

Narratives

Executive Summary

The Corps Network proposes to have 31 AmeriCorps members, including 25 disconnected youth members (80%), who will engage in environmental stewardship and housing projects, while obtaining high school diplomas/GEDs, industry recognized credentials, and workplace readiness skills in Baltimore, MD; and Waukegan, IL. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for improving 50 acres of public lands, 1 mile of trails, and 4 homes for low-income people. After successfully completing the program, 15 of 25 (60%) of all AmeriCorps members provided with workforce development services, will obtain employment; 3 of an estimated 5 (60%) of AmeriCorps members without a high school credential upon enrollment will obtain a diploma or GED; and of the 25 (80%) disconnected AmeriCorps members that complete the program successfully, 19 (76%) will avoid recidivism and 14 (56%) will show positive engagement changes. The CNCS investment of \$185,345 will be matched with \$295,556 (61% of outlays) - \$212,896 in public funding and \$82,660 in private funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

The Corps Network (TCN) is the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps. TCN proposes a "Civic Justice Initiative (CJI)," which would build on TCN's 10+ years of experience with service-based, diversion and re-entry programming for court-involved opportunity youth. In 2005, in partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates and Open Society Foundations, and with support from CNCS and the US Department of Labor, TCN developed the Civic Justice Corps (CJC) model. The CJC model has 8 key components: (1) partnerships with justice agencies, (2) partnerships with workforce development providers/employers, (3) educational attainment and postsecondary connections, (4) meaningful service projects/service learning, (5) Corpsmember development, (6) local support, (7) staff development, and (8) post-program support and follow-up. TCN's CJC model has helped hundreds of previously court-involved youth move into the workforce and become productive citizens. This new initiative (CJI) would add a significant mentoring component to the traditional CJC model by enrolling additional AmeriCorps members specifically recruited, selected, and trained for their ability to mentor and support disconnected youth that have been adjudicated in the juvenile justice system, convicted in the criminal justice system, or at risk of incarceration.

The critical problems that the CJI will address include: (1) youth disengagement from the workforce and education systems; (2) high rates of adjudication, incarceration, and recidivism among disconnected youth; (3) declining ecosystem health and decreased quality of, and access to, parks,

Narratives

trails, and other outdoor recreational facilities; and (4) a lack of safe, efficient, and affordable housing for low-income individuals.

PROBLEM (1): YOUTH DISENGAGEMENT FROM THE WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION SYSTEMS: 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 (almost 17% of that age group), who are out of school and out of work (The Economic Value of Opportunity youth, 2012). With almost one million more youth becoming disconnected from education and workforce each year (Collective Impact for Opportunity youth, 2012) there is an urgent need to re-engage these young people. Corps like Civic Works, Greater Miami Service Corps, Limitless Vistas, Inc., and Youth Conservation Corps, have been utilizing service as a strategy to deliver education, job training, and hands-on work experience to disadvantaged youth for 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." 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 Corps participants increased from 50% to 68%.

PROBLEM (2): HIGH RATES OF ADJUDICATION, INCARCERATION, AND RECIDIVISM AMONG DISCONNECTED YOUTH: According to data collected by the National Institute of Justice and OJJDP, about 200,000 people ages 24 and younger leave juvenile facilities or prisons every year and approximately 75% return to prison within three years of release. Corps have been effectively providing diversion and re-entry services to this population for many years. A recent (2014) report by the Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections highlighted Baltimore's Civic Works, as a successful "green re-entry program" and recognized the CJC model as a proven opportunity for young people to give back to their communities, while also gaining education and employability skills and receiving supportive services. Moreover, the results produced by the original 14 CJC pilot programs were significant and impressive. Of 559 participants, 436 (78%) had been previously incarcerated. Upon completion of the program, 47% received a high school diploma or GED, 79% were placed in jobs or further education, and 72% of those retained those placements. Most remarkably, the recidivism rate was 10% while the prevailing rate in those communities ranged from 50% to 70%.

PROBLEM (3): DECLINING ECOSYSTEM HEALTH AND DECREASED QUALITY OF, AND ACCESS TO, PARKS, TRAILS, AND OTHER OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL FACILITIES: Our public

Narratives

lands and waters, which "provide critical ecosystem services like cleaning our air, purifying our water, absorbing pollution, preventing flood and erosion, and providing habitat for diverse species of wildlife," are deteriorating and/or disappearing (America's Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations, Feb 2011). They face threats from development, unsustainable use, pollution, and climate change. For example, Southeast Louisiana, where Limitless Vistas, Inc. is located, has been heavily impacted by the loss of wetlands. If current land loss rates continues, by 2040 Louisiana will have lost more than one million acres of coastal wetlands (The Fragile Fringe: Coastal Wetlands of the Continental United States, 1992). Urban public lands and waters do not fare any better. 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 undrinkable, unfishable, and unswimable (US Fish and Wildlife Service, 2011). At the same time, federal land and water management agencies report backlogged maintenance needs totaling more than \$25 million while up 40% of their current workforce is eligible to retire. TCN's Corps programs, because of their broad geographical reach, significant experience, and unique skill sets, are ideally suited to address these issues on our public lands and provide a career ready workforce.

