**Memo: Opportunity to fund Youth Conservation Corps Programming via the US Forest Service Community and Urban Forestry Program**

April 27, 2023

In response to the current [USFS NOFO](https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/urban-forests), Volunteer Maine will submit a request to serve as a pass-through entity to fund new and existing Youth Conservation Corps programs in Maine. The program model would be similar to National Service and teen youth corps in other states (primary target 14-17 yos).

This fits the decision criteria in the identity statement by

* supporting service as a solution to community problems.
* Promoting personal and civic responsibility among those under 18 yo.
* Funding agencies seeking to develop service programs, this time for teens who would be empowered to implement solutions.
* Providing technical assistance and training to the grantee staff, not only on volunteer management and climate but also service-learning in a community-based program.

At least 80% of the funding received will go directly to Corps programs. Some of the funding will go to operational grants to fund Youth Conservation Corps member stipends and program director/supervisor salaries when projects are focused on the eligible activities (listed below). The priority will be on paid experiences for youth with stipends that are the equivalent of at least minimum wage. Some funding will be carved out for youth volunteer positions to accommodate members who are not eligible to work due to immigration status or age (volunteer positions will be a stepping-stone to later paid employment). The stipended corps positions could be a significant source of recruitment for AmeriCorps when youth are eligible.

Some funding will also be made available in planning grants (likely sub-$10,000 contracts) to create staff capacity for planning and developing high-quality corps programs. During planning, staff or a consultant will spend time building partnerships, developing resources, and incorporating community input into their corps program. Some funding in planning grants may be available to pay community members stipends to serve in community advisor roles.

Funded programs will target opportunities for youth under 18; programs may set a minimum age based on child labor laws. Likely grantees include existing Youth Conservation Corps programs sponsored by watershed and lake associations, municipalities, youth serving organizations, or parks/land trusts.

Corps programs must conduct projects in Maine or in watersheds that drain into Maine (in neighboring New Hampshire).

Preference will be for service projects in disadvantaged communities according to Justice40 criteria. (Projects outside these locations will be required to contribute 50% cost-share).

This funding opportunity is for 5 years. Suggested request amount is approximately $3,125,000. This would allow us to make grants totaling $500,000 each year for 5 years (planning grants would sunset after four years). Up to $125,000 would be available each year for internal staffing, indirect, administrative needs, outreach and marketing to connect with potential grantees, training and technical assistance including funding for member gatherings. We also would likely need to purchase software or build a grants management/reporting system (or use existing resources such as OnCorps to fulfill these needs). The Climate Corps Coordinator would be able to serve as the Grants Officer for the program for the first year under the current ARPA funding. The last four years this grant could partially fund the Climate Corps Coordinator position to continue the Grants Officer role. Any internal expenses would need to matched at 50% from non-federal sources.

The Commission and Task Forces would develop a grantmaking strategy and process in consultation with staff, the Maine Forest Service, and the US Forest Service, to meet mutual goals of the funding program and the Climate Corps. The goal of funding pass-through entities is to reach small organizations that would be unable to compete in this federal competition. It’s vital that the grants officer for the program build relationships and conduct outreach to reach these organizations and communities.

Youth Conservation Corps-Climate Action for Maine’s Community Forests

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| 1. What needs, problems, or opportunities are priorities for the Climate Corps to address? |
| Maine’s Climate Action Plan calls for the conservation of 30% of the state’s land to store more carbon while supporting the forestry and outdoor-recreation industries. The Governor’s Task Force on Forest Carbon specifically recommends increasing climate-friendly forest management through practices such as managing competition from invasives, planting trees suited to a changing climate, and reducing risk from disturbances (wildfire, invasive pests, etc).  Maine has legacy, independent Youth Conservation Corps programs across the state that have persisted despite little to no state or federal funding. These non-profit or municipality-run programs deliver vital environmental services and provide meaningful employment opportunities for youth. They need more resources to serve youth and we need more resources in the state to serve regions that have no active youth conservation corps.  The Urban and Community Forestry Program has a goal to support communities experiencing low tree canopy cover, hazard tree threats, flooding, and extreme heat; increase access to green jobs; improve climate resilience; and increase the benefits from forests for all communities. |

