

HHS COMMITTEE # 1  
February 9, 2012  
**Update**

**M E M O R A N D U M**

February 7, 2012

TO: Health and Human Services Committee  
FROM: Vivian Yao, Legislative Analyst   
SUBJECT: **Update: Conservation Corps**

The HHS Committee will hear an update on progress in implementing the Conservation Corps program. Participants in the discussion will include:

- Uma Ahluwalia, Director, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
- Raymond Crowell, Chief, Behavioral Health and Crisis Services, DHHS
- Carol Walsh, Executive Director, Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families (Collaboration Council)

Members of the Friends of the Montgomery County Conservation Corps are also expected to attend the meeting.

**For FY12, the Council approved \$200,000 in the DHHS operating budget to support the start up of the Conservation Corps program with the understanding that the program would require \$500,000 to continue operations in FY13.**

The Council directed the Department to review its previous efforts to procure a vendor to deliver Conservation Corps services, gather information about possibilities for improving program design and the Request for Proposal (RFP) process, and contract with the Collaboration Council to implement the RFP and contract with a selected vendor. The Council requested a mid-year progress report and contemplated a discussion with Executive Branch representatives regarding expected FY13 funding prior to the issuance of the RFP.

**BACKGROUND**

***History of Conservation Corps in Montgomery County***

The Montgomery County Conservation Corps was founded in 1984 and provided job, GED and life skills training for out-of-school and unemployed youth ages 17-24. Participants received on-the-job training in conservation, carpentry, wood-working, and landscaping while earning an hourly stipend. Corps members also had the opportunity to earn AmeriCorps educational grants through their participation in the program.

Consistent with the reported service and success of Corps programs nationally<sup>1</sup>, the local Montgomery County Conservation Corps program has served a significantly diverse and at-risk population, provided a significant level of conservation-related services to the community, and reported strong outcomes including high academic achievement and low recidivism rates.

The budget for the County-run program in its last full year of operation (FY10) was \$856,730. While the person cost of the program is significant, the program has been cost-effective for taxpayers by developing productive, taxpaying workers and diverting at-risk youth from the criminal justice system, mental health services, homelessness, and other negative circumstances that require high cost government services. Moreover, the community also benefits from the value of the labor performed by Corps members in preserving and protecting the County's natural assets and community resources.

### ***Decision to Transition to a Nonprofit***

For FY11, the Council agreed with the Executive's recommendation to change the delivery model of the Conservation Corps program by transitioning the program to a non-profit organization. DHHS was tasked with developing an RFP and selecting a vendor in the first half of FY11, and \$250,000 was provided for services to be delivered by a contract provided in the second half of the fiscal year. The projected annualized budget for the program was \$500,000.

The Friends of the Montgomery County Conservation Corps was generally supportive of the proposed public-private partnership. The Corps Network, the national advocate and representative of the nation's service and conservation corps, also recommended that the program develop a focused strategic plan on restructuring its program to expand and serve more of its target population and diversify and expand its funding sources.

The County implemented an RFP process to identify a vendor for the Conservation Corps program in FY11 and received one proposal. The Department did not make an award because of the high cost of the one proposal received. Concerns were raised by the Friends of the Conservation Corps that the RFP process was "cumbersome and confusing" and contributed to the County's receiving only one bid.

### **MONTGOMERY COUNTY CONSERVATION CORPS REPORT**

The January 2011 report (©1-37) completed by the Collaboration Council analyzes and makes recommendations on the following:

- Improvements that should be made in the procurement process;
- The availability of qualified and interested local or regional program providers;
- The program's target population and program design; and
- The appropriate cost of the program.

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<sup>1</sup> A 1997 Abt Associates/Brandeis University random assignment study concluded that Youth Service and Conservation Corps generate a positive return on investment and the youth involved were positively affected by joining a Corp with significant employment and earnings gains, drop in arrest rates, and drop in out-of-wedlock among female Corpsmembers. The positive outcomes were particularly striking for African American men.

In completing this work, the Collaboration Council convened a focus group of organizations that downloaded the 2010 RFP or attended the pre-submission conference; convened public and private stakeholders; consulted with the Corps Network on Corps operations and standards and Americorps opportunities and requirements; consulted with the Friends of the Montgomery County Conservation Corps; interviewed staff involved in the DHHS Conservation Corps program; visited existing Conservation Corps programs in other jurisdictions; and reviewed literature on practices and policies for effectively serving disconnected youth and preparing young adults for career pathways.

Some of the key recommendations highlighted by the report can be found in the Executive Summary at ©1-6 and include the following:

- There are local and regional providers with both the interest and skill to run a County Conservation Corps.
- The proposed target population should remain the same as the County-run program -- 17-24 year olds who have dropped out of high school and are otherwise disconnected and unskilled, e.g., not engaged in the workforce, low income, limited work history, poor basic skills, some having contacts with the juvenile/criminal justice system.
- The program goals involve providing opportunities for work experience and GED attainment as vehicles to increase work readiness, engage in career goal-setting, and prepare for post-secondary opportunities.
- The program should track a variety of data and outcomes (see ©22-23) including participant demographics, work hours and services completed, recidivism rates, educational achievement, and workplace knowledge and skills readiness.
- During the first year, at least two 10-person work crews should operate, and participants will engage in a nine-month program with the following components: employment training and career guidance; academic education, workplace and life skills training; support with basic needs and social services; and stipends and incentives. The number of work crews may increase with the number of fee-for-service work projects.
- The FY12 funding should be used for start up expenses including the purchase of vans and work equipment. Operating a viable program would cost an average of \$500,000 per year.
- County funding should be maintained at \$500,000 for at least the first two years to allow a program of this complexity to become stable and credible for expansion and gain more fee-based work contracts. The Contractor would be required to apply for AmeriCorps program funds during the first two years.
- Assuming that the Council and the County Executive agree on funding for the program, the report recommends that the RFP be issued by the Collaboration Council with the target date for startup activities in late FY12. The start up period would focus on putting in place essential elements of the Corps including staffing and training, procurement of materials, working on establishing partnerships and agreements, etc. The program would begin serving its first cohort in early FY13.

## **ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION**

The Committee may be interested in exploring the following issues with participants:

### ***Participant Costs***

Council staff observes that the proposed minimum target level of young people served is quite low (20 for the first year) and results in a per participant cost much higher than when the County ran the program.<sup>2</sup> This may be appropriate for the start up year, but it is not an acceptable minimum if the program is fully up and running as it results in a higher per participant cost. **The contract with the selected vendor should be clear that the number of participants served should grow over time without additional County General fund support.** Council staff notes that continued County funding for the program over the long term would provide greater stability for the program and should leverage other funding to serve more people.

### ***Length of Service Term***

The proposed service term is nine months, three months longer than the County-run program. The report suggests that given the minimal work readiness, academic and life skills Corps members present, the additional time is needed to give participants time to solidify their work skills and complete their academic goals. Council staff concurs with the assessment and interprets this recommendation as a *minimum service term*. Corps programs around the country have longer service terms of one or even two years. Ideally, the contracted vendor would be successful in piecing together other private or public funding sources to allow a longer service term as needed by participants.

### ***Outcomes***

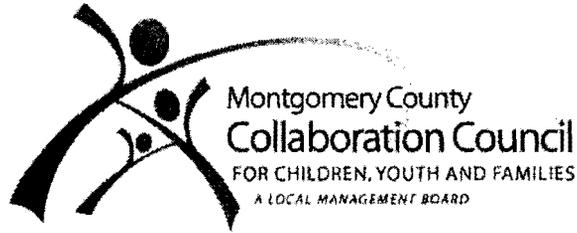
The report outlines useful outcomes to measure the effectiveness of services while participants are in the program and shortly after they leave, but it would also be important to collect longer range data on work and/or postsecondary education or training. The program is intended to help significantly at-risk young people transition to productive citizens and workers, which goal justifies the high participant cost of the program. **It would be useful to see a longer range outcome that measures participant ability to maintain progress over time, e.g., at six months, one year, etc.**

### ***Program Start Up***

The report suggests that the complexity of the program requires initial planning support and recommends that the FY12 budget for the program be used as start up expenses for needed equipment and vans, developing curriculum and program materials, staff recruitment, outreach and marketing efforts, data collection systems, and securing program facilities. Council staff concurs with this assessment. This would allow the program to be well-positioned to begin providing service to young people in FY13. **The Committee may be interested in understanding the status of the equipment and vans used for the County-run program. Council staff understands that some of the equipment was purchased by the Friends of the Conservation Corps for specific use by the program.**

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<sup>2</sup> The County-run program budget was significantly higher, but the program also served a significantly higher number of participants. However, the level of services recommended is higher than that provided under the County-run program (9 months vs. 6 months).



January 11, 2012

TO: Uma Ahluwalia, Director, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)  
Raymond Crowel, Chief, Behavioral Health and Victims Services, DHHS

FROM: Carol Walsh, Executive Director, Montgomery County Collaboration Council

SUBJECT: Montgomery County Conservation Corps (MCCC)

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Since 1984, Montgomery County government operated the Conservation Corps (MCCC). For FY2011, the County Council approved a budget that included the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) contracting with a nonprofit organization to operate the Corps. However, the County was unable to secure a contractor. Services to youth ended in June 2010.

During FY2012 budget deliberations, the County Council again included funding to contract with a private provider for the second part of the fiscal year, conditioned upon further analysis regarding the presence of viable bidders; clarification regarding target population and program design; and the cost of the program relevant to its impact. The Collaboration Council was selected to first do this research and then conduct the procurement process, based on the approval to proceed given this new information.

To respond to the County Council's directive, the Collaboration Council took a broad and comprehensive approach to gathering information including focus groups of potential providers and historic partners to the Corps; consultations with The Corps Network on standards, model programs, and AmeriCorps requirements; site visits to nearby Corps programs, and reviews of literature on effective practices and policies and costs. Raymond Crowel, Chief, Behavioral Health and Victims Services and Teresa Bennett, Child and Adolescent Services from DHHS and Vivian Yao, Montgomery County Council Legislative Analyst participated in several of these activities.

**Purpose of the Report**

This report is to update the Council on the DHHS and Collaboration Council's work to analyze the reestablishment of a Conservation Corps in Montgomery County. The report includes this executive summary that provides top level findings, conclusions and recommendations for next steps followed by a full report with more detailed discussion.

The report addresses three questions posed by the County Council:

1. Are there private providers who have both the interest and the capacity to successfully operate a County Conservation Corps?
2. How should the Corps be structured to ensure its success in positive youth outcomes?
3. What are the best estimates of cost to establish and maintain a viable Conservation Corps relative to its impact?