PROBLEM (4): A LACK OF SAFE, EFFICIENT, AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: The National Low Income Housing Coalition reports that approximately 95 million Americans experience housing problems related to affordability, accessibility, 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. 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. For example, over the last several years, Civic Works made energy improvements to 6,000 households. They rehabbed, repaired, or weatherized 700 homes, and helped secure living wage employment for 90% of their Green Careers program

Narratives

graduates.

THEORY OF CHANGE: The Corps Network's Civic Justice Initiative is designed to address the four needs above. TCN's model will work at intersection of green labor market needs, housing problems, and workforce development and educational needs for court-involved young people. AC members will engage in service activities that are designed to address the ecosystem deterioration and housing needs in the AC members' communities.

If disconnected youth are provided opportunities for skill development in a supportive environment, they will successfully reengage into the workforce development and education systems, thereby increasing their self-sufficiency and earning potential. To successfully reengage opportunity youth, there is a need for programs to provide a sense of belonging, positive role models and access to a holistic menu of social and emotional supports (Corcoran, Hanleybrown, Steinberg, & Tallant 2012) - all of which are incorporated into the Corps model. Corps provide programs that include elements that are recognized as best practices in successfully engaging youth, including high expectations, wrap-around support, work-relevant learning opportunities, and a connected, caring adult (White House Council on Community Solutions 2012). A recently released study on Youth Corps by Abt Associates reported that 77.1% of AC members asserted that experience in the Corps gave them an advantage when looking for a job. Many AC members go on to careers specifically in public service and conservation. According to the US Forest Service, more than 12% of their current employees spent time in a Corps. Therefore, engaging opportunity youth in Corps programs is an ideal scenario: AC members will develop work readiness skills necessary for career and post-secondary opportunities as well as valued labor market skills that will position them to pursue living-wage careers.

If disconnected youth are provided with services to reduce barriers, caring adults and mentors, opportunities for skill building and self-esteem building, and assistance with pending legal matters, they will not reengage with the justice system and will become contributing members of society, decreasing poverty and crime in communities they thrive in.

Mentors' availability to AC members' will allow for more flexible, proactive, and, if necessary, reactive support. The mentoring relationships will ensure that opportunity youth AC members have role models to support them as they navigate their AmeriCorps experience, increasing the likelihood of successful completion of the program. These activities will exponentially increase the likelihood of successful reengagement for adjudicated opportunity youth by addressing their most commonly cited obstacles directly.

If low-income households are provided with energy efficiency education and services as well as home

Narratives

safety improvement services, then they will be more likely to sustain these measures and their homes will be more accessible, affordable, and individuals' health will be improved. These service activities also give AC members hands-on work experience and connections to employers in sectors that can lead to living wage careers.

If public lands and trails are treated with services such as invasive species removal and habitat restoration, ecosystem health will improve and more people will engage in outdoor recreational activities, thereby increasing environmental stewardship and the health of individuals. The public lands service activities will have a direct positive impact on the public lands, increasing the ecosystem health, safety, accessibility, and appeal of parks and trails. In terms of community and conservation efforts, in a study administered by researchers at Texas A&M, Corpsmembers reported significantly increased community engagement, positive attitudes towards public lands, and environmental activism. Participants also experienced significantly higher developmental outcomes, with Corpsmembers reporting increases in their ability to work in teams, leadership skills and self-responsibility. CJI will make a significant impact by addressing both Corpsmembers' and communities' needs.

EVIDENCE BASE: 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).

Another pillar of the CJI program is to perform energy audits and other activities that will reduce costs and increase energy efficiency for low income households. The DOE Weather Assistance Program, which had the same methods and goals, found an average savings of \$436.64 per household, with high societal benefits, including reduced carbon dioxide emissions (Eisenberg, 2010).

