pounds of bottles and cans. A recently passed California State law authorized the California Corps to start recycling motor oil, tires, and e-waste as well.

IMPROVEMENT OF SUBSTANDARD AND INEFFICIENT HOUSING. Lack of safe, accessible, and energy efficient housing for low-income individuals and families and people with disabilities.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition reports that approximately 95 million Americans experience housing problems related to affordability, accessibility, overcrowding, poor quality, and homelessness. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, poor quality and inadequate housing contributes to a number of physical and mental health problems like infectious and chronic diseases, injuries, and delayed development, and is disproportionately experienced by low-income seniors, children, and people with disabilities. Contributing factors such as overly steep and damaged staircases, uneven floors, exposed wiring, and a lack of safety devices like smoke detectors, window guards, and handrails result in an estimated 4 million emergency room visits annually (NLIHC).

Further, a 2009 study by Fannie Mae found low-income housing was 37% less energy efficient than middle and upper income housing. Exposure to extreme temperatures, as a result of inadequate heating and cooling systems, combined with poor insulation, can lead to increased risk of cardiovascular disease and even death. Energy inefficient housing can also lead to increased pollution and increased financial burdens, particularly for low-income residents (American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy, 2004).

In many cases, minor - and often inexpensive - home repairs and modifications can eliminate these dangerous and costly conditions. Corps have been helping to repair and improve the energy efficiency of low-income housing for many years. Members at Sequoia Community Corps (CA) and Service Collaborative of Western NY conduct in-home energy audits, wrap water heaters and furnaces, fix leaky pipes, caulk drafty windows and doors, and install efficient light bulbs, showerheads, and toilets. WisCorps members paint; build wheelchair ramps and install railings; fix stairs, porches, and decks;

Narratives

and clean gutters and yards for residents who are low-income, elderly, or disabled.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISADVANTAGED AND DISCONNECTED YOUTH. America's youth (16 - 24 year olds) have been greatly impacted by the economic downturn, enduring an unemployment rate that is nearly double the national average (Bureau of Labor Statistics). Currently, there are 6.7 million youth ages 16 to 24, or almost 17% of that age group, who are out of school, out of work (The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth, 2012). These 6.7 million young people are projected to cost taxpayers \$1.6 trillion in public expenditures related to crime, welfare and health over the course of their lifetimes (Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of America's Forgotten Youth, 2012). With 1 million more youth becoming disconnected from education and workforce development systems each year, there is an urgent need to re-engage these young people (Collective Impact for Opportunity Youth, 2012).

Corps operate in some of the most economically distressed communities in the country. For instance, West Virginia consistently ranks in the bottom ten percent of all state economies, making the need for job training critical for economic improvement (Businessinsider.com, 2014), and according to the US Census Bureau, the City of Miami suffers from an unemployment rate of 33%, a poverty rate of 25%, and a high school dropout rate of nearly 61% (Rep. Rudy Moise, 2012). Corps like the Citizens Conservation Corps of West Virginia, Greater Miami Service Corps, and Youth Conservation Corps (IL), have been utilizing service as a strategy to deliver education, job training, and hands-on work experience to disadvantaged youth for many years. In fact, Corps have been described as, "a specialized form of national service that combines service to improve communities and the environment with programming to build job skills, personal motivation, and education". Further, experts believe that "participation in Youth Corps affect subsequent employment outcomes in a variety of ways, including providing initial work experience and building skills such as attendance, punctuality, teamwork and conflict resolution skills that may help corpsmembers succeed in subsequent jobs. During their Corps experience, members may also learn about careers they may not have been exposed to previously and may in fact choose specific programs so that they can 'try out' occupations" (When I Grow Up, 2014).

A CNCS-funded study titled "National Evaluation of Youth Corps: Findings at Follow Up" found that over the course of the study educational enrollment and employment by program participants increased from 50% to 67%, while 64% of program participants said that their participation in Corps helped them secure a job, and 77% of program participants said Youth Corps experience gave them a job-hunting advantage.