**1. Are there private providers who have both the interest and the capacity to successfully operate a County Conservation Corps?**

**Findings:**

While there are potential providers who would be interested in bidding, there are process and scope issues that need to be addressed. For example, the FY2011 RFP was found to be overly prescriptive and complex. Requirements and deliverables seemed too extensive and broad especially at the outset of a new initiative. At the same time there was not good clarity around a number of key issues such as the AmeriCorps requirements, the availability of equipment and vehicles, and work projects with county departments. These and other issues such as clarifying the role of the Friends of the Conservation Corps will need to be addressed in the RFP process.

**Conclusions:**

There are local and regional providers with both the interest and skill to run a County Conservation Corps.

**2. How should the Corps be structured to ensure its success in positive youth outcomes?**

**Findings:**

In considering the structure of a Conservation Corps we examined a range of Corps programs across the country and conducted in-depth site visits to nearby Corps programs. We examined their target populations, program goals, program structure, and partnerships. We also looked at what the Corps offers participants in relation to their readiness to enter the workforce and complete high school (diploma or GED) and then move on to post-secondary certificates or degrees.

**Target Population.** We found that the educational level of Corps members varied greatly from pre-GED to college enrolled. The majority of young people being served were those who have dropped out of high school and are otherwise “disconnected”—not currently engaged in the workforce, low income with some having contacts with the juvenile/criminal justice system and illegal use of drugs. Family and other support systems also varied. A second consistent theme is the range of work readiness skills of participants. Many have limited or no work history and poor basic skills such as timeliness and organization. We also found that aside from an opportunity to gain skills and educational advantage, most Corps members come because they need an opportunity to earn money through weekly stipends. These characteristics of the target population mirror those of the former MCCC.

**Program Goals.** Formally referred to as Youth Service and Conservation Corps, the Corps goals have evolved from the initial focus on work experience and earning a GED to get a job to the current emphasis on increasing work readiness and career goal-setting to move into post-secondary settings such as trade schools and colleges. This evolution is necessitated by today’s economy requiring workers to have occupation-specific training within and beyond high school in order to have an advantage at entering and staying in the workforce in either middle or high skill-level jobs. Thus Corps programs help disconnected youth to have a second chance to be re-engaged and remain long-term in the workforce. The prior MCCC did not clearly state the relationship of its required work projects to long-term career development and employment in job valued in the labor market.

**Program Structure and Approach.** Corps programs use research-based effective practices for serving older and disconnected youth where a set of integrated services are delivered within a positive youth development, strengths-based philosophy over many months. These services are job readiness training and work-setting experience, academic instruction for high school completion, life skills training, career

guidance, and linking with basic needs and social services supports. These services are delivered within a crew structure where typically no more than 10 youth work with an adult supervisor and role model. Individual Development Plans establish individual Corps member's goals and identify and track the needed activities and supports to achieve those goals.

Conservation Corps programs are typically structured so that Corps members can fulfill the requirements for earning AmeriCorps Education Awards. The prior MCCC participated in the Education Awards program. Corps members must have a GED or high school diploma and complete 900 hours of Corps activities to be able to use \$2,350 for trade school or college. This time requirement typically means that Corps members must participate in 35 hours/week of programming for six months. The Corps program itself must deliver 80% of its hours in work experience and 20% in education and training for an aggregate of those considered Corps members.

**Partnerships.** Corps programs have several partners, including other child serving agencies that refer youth; contribute to the Corps member's Individual Development Plan; deliver education and life skills training; and serve as work-sites. The prior MCCC had these partnerships; several agencies have indicated their interest in re-building their relationship with the new MCCC.

With work-based experiences as the fundamental activity, the primary challenge for Corps providers is to ensure that adequate work experiences are in place throughout the Corps member's enrollment. Since Federal AmeriCorps regulations stipulate that for-profit businesses cannot benefit from Corps work, the only sources of work must be government agencies and nonprofit organizations. When MCCC was within DHHS, it had strong partnerships with several County departments to perform an array of work services, either free or for a fee. These same relationships are essential to the private contractor.

### **Conclusions:**

**Target Population.** The proposed target population will remain the same as previously served by the MCCC and stated in the DHHS RFP. The age range is 17-24 years. We also recommend that the Corps continue to serve persons who are pre-GED through those entering college or other training programs. See page 11 for detailed eligibility requirements.

**Program Goals.** The overarching goal is *Young people prepared and participating in the workplace.*

Measures that will track this outcome for each young person will include:

- Increased academic credentials (high school diploma or GED, pre-GED progress, or post-secondary education and training)
- Increased workplace knowledge and skills readiness
- Develop career pathway plan especially in natural resources and environmental occupations
- Utilization of Education Award to continue on a career pathway post-Corps program

### **Program Structure and Approach.**

**Work Crews.** During the first year, at least two work crews will operate, each with 10 young people assigned to an adult staff person. This small staff to participant ratio is needed, given the minimal work readiness, academic and life skills that Corps members will present. The adult staff person will have a mix of experience in working with disconnected youth along with knowledge of the specific work skills and content needed in the job sites. The number of crews can expand with the number of fee for service work projects.

**Service Schedule.** We also believe that a three-phase program that meets participants at their level of readiness and focuses on achievable and progressive goals will benefit participants. Consistent with this we strongly believe that the length of time of the program should be nine months, in order to give participants time to solidify their work skills and complete their academic goals. An example of a three phase program is: 1) all enrollees would participate in an orientation period, 2) followed by period that focuses on work readiness skills, improving academic performance and gradual introduction to the workplace; 3) with a final phase being increased work responsibilities and transition to post-Corps activities.

**Program Components.** An effective Montgomery County Conservation Corps should have four components:

1. Employment Training and Career Guidance – Corps members will participate in Corps Work Experience Projects (CWEP) that have been identified as needed by the county departments and other public agencies and nonprofit groups. The extensive list from the prior RFP will be honed down to a targeted group of CWEPs for which Corps members can be trained to perform well and safely and are aligned with current labor market needs within the Maryland State Department of Education’s Environmental, Agricultural and Natural Resource Career Cluster. Examples of career options requiring an Associate’s degree or less include Landscaper, Environmental Technician and Horticulturalist. Rather than having the Contractor build its own onsite career guidance capacity as required in the past RFP, the contractor will be expected to utilize the Workforce Investment Board’s MontgomeryWorks One Stop Career Centers.
2. Academic Education, Workplace and Life Skills Training - Educational elements of the Corps must take into consideration the varied needs of participants. Each Corps member will be assessed to determine their academic level and goals. Education providers will hold appropriate degrees and certificates. While the Corps needs to address the educational needs, there is no hard and fast rule that requires that educational elements be provided directly by the Corps. For example a partnership with academic institutions could be established that would address the component either at the Corps facility or off-site. Complementing the training in technical work content is the training of Corps members in those workplace behaviors such as dependability and working as part of a team. The life skills training content will be responsive to the current set of Corps members’ needs; activities will utilize appropriate curriculum and be delivered by Corps program staff, outside agencies and consultants or volunteers.
3. Basic Needs and Social Services - Each Corps member must have an Individual Development Plan which establishes goals within each of the program’s components, including the array of housing, food, clothing, income supports, child care and other unique needs of each Corps member. The Corps should form partnerships with those public agencies (or government-funded private agencies) that have benefits for which the Corps Members are eligible.
4. Stipends and Incentives -The weekly participation stipends typically offered through Corps programs are essential to attracting and retaining Corps participants. Participants in AmeriCorps programs are not considered employees and therefore are paid stipends not hourly wages. A system of incentives, including increase in stipend amounts, can provide recognition and reward for positive Corps member development and performance.

**Partnerships.** As referenced frequently above, there are many opportunities for partnerships in each of the program components. It is our intent to identify those public partners that would be available to any contractor in the RFP. Prospective bidders will be encouraged in the RFP to form partnerships within a proposal.

### **3. What are the best estimates of cost to establish and maintain a viable Conservation Corps relative to its impact?**

#### **Findings.**

**Expenses.** Start-up and annual operating funds are needed. In developing cost recommendations we examined the past costs of operating the Corps in Montgomery County as well as the costs and operating budgets of other Corps programs. Given the target population and the breadth and depth of services that must be provided for impacts, this intervention program has higher expenses. The Corps operating model calls for participants to work in small crews for an extended period of time to be most effective. This results in a higher per participant cost, estimated at \$22,000 (for two crews with 20 members total for nine months), including the Corps member's stipend.

In addition to the stipends, the operating costs are driven by a variety of factors including staffing, transportation, work-related equipment storage and maintenance. Some costs are relatively fixed and with the expansion of fee-based work and other grants, the per participant rate can decrease somewhat (for example 3 crews and 28 members) decreases the per participant to closer to \$20,000 including stipend. It is important to note that a separate start-up budget would pay for recruiting staff and purchasing new vans and other needed work equipment and program supplies.

**Revenues.** Corps nationally use a mix of funding sources including state and county government; Federal AmeriCorps program grant (different from educational awards); fees for work contracts; and private philanthropy and fund-raised dollars. Baltimore CivicWorks has been especially successful in creating a mix of funding sources and work projects that give flexibility to job training and financially support the overall organization.

#### **Conclusions.**

**Expenses.** The County funding budgeted for this year should be used for start-up expenses, especially purchase of vans and work equipment. Our estimate is that operating a viable Conservation Corps in the County will cost an average of \$500,000 year. Inherent in the procurement process is the objective of purchasing the most services for the least cost within the funding available. Also, Offerors that can bring additional resources will be favorably rated. And, further in-kind resources, such as storage space for the equipment and vans, from the County and others will help control costs.

**Revenues.** While we are confident that a strong provider can over time develop alternative funding steams, County funding for the Corps would need to be maintained at \$500,000 for at least the first two years of operation. It is realistic that a program of this complexity will require a least two service cycles to become stable and credible for expansion, especially in gaining more fee-based contracts for work projects. The Contractor will be required to apply for AmeriCorps program funds, during the first two years. As with other "friends" organizations, the Friends of the Conservation Corps would assist in generating private funding.

### **Specific Recommendations for Action**

#### **The RFP Process and Time Line:**

Assuming the County Council and County Executive agree on funding for the Conservation Corps, we recommend that:

- An RFP be issued by the Collaboration Council with a target date for startup activities in late FY2012.
- The startup period is focused on putting in place essential elements of the Corps; staffing and training, procurement of materials, and working on establishing the partnerships and agreements, etc.
- The program would begin serving its first cohort of at least 20 youth in early FY2013.