Narratives

Further, studies have shown that, broadly, energy efficiency can have tremendous environmental and economic impacts; researchers suggest that if energy efficiency programs are brought to scale, the United States could see a savings of 9.1 quadrillion BTUs and a gross energy savings of \$1.2 trillion (Granade et al., 2009)

NOTICE PRIORITIES: In this initiative, Corps will largely facilitate community service projects that will fall under the CNCS Focus Area of Environmental Stewardship as they work to improve at-risk ecosystems, improve energy efficiency, reduce consumption and provide green training opportunities. AC member outcomes address Economic Opportunity (job skills, improved employability, educational attainment, and reduced recidivism).

All subgrantees will be serving high-need areas and enrolling primarily disconnected youth. During the RFP process, TCN required applicants to provide information about the communities in which they serve. According to a 2013 American Community Survey, 24.5% of all Baltimore (home of Civic Works) residents have incomes below the poverty line. Further, 41.9% of Baltimore residents aged 16-19 and 23.5% of those aged 20-24 are unemployed. Likewise, in New Orleans Parish, where Limitless Vistas, Inc. is based, the percentage of persons living below the poverty line is 27.3%. In communities throughout North Chicago, served by Waukegan's Youth Conservation Corps, the high school dropout rates range from 30% to nearly 42%. And, in some neighborhoods in Miami-Dade County (home of Greater Miami Service Corps), the crime rate is nearly ten times the national average (Neighborhood Scout Report. www.neighborhoodscout.com/fl/miami/crime).

MEMBER TRAINING begins with orientation and continues throughout the program. Although orientation may vary in length by Corps, all include an overview of AmeriCorps, 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. During orientation, AC members meet with a case manager to conduct a needs assessment and develop an individual development/training plan (IDP), which outlines the AC member goals (education and career), identifies potential challenges, and includes a plan for overcoming those challenges and meeting those goals. Following orientation, AC members engage in a structured regiment of education and training that is reinforced, and made relevant, through service-learning projects. Some of the specific education/training opportunities include: HSD/GED, NCCER and HBI Basic Construction, 40-Hour HAZWOPER training, 10-hour OSHA training, commercial drivers license, First Aid, and CPR. Other credentials that will also be provided include American Hotel and Lodging certification for Front Desk Representative, Restaurant Server, and Maintenance Technician.

Narratives

AC mentors, and in some cases mentees, will engage in specialized training designed to facilitate and increase the effectiveness of that relationship. For instance, Civic Works is a current subgrantee in an OJJDP-funded YouthBuild USA mentoring program and will use the model to train both mentors and mentees. Greater Miami Service Corps mentors will be provided Success Coach training through ServiceWorks and The National Mentoring Alliance. All four Corps will develop a training plan utilizing resources from the National Mentoring Resource Center, like "Training New Mentors: Effective Strategies for Providing Quality Youth Mentoring in Schools and Communities," and, "Elements of Effective Practice for Mentors." All training plans will be reviewed and approved by TCN staff.

MEMBER SUPERVISION: Following orientation, all AC members (disconnected youth and mentors) will be assigned to teams or "Crews" that include 6-12 AC members and 1-2 highly trained supervisors or Crewleaders, in addition to their individual mentors. Crewleaders 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, usually consisting of a combination of classroom training, hands-on training, and demonstrations. Topics include supervising and motivating participants, behavior management, conflict resolution, discipline, leadership, time management, risk management and ethics. Crewleaders serve as role models, mentors, and direct service and training providers for AC members.

MEMBER EXPERIENCE: To ensure that all members have meaningful service experiences, Corps staff identify and line up service projects months in advance. Members interact with effected community members regarding their expectations for the projects. At the end of each service day, 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. Members are encouraged to think about the importance of their efforts and, more generally, the importance of national service. Through state and national networks, such as state commissions, NCCC, FEMA Corps, AmeriCorps Alums, and The Corps Network, members are given the opportunity to learn more about other AC programs and national service. 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 AC Week. In a 2014 Evaluation of the NYC Justice Corps (Westat), which drew upon TCN's CJC model, participants "praised the program." Respondents felt that because of the program, they had become more "patient, mature, and wise." They felt that the program helped them "improve their communication skills and

Narratives

gain the other skills and knowledge necessary to find and maintain employment after graduation." Each year at TCN's National Conference, we highlight, "Corpsmembers of the Year," competitively selected from a national pool of nominations. These Corpsmembers often attribute much of their success to the support and opportunities provided to them by the Corps.

COMMITMENT TO AC IDENTIFICATION: TCN has a long partnership with CNCS and actively promotes AmeriCorps on our website and all relevant material. All Corps participating in any of our AC programs are required to prominently display the AC logo on their gear and materials. Beyond ensuring the logo is well represented, Corps work from the beginning of the recruitment process to emphasize and instill an ethic of service in all AC members, part of which includes sharing the rich history of AmeriCorps and the national service movement.