Narratives

THEORY OF CHANGE: As the examples above clearly demonstrate, the nation faces critical problems related to the declining health of our ecosystems and the decreased quality of, and access to, trails and other public lands and waterways. In addition, there is a lack of safe, accessible, and energy efficient housing for low-income individuals and families and people with disabilities. At the same time, millions of Opportunity Youth and other disadvantaged young people need training, work experience and other opportunities to make them attractive to employers. The Corps Network proposes to engage 2670 AmeriCorps EAP members to improve public lands and waters through a variety of conservation related service projects, and to improve the housing conditions of many low-income residents. At the same time, members will gain the skills and experience they need to enter the workforce. See attached logic model for details.

MEMBER TRAINING begins with orientation and continues throughout the program. Although orientation may vary in length by site, all include an overview of A*C, an introduction to the program, member conduct (including prohibited activities), program requirements (including timesheets), and information on the projects and communities in which they will serve. Orientation also covers issues such as civic engagement, conservation awareness, workforce readiness (including soft skills like the ability to show up on time, take direction, and work with others), health and safety, tool safety, and life after AmeriCorps

For instance, prior to enrolling in the EAP, members in Los Angeles Conservation Corps Environmental Awareness Program (LEAP) go through an eight-week training process through which members learn about the various functions of the Corps, such as the mission statement, the scope of service provided to the community, and fundamental information regarding environmental conservation.

During orientation, many Corps also administer a variety of assessments to determine what, if any, additional services and supports might be necessary to ensure the success of the members. Some Corps, like Greater Miami Service Corps, work with members to develop Individual Development Plans that may include additional or remedial education classes, specific training, counseling, and/or access to supportive services.

After the initial Orientation members are provided with technical skills training related to carrying out their assignments, such as trail building, equipment use and safety, carpentry, weatherization, energy efficiency, and specialty trainings such as backcountry survival, firefighting, and disaster mitigation, response, and recovery.

For instance, the CA Conservation Corps spends 10% of work time per year on direct training

Narratives

opportunities, such as three one-week trail building courses -- beginner, intermediate and advanced; 24-40 hours of Salmon Restoration/Watershed training; Emergency Response trainings, Fire, Flood and other natural disaster preparedness that include Agency certifications; Tree stand management-Arborist, chipper and chainsaw trainings; and Safety First-Aid and CPR, First Responder and Wilderness First Responder courses.

MEMBER SUPERVISION: Following orientation, members are assigned to teams or "Crews" that include 6-12 members and 1-2 highly trained supervisors or Crew Leaders. Crew Leaders are often former members, and as such, are able to share the knowledge and experience they gained through the program and to develop a special bond with incoming members. This is critical because Crew Leaders are not only technical trainers for members, they are also role models, mentors, and counselors. In this role, Crew Leaders provide a sympathetic ear, encouraging words, and meaningful advice.

Crew Leaders receive several weeks of specialized training prior to the official start date of the program as well as additional training throughout the course of the program. Crew Leader training consists of a combination of classroom training, hands-on training, and demonstrations. Topics include supervising and motivating participants, behavior management, conflict resolution, discipline procedures, leadership, time management, goal setting, outdoor judgment, risk management and ethics. Crew Leaders are also prepared to teach members the specific skills they will need for a particular project, like how to remove invasive species or plant a tree, how to build a bridge or a water bar, how change a shower head or wrap a water heater. One Fresh Start Advocap Crew Leader is a retired contractor. As such, he is able to teach members a variety of construction skills and share with them information on careers in the trades.

While Crew Leaders serve as the primary supervisors of members, highly skilled and experienced project partners and/or licensed professionals often play a role on projects as well. These individuals are brought on to provide very specialized trainings, like pesticide application, chainsaw instruction, energy audit, carpentry, and historic preservation. For instance, American YouthWorks has a retired NPS mason on staff to teach members how to lay brick and build stone walls. The California Conservation Corps engages a US Forest Ranger to provide firefighting or "Red Card" certification to members.

TCN provides the tools necessary to train all EAP staff, supervisors and partners in AmeriCorps rules and regulations through a comprehensive A*C Program Manual that includes: recruitment options, orientation requirements, sample forms, member management information, reporting and

Narratives

compliance requirements, and more. To keep Corps staff engaged and up to date on a larger scale, many attend CNCS or State Commission meetings, TCN's annual conference (EAP reps are subsidized), and the Corps Rendezvous, a grassroots conference for program-level staff who operate similar Conservation Corps programs throughout the nation.