#### **RFP Program Design and Deliverables**

The Requirements of the provider will be limited to the essential elements as detailed in this report but the processes and approach to accomplishing them will be less prescriptive. We will also ensure that prospective bidders are given support in understanding the AmeriCorps requirements and public partnership resources.

## **REPORT**

### **Background**

Since 1984, Montgomery County government operated the Conservation Corps (MCCC). For FY2011, the County Council approved a budget that included the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) contracting with a nonprofit organization to operate the Corps. However, the County was unable to secure a contractor. Services to youth ended in June 2010.

During FY2012 budget deliberations, the County Council again included funding to contract with a private provider for the second part of the fiscal year, conditioned upon further analysis regarding the presence of viable bidders; clarification regarding target population and program design; and the cost of the program relevant to its impact. The Collaboration Council was selected to first do this research and then conduct the procurement process, based on the approval to proceed given this new information.

### **Activities Completed for this Report**

The Collaboration Council used many avenues to obtain information that has led to the findings and recommendations in this report, as follows:

- Convened a focus group of organizations that had either downloaded the October 18, 2010 Request for Proposals #1001267 or attended the pre-submission conference.
- Convened a group of public and private stakeholders who had referred youth to the program; had an interest in delivering the program; could furnish insight into the efficacy or work projects and/or were potential work sites (via free service learning or contract for paid work).
- Consulted with The Corps Network regarding examples of Corps operations across the nation, Corps standards, and AmeriCorps funding and requirements.
- Consulted with the Friends of the Conservation Corps regarding their history of involvement; their vision and goals for the local Corps; and their role with a future contractor.
- Interviewed staff who were involved in the several years of DHHS Montgomery Conservation Corps operations and received operations manuals and other materials.
- Visited programs in Baltimore and Washington, D.C.
- Reviewed literature regarding practices and policies for effective services to disconnected youth and current thinking regarding preparation of young adults for career pathways (part of our Credentialed by 26 Challenge work).

Raymond Crowel, Chief, Behavioral Health and Victims Services and Teresa Bennett, Child and Adolescent Services from DHHS and Vivian Yao, Montgomery County Council Legislative Analyst participated in several of the above activities.

### **Overview of the Conservation Corps Approach**

Youth Service and Conservation Corps are state and local programs that engage primarily youth and young adults (ages 16-25) in community service, training and educational activities. Corps are heirs to the Civilian Conservation Corps, a Depression-era program that engaged six million young men in conservation work. Collaboration Council's research into specific service and conservation corps organizations and programs found a wide variety of providers and program approaches. The Corps Network, the national advocacy and technical assistance organization for the nation's Service and Conservation Corps, reports that of the 143

identified Corps programs, 72% are operated by nonprofit organizations. Some of these organizations have Corps programs as their sole mission while others incorporate the Corps within much broader missions and service offerings. Most programs (77%) operate year round while a small number operate only seasonally. Target populations for the over 29,000 participants in 2008 ranged from those with no high school diploma (45%) to those having a college degree (15%). Likewise, program objectives can range from the introduction of youth to and appreciation for the conservation of natural resources with brief service projects through intensive full-time positive youth development and job training programs. According to the Corps Network, the majority of Corps members come to the Corps looking for a second chance to succeed in life.<sup>1</sup>

In 1997, Abt Associates produced a research report which concluded that the youth corps demonstrated significant and positive impacts on participants. The authors identified several characteristics of youth corps that when implemented together appeared to be fundamental to the program's success in serving more disadvantaged populations. These are as follows:

- **Comprehensiveness of services.** Participants are significantly disadvantaged economically, educationally or socially. Through case management, participants are linked to a variety of educational and social services which are integrated into the Corp programming via the Individual Development Plan.
- **Supportive and dedicated program staff.** The Corps uses a holistic, strengths-based approach for positive youth development. Through caring competent adults as crew supervisors, youth are motivated to succeed.
- **Quality of service experience.** Service activities are not simply "make work" but are planned to provide adequate supervision and opportunities for on-site learning.
- **Intensity of the service experience.** Participants usually participate full-time over many months which serves to make a lasting impression and precludes interaction with negative factors in members' pre-Corps lifestyles.
- **Expanded social network.** For many participants, youth corps provide a rare opportunity to interact with peers outside their immediate community. Working within a crew contributes to developing positive relationships with positive behavioral expectations along with supporting teamwork.<sup>2</sup>

Today, these components continue to be integral to the Youth Service and Conservation Corps as shown in the overarching description in the various federal laws and regulations that guide and fund these corps:

*Guided by adult leaders, who serve as mentors and role models as well as technical trainers and supervisors, crews of 8-12 Corps members carry out a wide range of conservation, urban infrastructure improvement and human service projects. In return for their efforts to restore and strengthen their communities, Corps members receive: 1) a living allowance<sup>3</sup>; 2) classroom training to improve basic competencies and, if necessary, to secure a GED or high school diploma; 3) experiential and environmental service-learning based education; 4) generic and technical skills training; 5) a wide range of supportive services; and 6) in many cases, an AmeriCorps post-service educational award.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> The Corps Network. *Snapshot of Corps*. [www.corpsnetwork.org](http://www.corpsnetwork.org)

<sup>2</sup> Abt Associates Inc., *Youth Corps: Promising Strategies for Young People and their Communities*, 2/1997. Pp23-25.

<sup>3</sup> For those Corps programs that only participate in the Educational Award Program of AmeriCorp, a living allowance is not required.

<sup>4</sup> The Corps Network, *Snapshot of the Corps*. [www.corpsnetwork.org](http://www.corpsnetwork.org)

The Abt Associates research described youth corps as programs that provide young people with a combination of work experience and education *within the framework of community service*.<sup>5</sup> This purpose is in keeping with the intent of the National and Community Service Act of 1990—funding to support full-time, productive work with visible community benefits in a natural resource or human service setting. The education component was intended to help participants achieve a high school diploma or GED as well as to provide skills training for employment.

What has changed over the past decade has been the increasing emphasis on the Youth Service and Conservation Corps as a program that 1) helps young people pursue postsecondary education credentials and careers and 2) provides follow-up support to ensure this post Corps program engagement. This transformation is in line with other research on disconnected youth. An enumeration of these expanded benefits can be found in the publication *The Corps Network's Corps: Jobs Today, A Lifetime of Employment Tomorrow*, published in January 2010, as shown below:

Regardless of the type of service, the Corps provides opportunities to

- Do real work—and get paid
- Gain hard skills—applicable to future employment
- Work in crews—developing 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce readiness skills like teamwork, collaboration, and taking responsibility
- Take initiative—growing as leaders and accountable, responsible colleagues
- Through individual development plans, set goals, reach them, plan for new goals—and realistically imagine the future
- Trust reliable mentors and willingly reach for the standards they set
- Grow in self-efficacy through pride in creating visible and valued improvements to the community and environment
- Attain academic achievement by learning through doing—relating classroom studies to experience in the field (and for those who need to, gain educationally by making progress toward a high school diploma or GED), and
- Earn credentials—entering pathways to careers and more education, not just dead-end jobs.

This breadth of services for this target population within this revised focus is also affirmed by the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF): “Nearly all jobs in the US will require youth to earn both a high school diploma and some type of a postsecondary credential to develop the appropriate skills and training for family-sustaining employment. In order to move disconnected youth along the path toward high school graduation and postsecondary education, a comprehensive system of supports that extends beyond just academics is necessary.”<sup>6</sup>

And while school reform efforts are being addressed at all levels to prevent students from getting off track, a recent Future of Children report states that “For the foreseeable future, the Nation will also need ‘second-chance’ systems and programs to re-engage and re-direct young people who leave the public school system.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Findings and Recommendations**

<sup>5</sup> Abt Associates, 2/1997. Page 2.

<sup>6</sup> American Youth Policy Forum. *Key Considerations for Serving Disconnect Youth*, July 2011, page 1

<sup>7</sup> Dan Bloom. *Future of Children Programs and Policies to Assist High School Dropouts in the Transition to Adulthood*. Future of Children. Vol. 20, No. 1. Page 90

This report synthesizes the findings from the above activities into three major sections that respond to the questions posed by the County Council:

- Part I: Prior RFP Process and Presence of Interested Bidders
- Part II: Describing a Future Conservation Corps in the County
- Part III: Funding and Sustainability

### **Part I: Prior RFP Process and Presence of Potential Bidders**

In September 2011, the Collaboration Council convened a focus group of organizations that had either downloaded the October 18, 2010 Request for Proposals #1001267 or attended the November 18, 2010 pre-submission conference. Four of the seven organizations attended the focus group; another organization stated it was no longer interested.

**Findings.** Participants in the focus group cited several areas of concern. First, there was a lack of clarity in RFP's Scope of Work and Deliverables particularly in the following areas:

- Requirements for payment of the youth
- Availability and status of the building/equipment; plus Bidders were not allowed to see the equipment to ascertain its condition while the RFP required the Bidder to then store and maintain it
- Task #2, the approach for potential contracting with County agencies, didn't confirm the presence of jobs
- Confusion regarding which AmeriCorps requirements are relevant only to Education Awards and which are relevant for general AmeriCorps funding
- Role of the Friends of the Conservation Corps
- Required branding as the Montgomery County Conservation Corps vs. contractor's identity which would be useful in securing further funding

Also, focus group members noted that the County's responses to their questions came close to the proposal deadline which also discouraged potential responders.

Second, focus group members stated that the deliverables were very specific and prescriptive, which gave no opportunity to offer other program designs that would adhere to Conservation Corps components and bring similar outcomes. All agreed that the number of deliverables and the prescriptiveness of the program components increased the program's budget.

Third, the RFP deliverables did not take into account what the service providers saw as youth needs. For example, a six month service period would not be sufficient for those who were pre-GED or had little knowledge of work environments and expectations.

### **Conclusions.**

- The new RFP must contain clearer information regarding deliverables, performance measures and public resources available to the program and allow providers flexibility in how they operate the program.
- A pre-submission conference will include technical assistance regarding national Corps standards and AmeriCorps requirements.

- Several local organizations remain interested in submitting proposals, if the above findings are addressed in the RFP.
- The Corps Network, the national association of youth service and conservation corps programs, will distribute the RFP to its members, thus expanding the pool of potential bidders.