Organizational Capability

The Corps Network (TCN) represents and support more than 120 Service and Conservation Corps, many of which have been in existence and changing lives and communities through service for several decades. Since its establishment in 1985, TCN member Corps have engaged nearly 1 million young people in service.

STAFFING AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE: TCN has an experienced team to lead this Civic Justice Initiative. Capri St. Vil, Director of Education Programs, will work closely with the sites in the development and implementation of educational, workforce development, and mentor programming. Ms. St. Vil has worked for the last 25 years extensively with foster care, court-involved and other at-risk youth in the area of education and workforce development in New York City, Seattle, and DC. She has developed curriculum and training programs and has taught on the high school, community college, and university levels, including special education. She developed and managed an education and workforce development program in NYC, and coordinated services for students with disabilities. Carolyn Benard, with just over 11 years of experience managing federal grants, manages all TCN grants for both financial and programmatic compliance. Ms. Benard has completed a Federal Grants Management Certificate for Pass-Through Organizations from Management Concepts, one of the contracted trainers for federal agencies. 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.

EXPERIENCE ADMINISTERING AMERICORPS AND OTHER FEDERAL GRANTS:

Narratives

For nearly 30 years, TCN has managed many major federal awards involving collaboration with and oversight of multiple sub-sites, including 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 AmeriCorps portfolio. During the most recent five years, TCN has managed the following CNCS grants:

(1) Opportunity Youth Service Initiative. October 2013 -- ongoing. Year 1 approximately 2.4 million, Year 2 approximately 3.28 million. OYSI supports 12 Corps in 13 different states that have enrolled 671 members to date, of which 282 have earned Education Awards (307 still active). All slots have been filled to date, and the average retention rate is 84% for Year 1. (2) Clean Energy Service Corps. October 2010 - Sept 2013; Approximately \$1.2 million annually supporting 9 Corps in 8 different states. All 617 slots were filled and the average retention rate was 79%. (3) Civic Justice Corps. January 2009 - Dec 2012; 24 MSY; \$312,000 annually supporting 3 Corps in 3 different states. All 150 slots were filled and the average retention was 68%. (4) EAP. July 2009 - June 2012; 1,360 MSY annually with an award of \$1,060,166 in year 3. Fill rate was 99% - 100%. Average retention rate was 90%.

Findings in over a decade of A-133 audits have been minimal to none; Over the last four years only one finding was identified, related to new requirements for FFATA Sub-award Reporting (FSRS), and was immediately rectified. 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.

ENGAGEMENT IN PLANNING INTERVENTIONS: Information provided in proposals regarding site leadership, staffing, and ability to generate local support and collaborate with other stakeholders demonstrates organizational sophistication and strength, and deep roots in community. On the surface subgrantees vary as widely as their geography and demographics, yet they all share commitments to excellence in operations, collaboration, and community capacity-building.

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP IN IMPLEMENTATION: A key partner will be the National League of Cities (NLC), and the cities in which our subgrantees are located. NLC's Institute for Youth, Education and Families is currently engaged in a strategic partnership focused on municipal leadership for juvenile justice reform. TCN will work with NLC to develop a set of best practices, encourage the connection of city, and where applicable county, juvenile justice system with subgrantees, and identify points of collaboration. The relationship with the Corps will begin during recruitment via the referral to the Corps program through the local JJS or other agencies and

Narratives

continue to evolve. The Corps will work closely with NLC through TCN and are responsible for working with the local JJS to ensure disconnected AC members are making progress toward expungement and/or diversion if necessary.

STATE COMMISSION CONSULTATION: As a multi-site national program we submit consultation forms to each state commission as required.

PREVENTION AND DETECTION OF COMPLIANCE ISSUES: The Corps Network administered a national competition among our Organizational Member Corps. Proposals were reviewed and scored by a group of reviewers that signed conflict of interest statements to ensure no preferential treatment was given. TCN has selected Corps that have proved their ability to manage programs, grants, and finances. All four of our selected Corps programs have AmeriCorps program management and reporting experience. That, coupled with TCN's extensive experience in training and supporting programs to manage AmeriCorps, enables us to bring newer staff or sites up to speed as necessary. Technical assistance is provided both before the start of the program and throughout to support effective implementation at each location. TCN convenes special subgrantee sessions at its annual National Conference each February. Subgrantee staff receive training and information on best practices while networking with other Corps staff.