MEMBER EXPERIENCE: The member experience is central to all TCN Corps programs and projects. Members entrust that Corps will provide them with high quality training and professional development in a positive and safe atmosphere where they can learn and grow.

To ensure that members have access to meaningful service experiences, Corps staff identify and line up service projects months in advance. Members meet with project sponsors to learn about the purpose and significance of the project. They interact with affected community members regarding their expectations for the project. And at the end of each workday, members have time for assessment and reflection. They discuss what worked well and what areas need improvement. They work through any conflicts that arose during the day and, as a result, become closer as a team. Some Corps encourage members to journal, and build in a time each day for members to do so. Members are urged to think about the importance of their efforts and, more generally, the importance of national service. These kinds of activities instill in members an ethic of service and a desire to continue to serve beyond the end of the program. According to AmeriCorps: Changing Lives, Changing America (2007), 66% of AmeriCorps alumni go into a career in public service. For instance, we know that at least 12% of all NPS employees did service in a Corps (nps.gov).

Members are given the opportunity to learn more about other A*C programs and national service through state and national networks including but not limited to state commissions, NCCC, FEMA Corps, and of course, The Corps Network. TCN participates in CNCS' Environmental Affinity Group and promotes large scale projects, where many Corps can work together, for Earth Day, Public Lands Day, MLK Day and during A*C Week. And Corps from across the country regularly work together on disaster response. In November 2014, for instance, members from CA, IA, MN, and WA deployed to Detroit to muck out flood damaged homes, serving alongside members from Hoopa TCCC and A*C St. Louis.

Further, the crew-based model ensures that EAP members interact with one another on a daily basis. They must respect and rely on each other to complete their work assignments. Moreover, exposure to project sponsors provide members with opportunities for networking and professional development which increases their prospects in the job market. Additional information on the skills and experiences member acquire during their terms of service that make them valuable to future employers can be

Narratives

found in the section on Member Training.

Participant recruitment in TCN's EAP varies by location with some sites recruiting nationally, while the majority of sites recruit from the communities in which serve. For example, Louisiana Green Corps (New Orleans), Fresno Local Conservation Corps (CA), Northwest Youth Corps (OR), Service Collaborative of Western NY and Citizens Conservation Corps of WV, all recruit locally. These programs find that word of mouth and high community visibility through AmeriCorps branding is an extremely effective recruitment method. Positions are advertised through a network of referrals from community, faith-based, and municipal organizations, including the criminal justice system, employment services, and schools. For example, Orange County Conservation Corps (CA) gets referrals from partners including the juvenile justice system, foster care group homes, and substance abuse rehabilitation programs. The Conservation Corps of MN & IA recruits members from underserved rural areas in those states and enrolls members with physical and learning disabilities as does Utah Conservation Corps and Greater Miami Service Corps.

AmeriCorps Identification: Member orientation includes the history of AmeriCorps, national service-centric training and esprit de corps. The Corps Network requires all Subgrantees to display the A*C logo on their websites; outreach and recruitment materials; related partnership agreements/MOUs; orientation and training materials; press releases and photo captions; forms, reports and publications; curriculum; and all uniforms and service gear. Subgrantees are also directed to have signage visible at all offices and service sites.

TCN purchases identification for all EAP Subgrantees who do not already have it or wish to supplement their items. TCN provides patches for uniforms, stickers for hard hats and water bottles, and transfers so the logo can easily be added to Corps t-shirts. In addition, TCN provides logo signs "AmeriCorps Serving Here" to all programs for their offices and work sites and encourages them to have the logo on their vehicles. Community members can easily recognize the A*C members by their gear and/or signage at project sites. To reinforce the importance of branding, we have invited CNCS staff to the special EAP session at our annual conference in February.

Organizational Capability

ORG BACKGROUND & STAFFING: Founded in 1985, with a mission to "promote the growth, quality, and sustainability of Corps" and support "well-funded, high-quality Corps in every community," The Corps Network (TCN) represents more than 100 state, local, and non-profit organizations, many of which have been in existence and changing lives and communities through service for several decades. Since it was established, TCN Corps have engaged more than 900,000

Narratives

young people in service.