**Part II: Describing a Future Conservation Corps in Montgomery County**

The following narrative describes each of the suggested Corps components within a framework of findings and conclusions:

Sections are

- A. Target Population
- B. Referrals and Outreach and Initial Screening
- C. Program Components
  - i. Employment Training and Career Guidance
  - ii. Education, Workplace and Life Skills Training
  - iii. Basic Needs & Social Services
  - iv. Stipends/Incentives
- D. Program Approach
  - i. Crews
  - ii. Weekly Schedule and Yearly Duration
  - iii. Tiered Programming
- E. Program Performance Measures

**A.Target Population**

**Findings.** The requirements for the target population as described in the last RFP were a combination of those established by the AmeriCorps in order for members to be eligible for its Education Awards Program and those locally determined, as shown in the following table.

AmeriCorps Requirements	Montgomery County Requirements
<p>Corps member must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be a United States citizen, United States national or lawful permanent resident of the United States;</li> <li>• Is either at least 17 years of age at the commencement or is an out-of-school youth 16 years of age at commencement of service</li> <li>• If out-of-school, must able to provide a reason for leaving school other than to join the Program;</li> </ul> <p>a. Be qualified to be enrolled in the AmeriCorps Educational Award Program (must acquire their GED or high school diploma before utilizing AmeriCorps Educational Award funds for post-secondary educational programs).</p>	<p>Corps member must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be documented to be between 17 years of age and 24 years of age;</li> <li>• be documented as living in Montgomery County for at least twelve months prior to participating in the Program;</li> <li>• be physically and mentally capable of performing labor intensive work as evidenced by a physical evaluation;</li> <li>• successfully complete a criminal background check and must not have been convicted of murder or listed on the sexual offender registry;</li> <li>• be drug free as evidenced in initial and ongoing random drug testing.<sup>8</sup></li> </ul> <p>The Contractor must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempt to recruit young adults who have faced significant challenges including incarceration, gang</li> </ul>

<sup>8</sup> Youth can be currently enrolled in substance abuse education and/or treatment programs. Any drug testing from that program can be accepted by the Corps, rather than having the youth tested repeatedly by multiple programs.



AmeriCorps Requirements	Montgomery County Requirements
	participation, or substance abuse and are lacking a high school diploma or equivalent education. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give preference in hiring Corps Members to economically disadvantaged young adults (at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines), including recipients (whether directly or through their family) of general assistance, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) or other public assistance benefits.</li> </ul>

In meetings with stakeholders and other Corps programs, two areas were topics of much discussion:

- 1. What can be the lowest educational level for youth who are accepted by the Corps program?** If these levels are too low, more resources must be devoted to addressing academic progress in order for the youth to be able to perform certain tasks on the job. Not having capable workers for fee-generating contracts will jeopardize this funding source. The intense work needed for those with particularly low academic records can potentially take resources away from other program aspects and slow the program's ability to make significant impact on all youth. Also, Educational Grant Awards are only available to those youth who have a high school diploma or earn a GED. Given the requirements that come with AmeriCorps' funding in order to give these awards, there should be a high number of youth enrolled who can realistically achieve high school completion to make adherence to those requirements worthwhile. Past DHHS Corps policy was that youth have a seventh grade reading level and a fifth grade math level. We recommend that this requirement stay, but that any Offeror can offer alternative eligibility criteria that are lower as long as the Offeror shows how it will help youth achieve significant progress toward high school diploma/GED or enrollment in post-secondary pathways without the high school completion.
- 2. What is the youngest age for enrollment?** As seen in the above table, AmeriCorps allows 16 year olds to participate, while the prior DHHS Corps had 17 as the lowest age. Stakeholders agreed that the youngest age should continue to be 17 which can capture those youth who despite all public school efforts still drop out. The average age in many programs is closer to 20 years. Given an age range from 17 to 24, the Offeror will be expected to describe how its proposed program will respond to the wide developmental stages and life experiences.

**Conclusions.**

- The target population will remain the same as in the prior DHHS RFP.

## **B. Outreach and Referrals and Initial Screening**

### **Outreach and Referrals.**

**Findings.** Those agencies that referred youth to the prior Montgomery County Corps are expected to continue to do so. These agencies include Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland Department of Juvenile Services, Montgomery County Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and Montgomery College. Community-based organizations that encounter the target population can also refer. Depending upon the selected Offeror's current association with these organizations, the Collaboration Council will assist in strengthening these relationships for the purpose of referrals and ongoing partnerships as youth are served. Youth can also apply directly to the program.

Whether youth apply themselves or come through a referring agency, there must be recruitment materials specifically developed to resonate with the target population that make clear the program's benefits, such as opportunities to work, earn a credential, become computer literate and access college.<sup>9</sup> Prior MC Conservation Corps staff and those in other programs stated that paid stipends and opportunity for work were draws and one effective recruitment tool was word of mouth by prior Corps members.

### **Conclusions.**

- Relationships with the several public and private agencies that come in contact with the target population must be established so that youth are referred.
- Recruitment approaches and materials must be developed that directly engage the target population.
- The benefits to youth in terms of opportunities to work, earn a high school credential and access further training and education for long-term employment must be clearly stated and appear more attractive than the target population's current lifestyle.

### **Initial Screening Interview with Applicants.**

**Findings.** The program design and initial interactions must sell the benefits of participation and lower the financial, time and psychological costs of participating.<sup>10</sup> Once referrals and applications are received, the program must work toward enrollment of young people who are committed to sustained involvement and thus likely candidates for successful program completion.

In other Corps programs, an initial screening process typically includes an interview with the applicant regarding his or her motivation, work and educational experience and skills, and perceived personal strengths and attitudes. The interview will also serve to clarify the industry focus of the work and confirm the applicant's level of interest in exploring future careers related to environment, conservation and natural resources. The program's climate of positive youth development and building on youth strengths must be evident during the screening process. For those applicants who are minors, parent permission to participate must be secured. This provides an opportunity to directly interact with families to increase their understanding of the program and consequently their support of their young person's involvement. Similar efforts to engage families with youth of majority who have family ties should occur.

The program should successfully attract applicants beyond its capacity so that there is some choice about who is accepted. Thus, selection as a candidate to move on in the process should bring immediate reward

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<sup>9</sup> Ivry, Robert and Doolittle, Fred. *Improving the Economic and Life Outcomes of At-Risk Youth*. MDRC. April 2003. Page 3

<sup>10</sup> Ivry and Doolittle, MDRC, Page 9

to applicants. Based on results of the initial screening, a group of applicants, a number greater than the program capacity, would move forward into the orientation period where subsequent assessments occur while further introducing and engaging the applicants in the program. At the end of the orientation period, the actual participants would be selected for full program completion. The Orientation Period is described on page 21.

#### **Conclusions.**

- Interactions with applicants must be strength-based, building on positive attributes and interests of the applicants and continue to communicate the activities and benefits of the Corps program.
- Applicants' families should be engaged in the initial screening, both for legal reasons (consent for minors' participation) and to build support for their young person.

### **C. Program Components**

An effective Montgomery County Conservation Corps would have four components:

1. Employment Training and Career Guidance
2. Academic Education, Workplace and Life Skills Training
3. Basic Needs and Social Services
4. Stipends and Incentives

Each is described in further detail below.

#### **1. Employment Training and Career Guidance**

Economic self-sufficiency requires not just academic credentials, but hard skills in specific industries and occupations; soft skills (pre-employment skills and appropriate workplace attitudes and habits) and work-based experience.<sup>11</sup> This section discusses hard skills and work-based experience with soft skills discussed under Academic Education and Life Skills.

#### **Corps Work Experience Program (CWEP)**

**Findings.** Attachment A has the excerpts from the prior DHHS Request for Proposals describing the requirements for the Corps Work Experience Projects (CWEP). The requirements are described in two ways: 1) very specific work for which the Corps is expected to be available to perform; and 2) the goals to be achieved by this work. The RFP lists eight distinct and required services; the RFP also states that services beyond those listed could be required. This list reflected the various ways County government could use the Corps to respond to its needs for immediate performance of various tasks, typically requiring entry-level skills, at a reasonable cost while at the same time giving the targeted youth work experiences and financially supporting the program through the fees for service.

The last RFP did not describe the connection between these CWEPs and post-program job availability or any related career possibilities that require post secondary training. While there is some overlap between the required services, each has a certain skill set for quality performance that would require discrete training of the Corps members by qualified trade people/instructors.

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<sup>11</sup> Brown, David, DeJesus, Edward, Schiraldi, Vincent *Barriers and Promising Approaches to Workforce and Youth Development for Young Offenders*. Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2002. Page 30

A review of Corps programs finds that most concentrate on a smaller number of work experience projects or service types. Fewer service types enable the Corps to focus on quality skills development among the Corps members and better relate the work experiences to career pathways. Liability of nonprofit organization is reduced in that youth perform work tasks for which they have been sufficiently trained and for which work safety conditions are better monitored.

As discussed earlier in this report, the Conservation Corps approach now emphasizes the importance of youth not just finding a job but to also think through what he/she envisions as their career path and its requisite education/training over their adult life. This approach can capitalize on the career and technology education (CTE) framework. In the nation's public education system, CTE evolved from vocational education's original and sole focus of preparing students for work immediately after high school. Today's CTE programs incorporate rigorous and challenging academic content standards and provide a sequence of courses leading to an industry-recognized credential or certificate, an associate or baccalaureate degree, or entry into apprenticeship programs. Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has organized CTE programs of study around 10 career clusters, which are adopted by local public school systems. The Conservation Corps CWEP is most aligned with the Environmental, Agricultural and Natural Resource Systems Career Cluster (found in Attachment B).

As Corps members acquire specific field skills, there must be assurance that there will be jobs available. Both state and county reports and actions confirm job growth in environment and natural resource systems work. At the state level, Governor O'Malley's Green Jobs and Industry Task Force issued a July 2010 report that recommended an aggressive plan to create and retain green jobs, support clean and renewable energy, protect Maryland's communities and preserve the State's natural resources.<sup>12</sup>

Locally, the *Report of the Montgomery County Green Economy Task Force* to the County Executive contained recommendations that would chart "a bold new course for Montgomery County focused on creating opportunities for new and existing 'green' businesses, spurring innovation, increasing employment, and developing next generation technologies. Two are specific to workforce training: C-1) Expand "green collar" education/training programs at Montgomery County Public Schools, Montgomery College, Universities at Shady Grove, and other professional training centers; and C-2) Expand pre-employment literacy training programs<sup>13</sup> Both are these recommendations are in keeping with the expectations of a Conservation Corps program. The report also included recommendations on specific initiatives such as energy retrofits and integration of storm water mitigation and retention into County facilities. As the County moves forward on these initiatives, partnering with the Conservation Corps would further help align needed work skills and show the potential for long-term employment to the Corps members.