Recently, through required reporting, it came to light that one of the Corps participating in OYSI was having difficulty recruiting mentors who were able to meet the needs of the AC Members as well as participate fully in the program design. Through community partnerships for mentors as well as mentor training, this concern is being addressed with the support of TCN staff before it becomes a compliance issue.

The Corps Network requires subgrantees to submit reimbursement requests on a monthly basis. This is to proactively manage expenditures and budget compliance. Documentation is required for most expenses such as supplies, travel, and training, but is only initially required for personnel and benefit expenses as well as indirect cost plans. Match is reported monthly and back-up is reviewed on a random check basis. Program Reports are submitted quarterly in the initial year of a grant, and then bi-annually to TCN to match CNCS requirements. Reports are reviewed for questions, challenges we can help address through technical assistance, and any discrepancies we may have with eGrants generated reports.

RESPONSE TO RISKS AND COMPLIANCE ISSUES IDENTIFIED: The Corps Network has established an internal monitoring guide for grants management that outlines staff responsibilities, applicable regulations to apply to each review, documents and systems to review and how to review

Narratives

each, writing the report and following up with the subgrantee. High-risk subgrantees are prioritized and risk is determined by a number of factors outlined in an assessment form including: experience with grants, financial structure and diversity, previous audit results and corrective actions, history of compliance and staff experience and retention. TCN assesses programs throughout the year to monitor for risk and noncompliance. If any instances are identified, TCN staff notifies the Subgrantees and collaboratively creates an improvement plan, usually to include monthly scheduled check-in calls as well as a site visit. If the issue of noncompliance persists, TCN staff set up a call with appropriate Subgrantee staff to discuss the corrective action plan progress and consequences for non-compliance related to future funding.

COMPLIANCE WITH AMERICORPS RULES AND REGULATIONS: Education regarding, and notification of, federal regulations, rules, cost principles, and AmeriCorps Provisions, begins with the release of a NOFA from TCN which references and highlights critical compliance guidance. TCN requires Corps to submit an Accounting Questionnaire, Assurances and Certifications, and SAM/EPLS results. After a subgrant has been awarded, TCN issues Subgrantee Agreements which include citations to all relevant regulations as well as Terms and Conditions (audits and compliance, termination, conflict of interest, and records retention). Subgrantees are also required to complete CNCS Financial Management Training online within 60 days of the award date.

To ensure ongoing compliance, TCN staff will conduct regular conference calls, webinars, desk audits, and site visits, and provide Corps with a variety of resources, including an AmeriCorps Program Manual that is continually updated. The manual contains guidance, policies and procedures, and requirements for running a successful AmeriCorps program including: AmeriCorps 101 Basics (eGrants, Pledge, Member Benefits, Host Site Management, and Branding); Subgrantee Requirements (Monitoring Information, Member Management, Criminal History Checks, and Desk Audit forms); Data Collection and Reporting; Financial Management (Budget, Match and In-Kind, Reimbursement Requests, Time and Activity Reporting, and TCN Financial Management Policy); AC Member Enrollment, Recruiting, Interviewing and Orientation (Position Descriptions, File Checklist, Prohibited Activities, Non-discrimination and Reasonable Accommodation, and Service Agreement Template); Conducting Criminal History Checks; AC Member Support and Resources; Exiting AC Members; and the Education Award.

National Service Criminal History Checks for staff and members are paid for either by the subgrantee, sponsoring organization, or from the CNCS share of the grant - TCN reviews all grant budget proposals to ensure that line item is present and accounted for. TCN staff background checks are done

Narratives

in-house with organizational funds. Criminal history checks conducted for members and staff include an FBI fingerprint check in addition to the state registry check and the NSOPR for anyone with recurring access to vulnerable populations. TCN verifies this through collection of a "Background Check Verification" form that is filled out by each Subgrantee before every program year.

HISTORY OF MEETING PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT TARGETS (3 YEARS): TCN has a long history of administering successful CNCS-funded programs. In the past three years, TCN has had two CNCS funded initiatives: the Clean Energy Service Corps (2010-2013) and the Opportunity Youth Service Initiative (2013-current). Both CESC and OYSI operated under multiple performance measures. Though both programs met or exceeded their goals for some performance measures like number of energy audits conducted for CESC (1,585 of 1,200 target) and acres of public lands improved for OYSI (3,823 of 2,700 target), they did not meet 100% of their goals for all performance measures (e.g. OYSI 279 of 640 miles of trails treated to date). Some of this is due to project work on public lands initially identified changing in nature or scope; long-term projects that are still in process; and/or surveys not returned for services provided yet (acres/miles not included). For OYSI, CNCS set AC member outcomes for employment placement one year out from graduation, therefore much of the member data is not yet available. For CJI, TCN plans to work with sites to create realistic goals and use data collection for performance management to monitor sites' progress towards goals on an ongoing basis.