For nearly 30 years, TCN has managed many major federal awards involving collaboration with and oversight of multiple sub-sites, including a \$9 million Opportunity Youth Service Initiative (OYSI) grant from CNCS, a \$3.6 million Clean Energy Service Corps grant from CNCS, a \$5.7 million National Emergency Grant from the US DOL, \$1 million from the Bureau of Reclamation, and the second largest Segal Education Award program in the A*C portfolio. Findings in over a decade of A-133 audits have been minimal to none. The result of TCN's experience managing federal awards is a strong database system, trusted technical assistance, and support to Subgrantees to ensure high quality programming and accurate and timely reporting.

Leslie Wilkoff has been with TCN since its inception in 1985 and as Director of its AmeriCorps Education Award Program, has been managing the TCN EAP since 2000. She has also administered all or part of other CNCS-funded programs like AmeriProCorps, Corps Respond, and Recovery Corps. Throughout her tenure at TCN, Ms. Wilkoff has planned numerous conferences, written and edited many documents, and managed a wide variety of member services. Over the past 14 years Ms. Wilkoff has been recognized as an expert on the Education Award Program and has been asked to serve on numerous CNCS working groups, including those focused on member satisfaction, the Annual Grantee Meeting, eGrants Portal, and national performance measures. Additionally, she has served as a mentor for new multi-site grantees. Ms. Wilkoff provides training to Subgrantees on compliance issues, performance measure tracking and reporting, Criminal History Checks and the eGrants Portal and has written a comprehensive A*C Program Manual as well as a publication geared to members who do not plan on attending a typical 4-yr college or university. This document is utilized by other grantees and several state commissions.

Other key staff working to effectively manage this award are Director of Finance and Administration, Nancy Siegal, who has over 25 years of nonprofit financial management experience and fiscal oversight and Emilie Rafal, TCN's Data Collection Systems Coordinator who is responsible for the organization's development and implementation of shared data collection and reporting. She manages the Annual Profile processes, including updating the survey to reflect common measures among Corps and analyzing the results, and has implemented a strategy to capture the current status and outcomes of grants. Over the past eight years, CNCS staff have conducted two site visits at TCN, both of which produced no findings.

In order to ensure that community members and partner organizations are engaged in planning and implementing the proposed interventions, TCN has submitted the required Consultation Forms to all

Narratives

31 state commissions where members will be serving. All EAP Corps have a number of, and work closely with, community partners and projects sponsors. Corps work with a wide range of local agencies and organizations on member recruitment and referral, and to provide supportive services like housing, childcare, and transportation. They also work with local employers to provide members with post-program placements. And virtually all service projects are identified (and often financially supported) by the community and/or project sponsor. In some cases members must convene community meetings prior to the start of a project to solicit input from local residents and business owners. In other cases, Corps host service days that allow community volunteers to work side-by-side with members. All Corps were required to submit at least two letters of support from community partners with their EAP application to TCN.

COMPLIANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY: Technical assistance is provided both before the start of the program and throughout to support effective implementation at each location. To ensure compliance with regulations, provisions, and policies, TCN's EAP staff conduct regular conference calls, webinars, desk audits, and site visits; provides sites with a variety of resources, including an A*C Program Manual that is continually updated; TCN dedicates a section of its website for technical assistance and best practices for the program.

TCN continually monitors and provides assistance to all EAP sites. In preparation for a pre-program year webinar, sites are sent key documents (i.e. Site Agreement, Corrective Action Policy, Orientation & Training Plan, Member Position Descriptions, and a new 3-page Criminal History Check (CHC) Compliance and Procedures Review Form created after our current EAP sites completed the CNCS Oct-Nov 2014 CHC Assessment, and if applicable, Union Concurrence and Host Site Agreement) all of which must be completed and returned prior to enrolling members. Sites are required to include Prohibited Activities in the Member Service Agreement as well as Position Descriptions. The Manual contains all compliance Policies and Procedures for running a successful A*C program, including sample member timesheets; how to enroll, manage and exit members; sample member service agreement; criminal history check requirements and Member Consent and Disclosure form, member file checklist, project tracking and reporting requirements and partner/sponsor form; a section on resources for members and more. Staff are currently working on an annual "Report Card" for each current Subgrantee highlighting best practices and flagging issues needing improvement or compliance. TCN convenes a special EAP session at its Annual National Conference each February. EAP reps receive training and information on best practices while networking with other Corps staff.