At its September 2011 meeting, Montgomery County's Workforce Investment Board (WIB) adopted three industry sectors for strategic focus, based on their potential for high growth, high demand, and high wages. One of the sectors is Professional and Business Services, which includes as an example occupation: Life Scientists & Environmental Scientists. These occupations fall within MSDE's Environmental, Agricultural and Natural Resource Systems Career Cluster. WIB will be working to align and integrate the workforce system, education and industry sectors to ensure that a workforce is available to meet local business needs over a multi-year period.

While WIB's examples of occupations focus on degreed professions, it must also be recognized that workers with middle skills are needed. A strong majority of the projected job openings in Maryland will be

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<sup>12</sup> [http://issuu.com/cybermaryland/docs/green\\_jobs\\_task\\_force\\_report](http://issuu.com/cybermaryland/docs/green_jobs_task_force_report)

<sup>13</sup> Report of the Montgomery County Green Economy Task Force to the County Executive. March 2010.

for middle-skill or high-skill jobs. Skills2Compete is Governor O'Malley's initiative to ensure that every working Marylander has access to the equivalent of at least two years of education or training past high school – leading to a career or technical credential, industry certification, or two years of college – to be pursued at whatever point and pace makes sense for individual workers and industries. The Conservation Corps can help disconnected youth get on a pathway for at least a middle skilled job.

### **Work-Based Partners**

**Findings.** Youth actually working in an industry/business setting is an essential component of the Conservation Corps. These experiences can be either 1) service learning of a volunteer nature or 2) fee for service contracts, where the employer pays for the services of the Corps. For several years, the MC Corps had partnerships and contracts with local public agencies fitting both categories. For FY2010, the projected revenue was \$70,000. Representatives from the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection and the Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission attended the stakeholders meeting and expressed interest in continuing to work with the Corps.

Public agencies must be key partners for the work experience component as AmeriCorps requirements preclude interaction with certain job-providing entities, while the Corps members are accumulating hours leading to their Educational Awards. According to federal law, the contractor's CWEP cannot provide a direct benefit to a business organized for profit; a labor union; a partisan political organization; and a nonprofit organization that fails to comply with the restrictions contained in section 501c(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986. As a result, Corps programs across the nation have partnerships with a wide variety of public and nonprofit entities, such as public housing authorities, environmental protection; public water and power providers, general services, community development and redevelopment corporations, parks services, and energy and water conservation programs. Potential partners could be found in nonprofit organizations such as Bethesda Green whose vision is "To make a positive difference for our environment by promoting a strong local economy that supports green business initiatives and creates green jobs and by advancing sustainable living practices that enhance our quality of life." A Silver Spring Green has recently begun.

With work-based experiences as the fundamental activity, the primary challenge for Corps providers is to ensure that adequate work experiences are in place throughout the Corps member's enrollment. These partnerships must be developed during the start-up phase to ensure integration between the Corps' job readiness/work preparation activities and on-site work experience. These early relationships with the work settings can also give these worksites increased confidence in the abilities of the work crews that have little work histories.

### **Conclusions.**

- Mix of Corps Work Experience Projects (CWEP) sites which range from basic introduction to the world of work, job readiness, application of basic literacy and numeracy skills, basic tool handling and so on to increasingly complex work content skills that are part of career pathways.
- Public agencies and nonprofit organizations that can provide relevant work experiences are essential partners. The new RFP should outline the potential tasks that public agencies want completed by the Conservation Corps so that appropriate training of the Corps members can be planned and where possible integrated into the target Career Cluster.
- The required types of services to be performed by the Corps should be narrowed from the eight in the original RFP.
- These focused Corps services areas must align with the Maryland State Department of Education's Environmental, Agricultural and Natural Resource Systems Career Cluster.

- The Corps programming must be aligned with the workforce development efforts of the Workforce Investment Board and secondary and higher education.
- Local government initiatives that are focusing on this career cluster and “green” industry should consider ways to integrate the Corps into their work.
- These partnerships should be developed during the start-up phase to ensure integration between the Corps’ job readiness/work preparation activities and on-site work experience.

**Career Guidance.**

**Findings.** Career readiness involves three major skill areas: core academic skills and the ability to apply those skills in concrete situations in order to function in the workplace and in routine daily activities; employability skills (such as critical thinking and responsibility); that are essential in any career area; and technical, job-specific skills related to a specific career pathway.<sup>14</sup> The Corps career guidance component should help the young people identify career pathways, especially within MSDE’s Environmental, Agricultural and Natural Resource Systems Career Cluster that are suited to their aptitude, personality, interest and skills.

The DHHS RFP required 1) Provision of Career Preparation Instruction, including creating individualized career development plans and employment readiness monitoring for each Corps Member, resume writing and preparation training, career interest assessment testing, individual career counseling, job search assistance, job retention classes and assistance and 2) Provision of an *onsite* career resource center that includes job announcements, college information, trades information, computers and other resource materials.

Through the Workforce Investment Board, the County already funds MontgomeryWorks to offer job seekers the tools and resources to prepare for and obtain a job within One-Stop Career Centers. The resource centers provide daily job listings and access to computers, printers, and fax and copy machines to aid job searches. MontgomeryWorks also offers labor market information, career development workshops, career counseling, and training referrals to eligible job seekers. MontgomeryWorks also connects with employers to let them know about diverse pool of skilled and qualified job seekers ready for hire. Workforce Solutions Group, Inc., a nonprofit organization, has acted as county-contracted operator of these centers since 2000.

Additionally, the local Corps program should have relationships with Montgomery College as that educational institution continues to position itself as the resource for a variety of postsecondary options.

**Conclusions.**

- Rather than require the Conservation Corps program to build its own capacity to deliver career guidance services, the Corps should partner with MontgomeryWorks to for Corps Members to participate in their already publicly funded One-Stop Career Center.

**ii. Academic Education, Workplace and Life Skills Training**

**Findings.** Most of the young people who are served in the Corps will not have a high school diploma. Thus, a priority for each youth will be to ensure that they have met this milestone either through completion of traditional high school requirements or the acquisition of a GED credential, with the approach depending upon their past education history; current performance level as measured by an appropriate assessment

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<sup>14</sup> What is “Career Ready”? Association of Career and Technical Education. [www.acteonline.org](http://www.acteonline.org)

tool; and needed supports for learning and personal motivations. The result will be increased competency in such core academic skills of reading, math and writing that will contribute to workplace success within the Corps Work Experience Projects.

Students must be able to apply academic knowledge to authentic situations they may face in their careers, a skill that takes practice and intentional instruction that may need to be tailored to a student's specific career goals.<sup>15</sup> A contributing factor to students dropping out of school is their failure to see how school relates to their future work. The GED instruction within the Corps program provides an opportunity to link academic learning with work content and career pathways, resulting in increased relevance and engagement of Corps members.

Variably referred to as work readiness, pre-employment, 21<sup>st</sup> Century or soft skills, these are as essential to workplace success as is academic knowledge. Among those skills most often mentioned by employers as needed are professionalism/work ethic; oral and written communications; teamwork/collaboration and critical thinking/problem solving.<sup>16</sup> The Corps program will assist the young people in learning and practicing these skills to improve their employability. Assessment tools and curriculum are available within various national and state public education and workforce development efforts.

Finally, the Corps helps its members build life skills for independent living as a competent adult and community member. The life skills training content will be responsive to the current set of Corps members' needs but could include practical skills of daily living; money management; using leisure time; volunteering; parenting; and balancing work and personal life. The youth will improve their capacity to identify strengths and needs; resources/strategies to meet those needs and then acting for personal fulfillment, family functioning and civic engagement. Activities will utilize appropriate curriculum that provides opportunities for practice of life skills and be delivered by Corps program staff, outside agencies and consultants or volunteers.

AmeriCorps requirements dictate that no more than 20% of the aggregate of all Corps members' hours are spent in education/training activities. Corps programs address this through a variety of scheduling approaches: four days in work and a fifth day for training; others work a portion of each day followed by training; and still others have weeks of training interspersed with work. The Corps Network and local Corps programs will provide examples of options.

#### Conclusions.

- Each Corps member must have an Individual Development Plan which establishes goals within each of the program's components, including education, career exploration and planning, work readiness.
- GED must be perceived as an important stage (not destination) in the youth's career pathway preparation and lifetime of learning.
- Equal attention must be paid to the youth's acquisition of workplace skills, including work ethic, teamwork, critical thinking/problem-solving and communications and life skills, including performing daily activities and money management.

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<sup>15</sup> *What is "Career Ready"?* Association of Career and Technical Education. [www.acteonline.org](http://www.acteonline.org)

<sup>16</sup> Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce. Are They Really Ready To Work? *Corporate Voices for Working Families*. 2006  
<http://www.cvworkingfamilies.org/system/files/readytoworkemployersattitude.pdf>

**iii. Basic Needs and Social Services**

**Findings.** Effective programming for this target population requires a holistic approach to ensure that family and personal circumstances promote educational and workplace success. Again, the Individual Development Plan will guide each Corps member’s service needs and the steps to be taken. Given the many services available via public and private agencies, it is anticipated that these will not require funding via the Conservation Corps budget. The following table illustrates potential needs and resources. To the extent possible, these sources will be confirmed and identified within the Request for Proposals as being available to any Contractor. Individual development planning will take into consideration all current services that each Corps member uses and the presence of any case managers in other agencies. Also, consideration must be given to assisting older youth in transitioning into the adult system. Helping the Corps members learn how to access services on their own or with their families will be integrated into the life skills training so that they will be able to manage their personal needs after they complete the Conservation Corps.

<i>Need</i>	<i>Potential Sources</i>
<b>Health</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial physical to ensure ability to perform Corps Work Experience Projects</li> <li>Ongoing health coverage to promote wellness and minimize program absences due to illness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primary Care Coalition &amp; Montgomery Cares</li> <li>Where present, family’s health insurance (up to age 26)</li> <li>Health coverage offered through The Corps Network</li> </ul>
<b>Substance Use</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-employment and ongoing random testing</li> <li>Enrollment in education or treatment programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DHHS Behavioral Health Services (depending upon age of Corps member, via child or adult services)</li> <li>Access via private insurance</li> </ul>
<b>Mental Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DHHS Behavioral Health Services (depending upon age of Corps member, via child or adult services)</li> <li>Access via private insurance</li> </ul>
<b>Income Supports &amp; Other Cash Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designated liaison for Corps members within DHHS</li> </ul>

**Conclusions.**

- Each Corps member’s Individual Development Plan will include goals and strategies related to basic needs and social services.
- The Corps should partner with those public agencies (or government-funded private agencies) that offer basic needs, income supports or other social services for which the Corps Members are eligible. These agencies will be identified in the RFP.