MEMBER ENROLLMENT: TCN has had 100% member enrollment for the last three CNCS National Direct grants (CJC, CESC, and OYSI), which represents a successful track record for 7 consecutive years. We proactively manage slots with subgrantees and if challenges arise, immediately reallocate to Corps that can successfully fill and manage the slots.

MEMBER RETENTION: In 2012, CESC had a member retention rate of 79% and OYSI currently has a retention rate of 84%. Though this is less than the desired 100% retention, these programs all work to identify resources to support the high-needs population they serve and reduce barriers to success. The retention rates for these programs continue to improve because staff have more experience and TCN provides additional T/TA, including best practices. Strategies identified include, but are not limited to: interview questions to determine desire for education award and potential future plans to use it; implementation of a trial period before official enrollment; and project schedule alterations.

The more formal mentoring component of CJI will help keep participants connected to the program, Crewleaders and staff will receive additional training on setting clear expectations, and Corps will

Narratives

increasingly work with community partners to help alleviate participants' barriers.

IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUES AND CORRECTIVE ACTION PLANS IMPLEMENTED:

TCN subgrantees participated in the most recent CNCS NSCHC compliance grace period audit. TCN staff have provided feedback to, and created action plans with, each Corps. Corps policies were reviewed and updated, AC member forms and agreements reviewed, and Corps procedures were verified. One subgrantee was identified as high-risk about a year ago due to a combination of factors which began creating compliance issues. TCN followed the procedures previously outlined related to corrective action planning and follow-up.

Any time an issue is identified, either by CNCS for TCN or by TCN for Subgrantees, we take it very seriously and follow-up to remedy the situation and prevent future similar issues. We value presenting a high-quality, effective, and impactful national program model. Our success depends on the success of all partners and Corps involved within our initiatives.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

There is a tremendous potential return on investment related to providing disconnected youth services that successfully reengage them in the workforce and educational systems, as well as reduce recidivism. Belfield and Levin (2012) take this proposition to a large scale: If we assume (generously) the average cost of participation in Corps programs is \$25,000/Corpsmember, with total funding of 2.5 million, we could serve 100 opportunity youth. TCN is proposing to serve 101 AC members (equated to 42.14 MSY or 42 "youth" for the purposes of this formula) at a rate of about \$24,000 (based on total outlays). CNCS funds would represent 54% of the investment with The Corps Network, at a rate of \$13,000/MSY, and its sub-grantees contributing 46%. This means that the return on investment for CNCS is almost double for the funds invested in TCN's programs serving disconnected youth. If we use the calculated rate of benefits to taxpayers of \$235,680/effective youth [see report for detailed analysis], assume an 80% retention rate (65 of 81 disconnected youth), and of those successfully completing, conservatively 80% (52/65) avoid recidivism (considered "effective youth"), then the total savings to taxpayers would be \$12,255,360.

Not only do the Corps provide services to members that are an investment in their future, according to a recent analysis by the US National Park Service, Service and Conservation Corps can complete environmental projects at 60% of the projected cost. As a result, AmeriCorps members can also accomplish more with less, creating a win-win service scenario with benefits to members and the communities in which they serve.

The headquarters portion of this current proposal, constitutes about 8% of the CNCS share. Most of

Narratives

this award would be passed through to local Corps across the country that are organizational members of The Corps Network. TCN is requesting \$1,000/MSY in CNCS funds to administer this project which adds 101 Corpsmembers to our portfolio, therefore are looking to add staff time to assist with this effort. The budget clearly outlines required staffing to support headquarters administration of this project, necessary supplies to implement it, and resources to effectively support the 4 organizations identified as high quality Corps to participate in this project.

The total outlays of this initiative represent a lower cost/MSY by \$1,000/MSY than most similar programs (Job Corps etc. cited in the Belfield and Levin, 2012 report). The full cost of operation is represented by an investment of 54% by CNCS and 46% by TCN, Corps, and Federal and community partners. The Corps model is a long-time tested, successful model for engaging disconnected and opportunity youth. The budgets represent known and real costs to program operations.

Slight Increase in Cost/MSY: TCN aims to pass on the maximum amount possible to our subgrantees who are serving a high-needs population, with increased needs for supportive services and additional professional training of mentors, and have allowed them to submit budgets that are at a level of \$12,000/MSY. Overall, TCN is requesting \$13,000/MSY, which represents a slight increase from our current award of \$12,336/MSY for OYSI. TCN Corps already contribute far above the minimum 24% of match at 46% proposed for this initiative, therefore there is little room for them to contribute substantially more. Headquarters budget is based on necessary management expenses to include staff time at a conservative level, travel for site visits, and minor supplies. All subgrantee budgets have been reviewed and are compliant, reasonable and necessary for high-quality, effective, and impactful program operations.