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| 1. What service activities could Climate Corps members do to alleviate the need (aka, what’s the intervention)? (ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES) |
| Youth Conservation Corps members would complete eligible activities such as:   * Planting trees in visible, contiguous locations where they make a direct, positive impact on the community. * Plant buffer trees and vegetation to naturally filter air and water, limit storm runoff, and stabilize soil. * Plant trees to enhance a business district. * Replace existing street trees as they age or suffer from invasive pests and diseases. * Establish a community tree nursery to provide seedlings for streets and parks. * Implement low impact development/green infrastructure such as bioswales, raingardens and other forms of green infrastructure. * Conduct a street tree inventory. * Build, improve, or maintain trails to increase public access to community forests/parks and protect forest health. *Need to check with Jan/USFS on eligibility.* * Maintain and monitor to improve forest health, assess risk to forests from pests, disease, and adverse climate impacts. * Prepare for more severe storms and recover damaged or deteriorated landscapes. * Protect, enhance, and increase access to watersheds in urban and developing areas with focus on conserving and managing forest patches. * Address exotic invasive pest species. * Engaging and leading community volunteers in the above activities. |

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| 1. Outcome or Change in the World Because the Program Exists: |
| Urban and community forests will be maintained and improved, sequestering more carbon, making a community more resilient despite climate change, and increasing access and benefits for all residents.  Youth will have valuable on the job experience and be exposed to careers in the forest products sector.  All community members will have the opportunity to deeply connect and engage with their local forest and tree resources, resulting in better awareness and long-term appreciation of the resource. |

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| 1. What would the day-to-day service look like for this member? |
| Typical to current YCC operations. Teams meet at project site or HQ, travel to project site as needed. With appropriate training and supervision, crews deliver projects with hand tools. May partner with other professionals to complete project. May have some days of training or team-building.  Service would mostly occur during the summer months between June and August, with some possibilities for year-round programming after school or for a “gap year” style program. |

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| 1. How will community volunteers be involved in the intervention? |
| YCC will lead groups of community volunteers, including other youth on projects.  Tree boards or other community advisory groups will participate in project strategy and oversight. |

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| 1. What resources or investments would be needed to make this intervention a reality? |
| Placements/Service Locations:  Lake Associations  Watershed Groups  LakeSmart “Hubs” (Sponsored by Maine Lakes)  Municipalities  Land Trusts and other Community Forests or Community-based organizations  Project Site Attributes:   * Publicly (government or non-profit, but NOT Federal) accessible woodlands or street trees in villages/towns/cities (visible from or contiguous to transportation corridors). * Adjacent land to publicly accessible property that needs management to protect the public resource (e.g., combatting an invasive species on a neighboring property that threatens or harms the public park).   Access/Connections/Introductions to Key Beneficiaries/Sites:  Sponsor of Youth Corps will need to develop partnerships with project hosts whether that’s municipalities, non-profits, land managers, or the business community in a relevant area.  Training Needed to Prepare the Member to Deliver the Service:   * Members will need training on tree planting and other relevant skills with hand tools. * Members should also have training on basic climate science and understand why their service contributes to our climate goals.   Potential Supplies/Materials/Tools Needed:  Tree seedlings  Hand tools  Monitoring tools such as GPS, software, forester’s tools.  Herbicide or pesticides if appropriate  Vehicle for transportation  Accommodation if service requires travel  Uniforms and safety equipment  Outreach and communications resources, such as signage, flyers, mailers, etc. |

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| 1. What are the skills and attributes needed by the Member (criteria that would drive recruitment strategy and be included in the position description)? |
| Physical abilities to complete tasks.  Willingness to make commitment for term of service.  Willingness to work hard, outside, with a team.  In compliance with child labor laws as relevant for the position.  Other attributes as required for the specific task (for example, over a certain age to operate equipment or work certain hours). |

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| 1. What are the workforce development needs of the sector?   What credential, education, or on-the-job training could the program offer to alleviate the workforce needs? |
| The forest products industry needs to develop their workforce through increasing career awareness at the secondary education level, by coordinating and expanding apprenticeship and training programs, and by making forest economy communities high quality places to live through community development.  YCCs could incorporate relevant pre-apprenticeship curriculums to prepare participants for apprenticeships/jobs in the Tree Care industry and Forest Products Sector. |

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| 1. Potential challenges, pitfalls, and lingering questions? |
| New grant program will need to develop technical assistance, build relationships, conduct outreach.  Will need close collaboration with Maine Forest Service to evaluate appropriate service activities. |