#### **iv. Stipends/Incentives**

**Findings.** Effective practice research confirms the importance of providing older youth and young adults with economic incentives to attract low income youth to the program, to introduce Corps members to the concept of payment for positive work performance and to introduce money management life skills. The Youth Service and Conservation Corps' service orientation precludes the requirement for payment of minimum wage. Thus, the program can create its own schedule of stipends which can vary with the level/tier of program and the Corps member's performance. For example, more experienced and skilled youth who are working on contracts that bring in funding might receive larger stipends than program newcomers. These necessary cash stipends are a substantial part of the Corps budget which drives up the cost. Other incentives (gift cards) and recognitions (such as Corps member of the week) can be developed with donations from businesses and merchants.

#### **Conclusions.**

- Programs for older youth and young adults must include some payment to be attractive to the target population.
- Participants in AmeriCorps programs are not considered employees and therefore are paid stipends not paid minimum or hourly wages.
- A system of incentives, including increase in stipend amounts, can provide recognition for and reward positive Corps member development and performance.

#### **Program Approach**

##### **Crew Structure.**

**Findings.** Having a number of youth Corps members regularly working with an adult staff person as a crew is fundamental to all Corps programs. The number of youth in a crew is driven by the characteristics of the youth and the work projects to be completed. Some mature Corps programs have a variety of sized crews to meet various funding contracts. Programs that serve the same population as the County's eligible youth advise that crew size be no more than 10, given the minimal work readiness, academic and life skills that Corps members will present. With this smaller number, the crew leader can adequately supervise and guide each member and facilitate team-building. Each crew's members will bring a mix of abilities and backgrounds so that they can also learn from each other.

The qualifications and experience of the crew leader will drive program success. Crew leaders must have technical skills relevant to the work projects as well as understand; apply a positive youth development framework; and readily gain credibility with Corps members. Some programs have alumni eventually filling this leadership role.

#### **Conclusions.**

- During the first year, at least two work crews will operate, each with 10 young people assigned to an adult staff person.
- Depending upon the Contractor's experience and available fee for service work projects, the number of crews (and their size) can expand.

#### **Weekly and Yearly Schedules**

**Findings.** Depending upon the target population and program goals, Corps programs range from a few weeks during the summer to programs where youth are enrolled for over a year. The County program had youth enrolled from six

to nine months. The length of enrollment decreases the number of youth that can be served in any one year which influences the per participant cost.

The weekly schedule is determined in part by the AmeriCorps Education Awards requirements, where youth must participate for a certain number of hours in order to collect the award with a "part-time" program requiring 900 hours for a potential \$2,350. This typically translates into a 35 hours/week for 6 months. Some Corps have youth off-site at work projects for four days each week with the fifth day devoted to education and life skills training; others spend part of each day at work and education/life skills services after work. These schedules keep in mind the AmeriCorps requirement of 80% work and 20% training of aggregate Corps member time. Corps programs vary in their approaches to how time is counted. Regardless, all youth must complete time sheets as a key tracking device. This scheduling must be flexible in order to take advantage of work projects which have their own deadlines.

#### **Conclusions.**

- The length of enrollment in the program should be nine months, in order to give participants time to solidify their work skills and complete their academic goals.
- There would one cohort of youth enrolled (number of youth and crews depending upon funding and contracts) each year.
- During the three months when youth are not served on a daily basis, time is spent helping youth get into their next job/educational level; and outreach for the next year's cohort, staff development, and so on. This three month period would likely be in the summer.

#### **Tiered Programming**

##### **Findings.**

The Corps Network has offered a template for programs on preparing youth to connect with green pathways. The authors note that a similar approach could apply to other career pathways. Described as the "On-Ramp Model", the framework has three phases:

- 1) Enriched Preparation: developing youth skills and experience to ready them for postsecondary study and first career pathway-related jobs;
- 2) Bridging and Transition: facilitating a successful start for youth in postsecondary course of study linked to a career; and
- 3) Starting Smart—First Year Supports to Completion: Enabling youth to persist through attainment of a credential<sup>17</sup>

The Corps contribution is found especially in Phase I: Enriched Preparation, which has three components:

- 1) Integrated and Aligned Education/Service/Work: building academic, technical and professional ("soft") skills in the context of applied learning and actual work experiences and aligning the skills with entry requirements for postsecondary courses of study and first jobs.
- 2) Postsecondary Readiness and Exposure: helping youth prepare for postsecondary study and culture so they enter college ready to succeed.
- 3) Youth Development, Leadership and Support: incorporating youth development principles and providing wraparound services to ensure a powerful program experience and supports necessary for youth to complete the program and take the next step.<sup>18</sup>

Attachment C presents the model and its phases graphically.

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<sup>17</sup> The Corps Network. *A Green Pathways' Framework: Postsecondary and Employment Success for Low-Income, Disconnected Youth*. June 2011. Page 18.

<sup>18</sup> The Corps Network. *A Green Pathways' Framework...*. Page 29.

To translate these components into a program that engages youth and achieves desired results, many programs use a tiered approach where Corps members progress through achieving higher skills. An example of a three tier program is:

- 1) Orientation Period: Those youth identified during the outreach and referrals period (page 13) will participate in educational assessments, health physicals, substance abuse screening and criminal background checks. Program content will focus on youth understanding the benefits and expectations of the program. Upon completion of this period, youth will be confirmed for long time enrollment.
- 2) Academic and Life Skills with Work Introduction: This phase focuses on work readiness skills, improving academic performance and gradual introduction to the workplace and projects;
- 3) Work and Academic Readiness: The final phase will include increased work responsibilities and transition to post-Corps education and work, based on completion of Individual Development Plans and relevant assessments.

While there should be some time expectations for Corps members in each tier or phase, movement between phases based on individual progress; early transition to post-secondary education or full-time job in the Corps work area should be viewed as "wins."

**Conclusions.**

- A three-tier program that meets participants at their level of readiness and focuses on achievable and progressive goals will benefit participants.

**Recommended Program Performance Measures**

**Findings.** Data collected by the prior Conservation Corps program appears to be minimal. The DHHS RFP required performance measures were a mix of service statistic outputs and some impact on youth participants. A more robust set of measures can help policy-makers and funders determine the effectiveness of the program, especially in light of its higher cost per youth for service delivery.

**Conclusions.**

- The contractor must be required to collect program performance data using Mark Friedman’s Results-based Accountability Framework that answers three questions as shown in the table below. Specific statistical target measures will be part of the contract negotiations.
- The Collaboration Council can make its Efforts to Outcomes software available to the contractor if the organization does not have its own software to collect and report the required data. The contractor must specify in its proposal and budget, how data will be collected.

RBA Questions	Recommended Conservation Corps Performance Measures
<p><b>How Much Was Done?</b>  (service statistics)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # and demographics/characteristics (significant challenges) of enrolled members; 75% of Corps Members represent youth with significant challenges including lacking high school diploma</li> <li>• # of CWEP contracts/worksites</li> <li>• # of CWEP hours completed by Corps members</li> <li>• # of educational and other training hours or adult education courses delivered/completed by #/% of members</li> <li>• # of members qualifying for AmeriCorps Education Awards (min. of 900 hours of participation)</li> <li>• # and demographics/characteristics of members successfully completing program</li> <li>• Corps members maintain a minimum of 85% attendance rate</li> </ul>

RBA Questions	Recommended Conservation Corps Performance Measures
<p><b>How Well Was It Done?</b></p> <p>(adherence to industry standards; satisfaction of program participants and other stakeholders)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No negative findings from The Corps Network's AmeriCorps Education Award Program Site Visit/Desk Audit Monitoring</li> <li>• Satisfactory or greater ratings on The Corps Network's Excellence in Corps Standards tool for the first assessment cycle.</li> <li>• Individual Development Plan created for each Corps member within 30 days of enrollment</li> <li>• Alignment of work activities with labor market needs</li> <li>• Corps members' satisfaction with the program and staff</li> <li>• Contractor/worksite satisfaction of the job performance of Corps members</li> </ul>
<p><b>Did It Make A Difference?</b></p> <p>(impact on the knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors or circumstances of the participants)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 90% of Corps members have no further involvement in illegal activity (delinquent or criminal behavior, substance abuse, etc.) while in program</li> <li>• % attaining GED or high school diploma or measurable increase in math and reading skills (for pre-GED training members)</li> <li>• # of goals achieved by each Corps Member on their Individual Development Plan</li> <li>• Increase in work field-specific knowledge or credentials as measured by an approved tool</li> <li>• Increase in workplace knowledge, attitudes and habits as measured by an approved tool</li> <li>• Increased knowledge of career pathways and required training as measured by an approved tool</li> <li>• % who use their AmeriCorps Educational award to participate in further training within one year of completing their Corps participation</li> <li>• % of Corps members who are employed and/or involved in further education and training within three months of ending their Corps participation</li> </ul>

### **Part III: Funding and Sustainability**

#### **Expenses**

**Start-up Costs.** Given this program has not been operating since June 2010, there will be start-up costs as the new Contractor gears up to deliver services. The FY2012 budgeted funds need to be used to cover start-up costs for this essentially new program ready to serve youth. Examples of those expenses include

- Vans—at least two. (The prior vans are no longer available.)
- Work equipment—exactly what will depend upon the status of previous program materials and the anticipated work projects.
- Academic and Life Skills curriculum and program materials
- Staff recruitment
- Initial staff employment and pre-service training
- Outreach and marketing strategies and materials to youth and referral agencies and work site agencies
- Office rental and equipment for staff
- Education/training facility equipment
- IT and communications
- Data collection software
- Security deposits on office, program facilities and equipment parking/storage

The funding approved for the current fiscal year can help to cover these start-up costs. The actual expenses will also be influenced by the resources the contractor brings.

**On-going Operations.** FY2013 will be the first full year for operating costs. Given the comprehensive nature of the program, the annual operating budget needs to cover

- Program Management
- Data and Record-keeping
- Fiscal management
- Work site contract development
- Outreach and marketing to potential youth and funders
- Facility including van parking, work equipment storage, office for staff and an education/training facility, preferably with access to computers
- Maintenance of vans, equipment and facilities
- Program personnel or contracted consultants for the Corps Work Experience Projects, academic education, work readiness and life skills training and coordinating access to basic needs and social services supports.
- Stipends and other incentives for the Corps members

**Revenue**

In 2010, Corps budgets totaled \$549 million nationwide, 26% derived from “sponsored projects” or fee-for-service revenue with the balance from a variety of Federal sources, state, county and municipal appropriations, and foundation and corporate grants. There is no dedicated Federal source of funds.