TCN assesses programs throughout the year to monitor for risk and noncompliance. If any instances

Narratives

are identified, TCN staff notifies the Subgrantees via email. If the issue of noncompliance persists, TCN staff sets up a call with appropriate Subgrantee staff to discuss a corrective action plan. In the past, if non-compliance continues, sites are asked to take a leave from the EAP program until they can prove that they will be compliant.

PAST PERFORMANCE: The Corps Network has a successful track record of performance with CNCS grants. In the past three years, EAP members exceeded the performance measurement goals set at the beginning of each program year. Corps improved 160,000 acres of parks and public lands, constructed and/or improved 7,600 miles of trails and 630 miles of waterways on public lands, made 629 housing units more energy efficient, safe, and/or available for low income families or people with disabilities. CNCS recently recognized EAP members who were part of 2014 crews providing disaster relief services in a recent newsletter. **WA Conservation Corps-Oso Mudslide:** Over the course of a month, 83 members and 25 staff served over 18,500 hours in response to the massive mudslide. WCC primarily assisted with logistics on site, supporting spike camps as well as the Incident Command Post, and some field conservation work. WCC served 13,700 meals to responders, collected/distributed 6,350 pounds of donations, constructed 9,400 feet of drainage ditches, cleared 3,500 feet of trail, spread 3,300 feet of gravel and cleared 220 obstruction trees from in and around the debris field. **Conservation Corps MN & IA-Summer Flooding:** Crews in MN sandbagged to protect property and homes, focusing their efforts on elderly and disabled households. **CA Conservation Corps-Summer Wildfires:** CCC deployed over 500 members (100 A*C) and staff throughout the state in response to the record setting wildfires, providing both frontline attack and logistical support to Cal Fire and the USFS.

Enrollment: This is the first grant cycle that TCN has not filled 100% of its awarded slots. Several programs dropped out at the beginning of the program year because they got fully-funded A*C slots or had funding shortfalls that required them to reduce the number of members they could enroll. TCN staff worked tirelessly to fill as many slots as possible. At the end of the program year TCN filled about 92% of the awarded slots. Because EAP sites cannot always predict the economy and partner funding a year in advance, TCN has implemented a new policy to encourage 100% enrollment. However, TCN is asking for fewer slots than prior years to ensure we fill 100% of slots awarded.

Retention: Given that our Corps serve many Opportunity Youth and other disadvantaged young people, who may need to leave the program for economic (they need a job to support themselves and/or their family) or family (they need to care for a child or parent) reasons, retention is always a challenge. However, TCN and our Subgrantees are always looking for ways to improve. Currently,

Narratives

the retention rate for our EAP is 86.4%; in the last grant cycle it was 82.5%. Corps have increased their retention rates over the past few years in a number of ways. Corps clearly communicate the expectations of the position during recruitment and assess member commitment prior to enrollment. The commitment is reinforced during orientation and throughout the term. Staff work directly with individual members to address any challenges that might prevent them from completing the term. Some Corps offer members incentives for completion and/or disincentives for early exit. Some Corps impose a waiting period before enrolling members to determine who is likely to complete the term while others have chosen to use shorter terms to increase retention rates. EAP Subgrantees will continue to use these and other best practices to steadily improve the retention rates.

Compliance Issues: Inconsistent staffing at Subgrantee sites is the most common factor that leads to compliance issues, like missed deadlines and late enrollments. While TCN has always provided comprehensive training to all staff at scheduled times, and individually as needed, the EAP application and Site Agreements were recently updated to address this shortfall. The changes include more stringent requirements, like always having at least two staff at each site who are trained to oversee EAP and use eGrants. We also encourage the use of succession plans. Further, TCN conducts webinars that are well attended, sends consistent reminders of deadlines and requirements, and provides a multitude of guidance documents. Technical assistance is always available by phone or email; when compliance issues are raised, TCN staff respond swiftly with the appropriate guidance.

Budget/Cost Effectiveness

COST EFFECTIVENESS: Because TCN is requesting funding to administer its EAP as opposed to a fully funded program, our budget pertains to the administrative functions of running the program as opposed to line items for staff, members, service projects, and as a result it does not directly align with the narrative.

Specifically, TCN is requesting \$800 per MSY for 1104.94 MSY for a total of \$883,952 per year to support 2670 A*C members. Full funding for 1104.94 MSY (or 2670 A*C members) at \$1373 per MSY, would cost CNCS just over \$15 million a year. Therefore, TCN's EAP supports over a 1000 MSY and over 2600 EAP members at a fraction of the cost of a fully funded program.

