



Cities Connecting Children to Nature

Photo credit: Los Angeles
Conservation Corps

CITY-CORPS PARTNERSHIPS

STRATEGY:

Establish service and conservation corps (corps) partnerships that engage young people in outdoor, hands-on service while also accomplishing projects for cities in areas such as conservation, recreation, and green infrastructure.

TARGET AGE GROUP:

Teens and young adults ages 14 to 25.

KEY BENEFITS:

Ongoing structure for cities and corps to work together, whose projects provide sustained, intensive connections to nature; a living stipend, wage and/or education awards for corps participants; as well as developing qualified candidates to diversify the future workforce.

RELATED CITY PRIORITIES:

Equity and inclusion; green infrastructure; stormwater management; park and open space improvement; energy efficiency; summer youth employment; workforce development; youth reengagement; stewardship and civic engagement; national and community service.

CITY-CORPS PARTNERSHIPS promote children’s connections to nature by

- Engaging teens in introductory local nature experiences,
- Providing young adult role models to lead programming for younger children, and,
- Expanding access to natural spaces.

Corps projects lasting one to 12 months, as well as afterschool corps programs, also address otherwise unmet community needs in areas such as recreation, conservation, and green infrastructure. Corps programs often serve as a first employment opportunity for teens, and offer mentorship, coaching, skill/certification attainment, and leadership

development. Corps typically operate as standalone 501(c)3 non-profits or as programs housed within government entities.

Corps can build upon cities’ existing youth employment or afterschool initiatives. **City governments** identify quality service projects that are appropriate for corps members. **Corps staff** serve as crew leaders, trainers, and mentors for each project and ensure project completion and work quality. **Project sponsors** assist by setting project expectations, educating corps members on the context and goal for the project, and, at times, providing fee-for-service funding to cover supplies, labor, and specific training needs.

CRAFTING STRONG CITY-CORPS AGREEMENTS

- Establish cooperative agreements that articulate mutual goals ranging from youth job training to accomplishing greening projects, rather than treating the corps as just another contractor competing to supply a service to the city.
- In cities with strong commitments to unionized labor and paying prevailing wages, corps should engage union leaders as board members or advisors to build a mutually supportive relationship ahead of allocating projects.
- With the stacked benefits of corps in mind, assign projects to corps that offer community service, ecological, and educational value for corps members and ongoing or maintenance roles to regular/long-term staff or contractors.

CITY PRIORITIES	TYPICAL FEE-FOR-SERVICE CORPS PROJECTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Workforce development, summer youth employment• Youth reengagement and education• Stormwater mitigation, sometimes under federally mandated consent decrees• Habitat restoration and maintenance• Food security/food deserts• Park activation• Tree canopy/urban heat island strategies• Recycling and sometimes composting• Racial equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trail building/maintenance• Invasive species removal/monitoring• Native species plantings• Erosion control & streambank restoration• Park & public facilities maintenance• Urban agriculture/community gardens• Green infrastructure• Urban forestry• Disaster response and mitigation efforts• Leading summer nature camps



“Operation Fresh Start and the City of Madison are proud to have a long standing partnership that provides disconnected youth a path to self-sufficiency through meaningful, supported work experience. Hundreds of youth have had the opportunity to gain this experience by working in city parks and greenways over the years. In addition, they have gotten the opportunity to connect directly with nature and experience the value of providing high quality park spaces for all members of the community. The city is especially pleased that a number of these young people are now city employees with the potential for many more in future years.”

- MAYOR PAUL SOGLIN | CITY OF MADISON, WISCONSIN

USING CITY-CORPS PARTNERSHIPS TO INCREASE EQUITABLE NATURE CONNECTION

WHAT	Corps projects that improve nature access	Corps programs that engage teens in introductory “nearby nature” experiences	Corps that provide young role models and programming for younger children
WHO	Target Audience: Teens/Young Adults ages 14-25	Target Audience: Teens ages 14-18	Target Audience: Children and Teens/Young Adults aged 14-25
	<p>————— City roles: Recruitment, service project design, cost-sharing —————</p>		
WHY	Meet need for easier nature access; develop skills for green careers; diversify candidate pool for city agency workforces.	Activate nearby nature for children and youth of color	Increase children’s connection to nature through peer-led programming; put nature-facing careers on the map for underrepresented populations.
HOW	LA Conservation Corps’ (LACC) Clean & Green program annually involves some 500 middle and high school students in 8-week sessions, in which they reduce barriers to accessing public spaces, including trash and graffiti removal and planting trees. In parallel during a recent year, young adult members of the LACC removed 9659 tons of litter and debris from public spaces; built/maintained 29,234 ft of trail; and planted 4,408 trees. LACC maintains a contract with L.A. County and an agreement with the City of Los Angeles to provide the services performed by corps members.	Each summer, City of Pittsburgh Mayor William Peduto leverages federal funds and philanthropy through the city/county workforce investment board, Partner4Work, to support operation of the Pittsburgh Community Corps by the Student Conservation Association (thesca.org). The corps puts some 90 low-income corps members aged 14-19, with little prior exposure to conservation, to work for six weeks on neighborhood park and conservation projects. SCA maintains a funding agreement with Partner4Work and project site agreements with the City.	Green City Force entered into an agreement with the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) to build and operate six urban farms on NYCHA properties. The corps leverages funding from private sources and the Mayor’s office to complete projects at these farm sites. Since 2013, corps members have grown 28.6 tons of vegetables for more than 25,000 public housing residents and engaged 375 school children in experiential learning about food, gardening and wellness.



Photo credit: Green City Force

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[What is a Corps?](#) *The Corps Network*

[Service & Conservation Corps: Developments in Green Infrastructure](#) *The Corps Network*

[Corps to Careers](#) *The Corps Network*

[Sample city-corps agreements](#)

Cities Connecting Children to Nature

Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) is an initiative of the National League of Cities and the Children & Nature Network, made possible with support from The JPB Foundation. [CCCN](#) helps city leaders and their partners ensure equitable opportunities for children to play, learn and grow in nature, from urban parks and community gardens to the great outdoors. Find more planning resources at the [CCCN Resource Hub](#).



The Corps Network, the national association of Service and Conservation Corps, provides leadership and support to over 130 Corps across the United States. Through advocacy, and providing Corps access to funding opportunities and expert guidance, The Corps Network annually enables more than 25,000 Corpsmembers to strengthen communities, improve the environment and transform their lives through service. To learn more about The Corps Network, please visit www.corpsnetwork.org.