**County Government.** Historically Montgomery County has been the primary funder. While we are confident that a strong provider can over time develop alternative funding streams, County funding for the Corps would need to be maintained at \$500,000 for at least the first several years of operation. It is realistic that a program of this complexity will require a least two service cycles to become stable and credible for expansion, especially in gaining more fee-based contracts for work projects. For reference the following table shows the funding history for the Corps between 2005 and 2011.

Historical County Funding for the Conservation Corp

FY	Approved County Annual Budget
2005	\$725,790
2006	\$756,910
2007	\$796,720
2008	\$797,220
2009	\$843,450
2010	\$856,730
2011	\$400,000

Source: HHS approved operating budgets, 2005 through 2011

**Fee for Service Work Contracts.** Corps programs typically think as entrepreneurs as funding for sustainability and growth must come from paid work contracts from public or nonprofit entities. A fee for service contract is needed in the first year; ideally the RFP will include that commitment from a public agency. In past years, this funding has been significant; for FY2010 the estimate was \$70,000. Clarity about potential and real public dollars for contracts will assist the Offeror in determining how much of its budget to devote to job contract finding and inclusion of earned income.

The successful contractor will have a plan for attracting more contracts as an increased number of contracts help with overall management costs and help decrease overall per participant program cost. Examples of other Corps programs that market their crew's work are: Vermont Youth Conservation Corps "Hiring a Crew" <http://www.vycc.org/projects/crew/payment/> Denver's Mile High Youth Corps <http://www.milehighyouthcorps.org/projectsponsor> and Baltimore Civic Works [www.civicworks.com/](http://www.civicworks.com/)

**AmeriCorps Funding.** The National and Community Service Act provides for AmeriCorps grant funding for the American Conservation and Youth Service Corps. AmeriCorps funding is available in two ways:

- 1) **AmeriCorps Education Awards Program (EAP).** Based on documented attendance in certain types of activities, Corps members who successfully complete the program are eligible to receive an award to be used for further training and education post Corps program. EAPs are a good first step for securing AmeriCorps funding as there are less fiscal reporting requirements for this minimal funding.
- 2) **Program Operations.** The Corps Network handles AmeriCorps program funding. This is a competitive proposal process with local match required (the County funding could suffice.)

Each funding category comes with policies and operations requirements, which are monitored through reports and onsite visits. The Corps Network advises that any Corps provider understand the more extensive requirements that come with program operations funds as the provider designs start-up and ongoing program activities with the long term goal of receiving both types of funding. However, Congress is looking at all the AmeriCorps funding for reductions, so how realistic this source is long term is questionable. The pre-submission conference will include technical assistance about the basic requirements that can inform prospective bidders.

Some questioned the cost/value of AmeriCorps involvement if it only means the Education Awards. Data are being sought from The Corps Network or AmeriCorps on how many Corps members have actually obtained their awards and used them. An estimate can be drawn from the County's FY10; there were 26 Corps members (19 w/ prior HS diploma and 7 who earned GED in program) who would qualify for the part-time (6 months) Educational Awards of max \$2350. If all had used, total value of scholarships would be \$61,100.

**Private Philanthropy and Fund-Raising.** Workforce development and post-secondary education options for disconnected youth are increasingly receiving priority among funders. One group that can be an effective advocate and resource developer in partnership with the Contractor is the Friends of the Conservation Corps. Their precise relationship with the Contractor and their role will be articulated in the RFP. However, some examples of support include:

- Reach out for jobs CWEP for Corps
- Link Corps graduates with jobs
- Stop by and get to know the youth and provide support
- Participate in orientation activities
- Work with program to identify and obtain incentives for members
- Support the contractor by fund-raising

**Attachments**

- A. Corps Work Experience Projects (CWEP) required in 2010 DHHS RFP
- B. Environmental, Agriculture and Natural Resource Systems Career Cluster
- C. The Corps Network On-Ramp Model

Attachment A  
Excerpt from 2010 RFP Regarding Work Projects

Corps Work Experience Projects (CWEPs)

- a. CWEPs must be undertaken in urban, suburban and rural in Montgomery County areas. The Contractor must use the following criteria in reviewing a CWEP offer:
  - i. The CWEP will provide Corps Members with education and training in employable skills;
  - ii. The CWEP will attract community support, participation, and funding;
  - iii. The CEWP conserves or enhances the County's natural resources, or has safety or other public benefits; and
  - iv. Funding from the CWEP will provide opportunities to expand Corps Member enrollment, services, and length of program participation.
  
- b. The Contractor must obtain, approve and coordinate CWEPs that either provide conservation, improvement and/or development of natural resources in Montgomery County or provide enhancement, preservation and maintenance of public lands, water or facilities in Montgomery County. CWEPs must also accomplish one or more of the following goals:
  - i. Involve labor intensive improvement activities on public/private lands or facilities that will result in a future public value;
  - ii. Preserve, maintain, and enhance environmentally important lands and waters;
  - iii. Accomplish useful and needed public works projects in both urban and rural areas;
  - iv. Conserve, maintain, improve, and develop natural resources in both urban and rural areas;
  - v. Provide opportunities for public use of, or education in, the areas, projects, and resources described in i, ii, and iii;
  - vi. Directly contribute to the conservation of energy;
  - vii. Contribute toward making public facilities accessible to persons with disabilities;
  - viii. Develop, rehabilitate, and restore parklands, recreational facilities, and historical resources; and,
  - ix. Restore and preserve wildlife habitat; and enhance reforestation in both urban and rural areas.
  
- c. The Contractor may also develop human service projects which combine both conservation work and human services, especially those projects and activities which promote the social well-being or economic self-sufficiency of the elderly, persons with physical or developmental disabilities, children or other persons with low incomes in Montgomery County.
  
- d. CWEP fees will be collected by the Contractor and must be used to help defray program costs. The Contractor may seek CWEPs from non-profit, state, federal and County funded agencies.
  
- e. CWEPs must not include removal or cleaning up of any toxic waste or other hazardous substance.
  
- f. The Contractor, in developing and approving CWEPs, must ensure that:
  - i. the CWEP will not discriminate based on an individual's race, color, religious creed, ancestry, sex, national origin or non-job-related handicap or disability;
  - ii. the CWEP cannot attempt to: influence legislation; organize or engage in protests, petitions, boycotts, or strikes; assist, promote, or deter union organizing; impair existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements; engage in partisan political

activities, or other activities designed to influence the outcome of an election to any public office; participate in, or endorse, events or activities that are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political platforms, political candidates, proposed legislation, or elected officials; engage in religious instruction, conduct worship services, provide instruction as part of a program that includes mandatory religious instruction or worship, construct or operate facilities devoted to religious instruction or worship, maintain facilities primarily or inherently devoted to religious instruction or worship; or engage in any form of religious proselytizing;

- iii. The CWEP cannot provide a direct benefit to: a business organized for profit; a labor union; a partisan political organization; and a nonprofit organization that fails to comply with the restrictions contained in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 except that nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent Corps Members from engaging in advocacy activities undertaken at their own initiative, outside of this Program; and,
- iv. Such other activities as the AmeriCorps Program may prohibit.

g. The Corps Members must be available to assist in emergency projects including, but not be limited to, natural disasters, fire prevention and suppression and rescue of lost or injured persons. Corps Member participation in emergency projects must be voluntary. Corps Members must receive adequate training, specific to the emergency, prior to participating in an emergency project.

The required services to be provided by the Contractor include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Watershed restoration**
  - includes repairing the source of the water damage, and repopulating the watershed with plant and sometimes tree species.
- **Reforestation**
  - includes planting tracts of small trees and shrubs at various locations throughout the County.
- **Urban Landscaping**
  - includes making and maintaining flower beds, soil preparation and planting along County highways and in downtown areas. Usually involves planting large trees.
- **Storm Water cleaning and mowing**
  - includes mowing around storm water ponds and picking up trash and debris in and around the ponds.
- **State park cleaning**
  - includes invasive species removal, signage installation, picking up litter and debris and hand pruning and removing invasive species within identified areas of a park.
- **Historic building restoration**
  - includes restoring buildings identified by the County for restoration. May include painting, installing floors, constructing walls, roofing, etc. In general returning the site to its original state.
- **Construction of park structures**
  - includes building trail bridges, drainages, rock staircases, retaining walls and step stones. Projects of this nature include such tasks as constructing bridges over streams, improving stream bed erosion through installing rip rap, constructing retaining walls from landscape timbers, large stairs from huge stones, etc.
- **Urban services**
  - includes graffiti removal, vacant lot clearing, trash/debris removal, and power washing bus shelters. These services are generally provided in downtown areas.

**Attachment B**  
**Environmental, Agriculture and Natural Resource Career Cluster**

## Maryland Career Clusters

### MARYLAND CAREER CLUSTERS HELP HIGH SCHOOLS WORK SMARTER IN TODAY'S COMPETITIVE ECONOMY.

Maryland Career Clusters are driven by what students need to know and do in order to be fully prepared for further education and careers in the 21st-century global economy. Career Clusters provide an important context for educational reform efforts as outlined in the Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) *Achievement Matters Most: Maryland's Plan for Every Student* and the *Policies and Procedures for the Development and Continuous Improvement of Career and Technology Education (CTE) Programs*. Under the guidance of MSDE, Maryland business, industry, and labor leaders organized the state's Career Cluster system.

Career Clusters have been embraced nationally at both secondary and postsecondary levels. Maryland is a recognized leader in successfully adapting the national framework to the state's economy and education reform. Local school systems and community colleges, along with other providers of postsecondary education, are using the Career Cluster system to organize teaching and learning to meet the specific needs and resources of their communities.

Career Clusters also help enhance economic development. They are groupings of interrelated occupations that represent the full range of career opportunities. By connecting educators and employers, career clusters provide a common framework to help ensure that Maryland has a high-quality workforce that attracts and retains businesses to the state.

#### MORE RELEVANT

At a time when the need for skills-driven education and high academic and technical achievement is greater than ever,

While nearly 80 percent of America's high school graduates enroll in college, an increasing number require remedial help at the outset. And overall, less than half of four-year college students complete the degree within five years.

we're losing many of our high school students to indifference.

Students are struggling to find the relevance that coursework will have on their future.

Too often students graduate inadequately prepared for challenging careers and the rigors of continued learning.

Maryland Career Clusters promote student success by relating students' educational experiences to their future goals and aspirations. Seeing the relevance of education, more students can reach high levels of performance, thus closing the achievement gaps.