Moreover, according to our Corps, the actual cost per member per year is approximately \$20,000, so the actual cost of serving 2670 members would be over \$53 million a year. As a result, our Corps are bringing over \$52 million in matching funds to the program, which represent a very cost effective program for CNCS.

The vast majority of TCN's EAP sites have successfully managed A*C programs for many years and

Narratives

are very capable of covering the additional costs associated with supporting members and staff, including criminal history checks, education and training, transition services, member development, and service projects. For instance, Los Angeles Conservation Corps annual fundraising luncheon garnered almost \$1 million in 2014 from individuals and corporations. Youth Conservation Corps (IL) 30th annual Golf Outing raised \$200,000 last year. Northwest Youth Corps (NYC), like most Corps has a demonstrated ability to leverage additional financial and/or in-kind resources from a variety of federal and nonfederal sources. Last year, about 70% of NYC's operating revenue came from Cooperative Agreements with project partners like NPS and USFS. Similarly, Orange County Conservation Corps and other CA local Corps receive CalRecycle funds from the state to collect recyclable materials for processing and repurposing, and, Louisiana Green Corps and Fresh Start (WI) receive WIA funding to target more Opportunity Youth.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

The Corps Network and a number of members Corps have contracted with researchers at North Carolina State and Brigham Young Universities to determine if the environmental stewardship projects completed by Corps improve ecosystem health and increase user activity.

Past Research and Existing Evidence:

Multiple studies exist on the impact of Corps on participants (e.g., Duerden, et al., 2013; Education Northwest, 2013). Each evaluation provides strong evidence that the Corps experience improves participants' community engagement, environmental engagement, teamwork, leadership, communication skills and grit. Emerging research demonstrates the efficacy of conservation work to provide broader social, health, and economic benefits. The primary conservation activities of Corps are improvements to public lands and stewardship.

Research links land improvement activities like those conducted by Corps to long-term community and ecosystem impacts. Improving public parks and habitats is associated with increased ecosystem services, improved biodiversity, and environmental health (Benayas et al., 2009; Suding, 2011). Controlling invasive species has major financial implications (Pimentel, et al., 2005) and can positively impact outdoor recreation (Eiswerth, et al., 2005; Julia, et al., 2007). Conservation activities can ensure that publicly accessible ecosystems remain healthy despite high human contact (Alessa et al., 2003). Numerous studies also indicate how poorly constructed trails negatively influence the quality of recreation and decrease visitation (Roggenbuck, et al., 1993; Vaske, et al., 1993). When trails are built and maintained properly, they have the potential to produce direct economic benefits through visitor expenditures on equipment, food, transportation, and lodging (Moore, et al., 1994).

Narratives

Theory of Change, Logic Model & Outcomes:

For this evaluation, there are two primary long-term impacts associated with Corps activities - - improving public parks and habitats promotes ecosystem health and improving trail conditions increases the quality of trails, leading to higher accessibility and usage and enhanced visitor experiences. While measuring the long-term impact of these activities lie outside the scope of a program evaluation, key antecedent mechanisms will be evaluated as program outputs/outcomes.

Research Questions to be addressed in the Evaluation

1. Do projects focused on improving, protecting, and restoring public parks and habitats improve visually assessed ecosystem health?
2. Do projects focused on improving or constructing trails improve the visually assessed quality of trails?

Study Components

A standardized form will be used to document project outputs, including numbers of acres/miles improved and characteristics of improvements (Years 1-3). Improvements will be photographed and geocoded. Using a quasi-experimental design, the following research questions will be addressed.

RQ1: Do projects focused on improving and restoring habitats improve visually assessed ecosystem health?

Working with Corps, the evaluation team will develop a visual assessment tool informed by existing instruments (e.g., Rangeland Health Evaluation Summary Worksheet [Pyke et al., 2002]). Principles of evaluation (e.g., CDC, 1999), suggest developing practical tools relevant to project goals can provide more accurate and useable information. Visual assessments provide real-time measures of observable indicators associated with ecosystem health. Measures will focus on key indicators of ecosystem health including soil erosion, species composition and mortality, and presence of litter. Instruments will be developed in both paper and online (via mobile application) formats. Pilot testing will occur prior to implementation (Year 2).