Individual Corps have extremely diverse revenue sources. Collectively, they receive nearly \$550,000,000 annually from a number of sources, including federal, state, and local government, foundation, and fee-for-service. Many member Corps have long-standing partnerships with the Federal Land Management Agencies and others receive funding from the US Departments of Education, Labor, and Transportation and/or state and local support. Almost all Corps solicit individual and corporate donations and many hold fund-raising events. Corps are entrepreneurial and nimble, and take advantage of a wide variety of funding streams. Corps generally select projects that are long-lasting and will serve the public for many years to come. All levels of government rely on Corps, as well as private industry, as a source of work-ready young people. They have a reputation for completing highly prized and much-needed projects in a very cost-effective manner. This is the greatest sustainable component any non-profit or for-profit organization can achieve.

Narratives

Evaluation Summary or Plan

N/A for new application.

We are participating in the CNCS Opportunity Youth Evaluation Bundle with JBS.

Amendment Justification

N/A for new application.

Clarification Summary

Please indicate how the program will collect and report on the required performance indicators (outlined on page 7 of the Notice) for clear drug testing record; sanctions or diversion program completion; and number of national service participants that complete job readiness training and other skill development services.

The Corps Network (TCN) will require each Corps to submit their policies and procedures related to the required clear drug testing record performance indicator before corpsmembers can be enrolled. All corpsmembers enrolled in the proposed Youth Opportunity Initiative will be required to receive a pre-program drug test. If a corpsmember's drug test is negative for controlled or illegal substances, they will be required to take a second drug test before completing the program and are subject to additional drug tests if staff observe behavior that indicates substance abuse. All Corps must have a plan and/or partnerships in place to work with members whose pre-program drug test is positive to achieve and maintain a clear drug test record during their term of service.

Programs with corpsmembers in a sanction/diversion program will work with appropriate juvenile justice agencies/diversion programs to ensure diversion program completion. Corps will record information related to drug testing and sanctions or diversion program completion for each corpsmember in a TCN provided Corpsmember database. Corps will report this information to The Corps Network for inclusion in our biannual progress reports to CNCS.

Prior to the start of each program year, all Corps Subgrantees are required to submit a training and orientation plan outlining job readiness training and skill development services offered to TCN for approval. Corps must track the corpsmembers who complete required and elective trainings as part of their reporting to TCN for inclusion our bi-annual reports to CNCS.

Narratives

Please revise your budget, performance measures, and Executive Summary to reflect the funding, MSY, and slot totals at which you are being clarified.

The budget, performance measures and Executive Summary have been adjusted to reflect the funding, MSY, and slot totals at which we are being clarified.

We have adjusted the budget, as requested, to reflect the clarified amount. If awarded the grant, we will need to make additional budget modifications due to site-specific needs based on the new MSY and number of slots.

Our application is under consideration for 32.45 MSY and 70 slots. Since all four Corps have programs designed around RHT slots we could not simultaneously utilize the full 32.45 MSY and keep our slot total at 70 without compromising program design. We have restructured our request to allow our sites to operate successful programs while accommodating the 32.45 MSY clarification amount. Therefore, we are requesting 32.408 MSY and 78 slots (3 FT, 7 HT, and 68 RHT) at \$13,000 Cost per MSY.

The application notes that an FBI fingerprint check, state registry check and the NSOPR are completed "for anyone with recurring access to vulnerable populations." However, ALL AmeriCorps members, including Disconnected Youth members, plus staff in covered positions under a Youth Opportunity AmeriCorps grant must undergo criminal background checks. Please review the NOFA and FAQs, and provide assurance that appropriate background checks will be completed as required. Adjust budget as needed.

TCN has previously and will continue to require the following for all corpsmembers and covered staff:

Criminal history checks will be conducted for all members and covered staff positions prior to considering a candidate for a position. Each check will include an NSOPW and FBI fingerprint or state repository if the covered staff or corpsmembers will not have access to vulnerable population. Corpsmembers and staff with recurring access to vulnerable populations must complete a three part criminal history check which includes a NSOPW, state repository and FBI fingerprint check.

Narratives

Please describe how supervisors/crew leaders will provide oversight and support to disconnected youth members and mentor members

The Ready to Achieve Mentoring Program (RAMP) framework, developed by the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), will be used to develop individual short term and long term goals by the crew leaders, program staff, mentors, and corpsmembers. This plan will serve as the starting point for the dynamic Individualized Development/Mentoring Plan (IDP) for each Corpsmember. This plan outlines the steps that will need to be taken, and the supports and services that will need to be provided, for corpsmembers to meet both their individual and program goals. All corpsmembers and mentors work on crews under the supervision of a crew leader. The crew leader serves as direct supervisor and is able to provide daily one-to-one specialized attention to both the mentor and disconnected youth members throughout the program.

While member mentors work side-by-side with disconnected youth members completing environmental stewardship project, mentor members also play an important role in supporting the disconnected youth members. Mentors will meet weekly in one-on-one sessions with their mentees to discuss their IDP. Crew leaders and mentors work closely with program staff to ensure that each member is on track to successfully complete the program and reach their personal goals.

Please further explain how the Opportunity Youth AmeriCorps program proposed in this application is different from the existing Opportunity Youth Services Initiative program.

The Youth Opportunity AmeriCorps program proposed is distinct from TCN's existing Opportunity Youth Service Initiative (OYSI) in the target demographic of opportunity youth it seeks to engage. While OYSI engages youth who are disengaged from both school and the workforce, the proposed Youth Opportunity AmeriCorps program targets a specific population of opportunity youth & court-involved youth. The proposed program uses The Corps Network's Civic Justice Corps (CJC) model to provide service-based, diversion and re-entry programming for these court-involved opportunity youth.

This Youth Opportunity Initiative further differs from the existing OYSI program through its

Narratives

mentoring component. To best accommodate court involved youth, almost 20% of the AmeriCorps members enrolled in the Youth Opportunity Initiative will serve as mentors to other Youth Opportunity corpsmembers. These mentors will be specifically recruited, selected and trained for their ability to mentor and support disconnected youth who have been adjudicated in the juvenile justice system, convicted in the criminal justice system, or at risk of incarceration.

The program has not successfully enrolled at 100%. Please provide the program's strategy regarding placement and site specific outreach. In addition, the Corporation requests that the program reach out to and implement a strategy to have Catholic Bishop of Chicago's St Sabina as a host location.

Our existing Opportunity Youth Service Initiative (OYSI) AmeriCorps program has not yet enrolled at 100% because we have not completed our grant year. Since all of our programs follow the Corps model and corpsmember serve on crews, most sites enroll corpsmembers in cohorts throughout the grant year. Many sites will be enrolling corpsmembers to serve on fall crews by the end of August. To date, we are on track and anticipate 100% enrollment by the end of the program year.

Three of the four Corps included in our proposed Youth Opportunity AmeriCorps program are current Subgrantees of our OYSI program. All of these programs, Civic Works, Greater Miami Service Corps and Limitless Vistas, Inc., have enrolled 100%.

TCN requires all subgrantees to submit enrollment schedules before each program year. TCN uses these enrollment schedules to check-in with subgrantees on a regular basis to ensure each site is on track for 100% enrollment by the end of the program year. TCN works with sites to create corrective action plans to address enrollment issues. For the proposed Youth Opportunity Initiative, sites will be mandated to establish community partnerships with organizations that are also connected with the population that we are looking to serve. This will give the sites the opportunity to more effectively target disconnect youth.

Our programs follow the Corps model and corpsmembers serve on crews that participate in a variety of fee-for-service environmental stewardship projects in their local communities. Our corpsmembers are not individually placed at host sites. Based both on location and our program's corps model, using Catholic Bishop of Chicago's St Sabina as a host location is not applicable to our program.

Narratives

Please review your desired grant award start date and member enrollment period start date in the Applicant Info section of your application. Please make any corrections necessary. In the Clarification narrative field, please enter a statement confirming your desired grant award start date and member enrollment period start date.

The preferred program year for the Youth Opportunity AmeriCorps program is October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016. While member enrollment dates will vary by site, enrollment will begin on October 1, 2015.

As outlined on page 7 of the NOFA, Number of Disconnected Youth AmeriCorps members that successfully complete the program is an OUTPUT, not an outcome. In addition, this output cannot include both completion and avoidance of recidivism as these represent two separate events. The output is completion; the outcome is avoiding recidivism. Please revise.

This has been revised in the Performance Measures section.

Please explain whether the outcome YO1c, number of disconnected youth members who demonstrate positive engagement changes encompasses the outcome, "Number of Disconnected Youth AmeriCorps members that avoid court or criminal involvement... during their term of service."

Explanation provided under Description of Intervention.

Continuation Changes

N/A for new application.

Grant Characteristics