Conservation Service Projects will be the population and a census approach will be used. The evaluation team will provide training on the use of assessment tools and protocols to establish reliable observations (Year 2). Trained observers will assess projects at the beginning (Year 3) to determine baseline levels of habitat health and again at the end of the project to determine level of improvement. Follow up observations of all projects will be used to determine maintenance of improvements.

Narratives

Scores will be indexed to calculate a visual health score for each plot. Pre and Post scores will be compared using repeated measures analyses (e.g., ANOVA, linear mixed models) with relevant controls. Evaluating maintenance of improvements at baseline, project completion, and follow up will be conducted using linear growth models.

RQ2: Do projects focused on improving or constructing trails improve the visual quality of trails, increase usage of trails, and increase visitor safety?

Working with Corps staff, the evaluation team will develop a visual trail quality assessment tool informed by existing instruments (e.g., EAPRS [Saelens, 2006], Recreation Trail Scorecard [Wilkerson & Whitman, 2009]). Measures will focus on key indicators of quality linked to visitor experience and ecosystem health (e.g., presence of social trails, erosion, water/mud, hazards, and barriers).

Year 1 - Pilot testing prior to implementation. Conservation Service Projects will be the population using a census approach. The evaluation team will provide training on use of assessment tools and protocols to establish reliable observations. Trained observers will assess projects at the beginning to determine baseline levels of trail segment quality and again at the end to determine level of improvement.

Year 2 - Follow up observations of all trail segments will be conducted to determine maintenance of improvements.

Scores will be indexed to calculate a visual quality score for each project area. Pre and Post scores will be compared using repeated measures with relevant controls. Evaluating the maintenance of improvements at baseline, project completion, and follow up will be conducted using linear growth models.

Evaluation Team: Led by Dr. Michael Edwards of NC State University and Dr. Mat Duerden of Brigham Young University. Dr. Edwards currently serves on the evaluation team for a Community Transformation Project, funded by CDC and NC Dept. of Public Health. He is also leading a project co-funded by the CDC and National Park Service aimed at identifying metrics for the contribution of parks and trails to public health goals. Dr. Duerden has conducted evaluations for over 10 years with specific focus on youth serving agencies including non-profits and governmental organizations. He has published related articles in a number of Journals including Journal of Youth Development and Journal of Park and Recreation Administration. Drs. Edwards and Duerden have co-led multiple conservation program evaluations for the Public Lands Service Coalition and The Corps Network since 2010.

Narratives

Estimated Budget: \$179,937

Amendment Justification

n/a

Clarification Summary

Clarification Summary

We have amended our Operating Sites to include Kupu (HI) and YMCA project both in the last grant cycle, Onondaga (NY) in last grant cycle as a Service Location of a Subgrantee, and VA State Parks which has been interested in joining the EAP for a couple years and are ready to participate now. All do our Performance Measures and are filling the slot gap left by Limitless Vistas (recently dropped out) and other Sites cutting back on their original slot requests.

Many of our Corps enroll Opportunity Youth and many run summer programs as well. Just last month, at the request of CNCS, The Corps Network (TCN) surveyed its membership to see how many Corps would be interested in participating in a summer program for Opportunity Youth. Three EAP sites indicated that they could 4.23 MSY/20 MT slots.

This was my first time using this particular application format and I clicked on the "multi-focus intermediary" option by accident and was unable to manually rectify the mistake. TCN is NOT a multi-focus intermediary. I contacted our program officer immediately upon recognizing my mistake but did not receive a response. If there is a way to "uncheck" this particular option, please advise.

I submitted a copy of our evaluation report titled, "2013 PLSC Evaluation Report," on January 20, 2015 and received confirmation of receipt by email on the January 21, 2015. I brought the issue of the missing evaluation to the attention of our program officer on April 13, 2015 and received the following response on the same day: "Thank you for sending verification of the submission of your evaluation document. Your email has been shared with the appropriate staff, who are investigating this issue." Regardless, here is a link to the evaluation referenced in our application and originally submitted. <http://gallery.mailchimp.com/cd9ee0d38cf07a7b716589cf6/files/6f6fd925-3035-4b0b-86d4-7950e1bad08e.pdf>

Narratives

Over the past two years, TCN has implemented several changes designed to discourage the return of unused EAP slots and to encourage 100% enrollment by our subgrantees. We now require programs to indicate on their application whether they are seeking slots from any other sources and if so, to factor those slots into their request from TCN. As a result, TCN is requesting fewer slots for 2015-2016 than in previous years. We also do regular check-ins with our subgrantees to ensure that they are on target for filling their allotment and readjust accordingly. Finally, programs not filling all of their granted slots may be penalized by having to forfeit some or all of the funds they receive for administrative purposes.

TCN specifically requires program staff to directly address the time commitment, nature of service, and essential functions of the position, as well as the candidates' ability to meet those expectations, during the interview process. This helps ensure a good fit for both the Corps and the applicant. In addition, interviewers ask the candidates if they foresee any impediments to completing the AmeriCorps term of service. Further, many sites have been, or are going to start, selecting EAP members from current or previous cohorts of Corpsmembers who have already demonstrated a level of commitment to the program and are therefore more likely to produce successful outcomes.

Funding/Demographics - Other Revenue Funds. This is the first time EAP was required to provide any funding information beyond the admin fee. We somehow doubled the amount we meant to provide. Our calculation is $1105 \text{ MSY} \times \$20,000 \text{ per member}$ (average cost per members for our Corps) = \$22,100,000 and it has been corrected in eGrants. This is an estimate of funds the Subgrantees will secure for their participation in the EAP.

During the Logic Model and Performance Measure workshops at the Grantee Symposium, and reiterated on subsequent webinars, TCN and other grantees were specifically instructed to include all relevant activities in their logic model but to choose (for the purpose of tracking and reporting data) only those PMs that represent the most significant amount of the service in which EAP members are engaged. Therefore, we mentioned Disaster Services and Opportunity Youth in our Logic Model, as many of our EAP sites do enroll Opportunity Youth and deliver Disaster Services, but chose Environmental Service (EN4 and EN5) as our "official" PMs because that is the area in which the majority of service occurs and many Disaster Services are included in those PMs.

Narratives

As explained above, we were directed to only create Performance Measures for our main service activities. With such a large and diverse group of programs, the "other" category is comprised of many different types of service, but none with a large enough impact to warrant a 5th PM. Further, many of our Environmental Stewardship projects involve activities that, while they certainly improve the environment, are not reportable under EN4 and EN5. Some of these activities include energy audits, weatherization, and rehabilitation of public buildings (not included in our O4 PM); emergency response (assisting base camps); environmental education and outreach; habitat and population monitoring; cultural resource survey and recordation; stream monitoring, water sample collection and analysis, mapping of abandoned mine lines, invasive species research, wildlife monitoring and much more.

Only acres or miles deemed "improved" or "greatly improved" will be counted towards the EN4.1 and EN5.1. The land management survey assessment of "improved" meets the CNCS definition for EN4.1 and EN5.1.

Regarding double-counting of project outcomes for all Performance Measures, The Corps Network provides very clear guidance to all of its subgrantees on the prohibition of, and ways to avoid, double counting. We monitor compliance via project tracking forms and reporting worksheets

Strategic Engagement Slots: Corps accept all who are able to successfully complete the service requirements of the individual programs and provide reasonable accommodations to participants with disabilities. Further, a number of Corps intentionally recruit and provide programming designed for this population. Generally speaking, however, Corps enroll participants with disabilities in their fully funded programs (as opposed to EAP), which enables them to provide the additional supports and services necessary to adequately serve this population. Because EAP slots come with very limited funding, we do not require subgrantees to enroll a certain number or percentage of members with disabilities as we might do under a fully funded programs.

We deleted the O4 Housing Performance Measure. Due to the expansion of the OYSI grant a couple programs in both EAP and OYSI (which does O4) are now only focusing on Environmental PMs for EAP. Corps still do energy audits (which aren't part of the O4 PM), weatherization, construction, rehab and repair so we want to keep this activity in our Logic Model and application, but feel the

Narratives

impact of those reporting on O4 isn't enough to warrant a PM. As a result of the redistribution of slots/MSY from O4, Environmental Stewardship increased by 12.38 MSY and 30 slots and 'Other' 10 MSY/25 slots.

Continuation Changes

Grant Characteristics