#### MORE FOCUSED

Maryland high schools are changing to better prepare every student for success after high school in higher education and challenging careers. The Maryland Career Clusters system directs students toward focused programs of study that make the high school experience more meaningful. Not unlike choosing a subject major in college, Career Clusters provide students an opportunity to select a field of interest while they are still in high school. They focus students and provide a variety of career options to pursue. When students are interested and engaged, learning takes place.

Concentrated learning in a given subject area is not a new concept in Maryland. Many local school systems have in place focused programs of study, such as the International Baccalaureate; Performing Arts Magnets; Math, Science, and Technology Signatures; and Finance Academies. Career Clusters are a resource for high schools as they reorganize into smaller learning communities. Instruction is organized around career themes, providing more students the opportunity to explore career choices while still in high school and enroll in pathway programs that enable them to successfully transition from high school to postsecondary education.

Similarly, community colleges are adapting career clusters as a means of organizing degree programs to ease the transition of students from high school and provide focused programs of study. Because learning is a lifelong process, Maryland educators have taken steps to ensure that high school students can readily transition to two-year colleges, four-year colleges, or other postsecondary education to reach their goals. Through articulated Tech Prep and CTE pathway programs, students take a sequence of courses beginning in high school and continuing at two- or four-year colleges without repeating material already mastered.

The 10 Career Cluster frameworks include listings of available career options with an associate's degree or less, a bachelor's degree, or more than a bachelor's degree.

## Maryland Career Clusters

### MORE PREPARED

Today's knowledge-based economy demands continuous learning and innovation. It calls for a highly skilled and flexible workforce with the ability to work in cross-functional teams with people from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. The focus is no longer on performing a single job or task. To be successful, students must be able to:

- Understand the educational requirements for success in college and the workplace;
- Manage their own careers and their need for continuing education in a constantly changing environment; and
- Identify and seek career advancement opportunities.

### MORE PRODUCTIVE

Career Clusters allow business leaders to be partners in education where students can participate in more extensive career development opportunities. As a result, students aspire to learn and determine their own education and career goals. Career Clusters create clear and smooth educational pathways young people can follow from kindergarten through grade 12, on to community college or other postsecondary education, and into the workplace. Throughout high school and postsecondary education, students participate in a variety of work-based learning opportunities that assist in determining their future career development and career goals.

FEATURES	BENEFITS
Aligns teaching and learning with students' interests.	When students are interested in what they're learning, they stay involved and perform better.
Helps students become more self-directed and focused on their future.	Students who set goals achieve greater success in high school, community college and beyond.
Relates classwork to students' goals and interests.	Students are motivated to work harder, enroll in more challenging courses, and make better career choices.
Provides a framework for organizing high schools into smaller learning communities.	Students receive more personalized instruction, advice, and support.
Aligns high school programs of study to college and workplace requirements.	Programs of study ready students for college and eliminate the need for remediation.
Organizes career opportunities into 10 Career Clusters.	Students, parents, and advisors understand future career possibilities, thus facilitating career decision-making.
Anticipates and responds to changes in the economy.	Business and community leaders continue to keep educators informed on the changing requirements of the workplace.
Guides the continuous improvement of career and technology education programs.	Students can earn industry credentials, and/or gain advanced standing in college and careers.
Aligns course content to state standards.	Student achievement increases and dropout rates decrease.

*"Two years after graduating high school, I received my Associate Degree in Nursing. I attended college classes while still in high school and over each summer. The advantage to participating in this program was I could work part time, while still living at home. This program was fast paced and intense, but it was worth every minute. I love nursing and am very proud to be a Registered Nurse."*

Tiffany Edwards  
Associate Degree in Nursing  
College of Southern Maryland

*"Career clusters and pathways are designed to make options for students easy to understand. In that way, students are able to make better and more informed decisions about their future careers, inspiring them to do their very best while still in high school."*

Shelley A. Johnson  
Director, Career and Technology Education  
Montgomery County Public Schools

## Career Cluster 5

# ENVIRONMENTAL, AGRICULTURAL, AND NATURAL RESOURCE SYSTEMS

### PATHWAY: AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION – PLANT SYSTEMS

Planning, producing, and distributing plant food, fiber, ornamental, and environmental products, including landscaping and horticultural services; related research and technical services, and business planning and finance.

- Conduct market and location analysis, soil testing, and product testing/selection.
- Plan, manage, and control materials purchasing, land preparation, production, product quality control, inventory, and biosecurity.
- Manage health, safety, and environmental practices.
- Conduct research for new markets, products and processes (genetic research).
- Develop and test advanced applications of biotechnology.
- Plan for risk management.
- Manage health, safety, and environmental practices.

### PATHWAY: AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION – ANIMAL SYSTEMS

Planning, producing and distributing meat, poultry, seafood and dairy products; raising livestock, aquaculture, veterinary services, related research and technical services; business planning and finance.

- Conduct market and location analysis, soil testing, and product testing/selection.
- Plan, manage and control materials purchasing, production, product quality control, inventory, and biosecurity.
- Conduct research for new markets, products, and processes (genetic research).
- Develop and test advanced applications of biotechnology.
- Plan for risk management.
- Manage health, safety, and environmental practices.

### SAMPLE CAREER OPTIONS

WITH AN ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE OR LESS	WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE	WITH MORE THAN A BACHELOR'S DEGREE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field Production or Farm Manager</li> <li>• Compliance Manager</li> <li>• Arborist</li> <li>• Landscaper</li> <li>• Florist</li> <li>• Certified Professional Horticulturalist (CPH)</li> <li>• Nursery/Garden Center Manager</li> <li>• Greenhouse Assistant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soil Scientist</li> <li>• Geographic Information Systems Specialist</li> <li>• Nutrient Management Specialist</li> <li>• IPM/Pest Control Specialist</li> <li>• Soil Conservation Planner</li> <li>• Landscape Designer</li> <li>• Landscape Architect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plant Scientist</li> <li>• Research Project Manager</li> <li>• Geneticist</li> <li>• Patent Lawyer</li> <li>• Entomologist</li> <li>• Plant Pathologist</li> <li>• Tissue Culture Specialist</li> <li>• Plant Breeder</li> <li>• Extension Educator/Specialist</li> </ul>

### SAMPLE CAREER OPTIONS

WITH AN ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE OR LESS	WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE	WITH MORE THAN A BACHELOR'S DEGREE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Animal Production Manager</li> <li>• Horse Trainer</li> <li>• Environmental Technician</li> <li>• Veterinary Technician</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographic Information Systems Specialist</li> <li>• Nutritionist</li> <li>• Inspector</li> <li>• Soil Conservation Planner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Veterinarian</li> <li>• Geneticist</li> <li>• Product Developer</li> <li>• Production Quality Assurance Manager</li> <li>• Research Scientist</li> <li>• State Health Official</li> </ul>

## Career Cluster 5

### ENVIRONMENTAL, AGRICULTURAL, AND NATURAL RESOURCE SYSTEMS

#### PATHWAY: FOOD AND FIBER PROCESSING

Researching and developing products focused on nutritional value; processing and packaging plant and animal products.

- Convert harvested plant and animal materials into end-use products.
- Plan and manage production, including process engineering, quality assurance and food safety, health, worker safety, environmental compliance, and industrial maintenance.

#### SAMPLE CAREER OPTIONS

WITH AN ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE OR LESS	WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE	WITH MORE THAN A BACHELOR'S DEGREE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buyer</li> <li>• Inspector</li> <li>• Logistics and Inventory Manager</li> <li>• Meat Grader</li> <li>• Production Supervisor</li> <li>• Laboratory Technician</li> <li>• Quality Assurance Associate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Product Scientist</li> <li>• International Marketing and Packaging Manager</li> <li>• Nutrition Scientist</li> <li>• Food Scientist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information Systems Manager</li> <li>• Industrial Engineer</li> <li>• Quality Assurance Manager</li> </ul>

#### PATHWAY: NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Managing, conserving, and restoring natural resources, such as parks, fisheries, forestry, wildlife and habitat, watersheds and tributaries; and the environmental monitoring of power plants.

- Plan and manage public and private natural resources and inventory.
- Conduct scientific testing, monitoring, and research.
- Develop and maintain natural resource areas, including civil engineering and construction.
- Improve the education and awareness of users about natural resources.

#### SAMPLE CAREER OPTIONS

WITH AN ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE OR LESS	WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE	WITH MORE THAN A BACHELOR'S DEGREE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural Resources Police Officer</li> <li>• Forestry Technician</li> <li>• Naturalist</li> <li>• Fishery Technician</li> <li>• Hatchery Technician</li> <li>• Wildlife Technician</li> <li>• Geographic Information Systems Technician</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy Analyst</li> <li>• Forester</li> <li>• Fisheries Manager</li> <li>• Soil Conservation Planner</li> <li>• Park Manager</li> <li>• Wildlife Manager</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biologist</li> <li>• Physical Scientist</li> <li>• Fisheries Scientist</li> <li>• Environmental Engineer</li> <li>• Ecological Engineer</li> <li>• Wildlife Biologist</li> <li>• Forest Scientist</li> </ul>

#### PATHWAY: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Planning, testing, monitoring, maintaining, and restoring water, air, and land quality and waste management for the protection of public health and environmental quality.

- Provide scientific research, safety, and technical support services, including geological measurement and geographic information systems; law enforcement; and compliance monitoring and permitting.
- Communicate to and educate the public on maintaining environmental quality and respond to environmental and public health emergencies.
- Manage all types of water resources.

#### SAMPLE CAREER OPTIONS

WITH AN ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE OR LESS	WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE	WITH MORE THAN A BACHELOR'S DEGREE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hazardous Materials Specialist</li> <li>• Lead/Abatement Technician</li> <li>• Environmental Technician</li> <li>• Emergency Response Technician</li> <li>• Geographic Information Systems Technician</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planner</li> <li>• Geologist</li> <li>• Water Resource Engineer</li> <li>• Environmental Compliance Specialist</li> <li>• Health Physicist</li> <li>• Public Health Engineer</li> <li>• Air Quality Manager</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water Quality Manager</li> <li>• Toxicologist</li> <li>• Land Use/Environmental Engineer</li> <li>• Industrial Hygienist</li> <li>• Environmental Lawyer</li> </ul>

## Career Cluster 5

### ENVIRONMENTAL, AGRICULTURAL, AND NATURAL RESOURCE SYSTEMS

#### CROSS-CLUSTER SKILL AREAS

In addition to focusing on a Pathway, students gain transferable skills across Career Clusters. These cross-cluster skills broaden a student's understanding of how different careers connect and intersect.

- **Information Technology and Communications Support:** Telecommunications, data, and computer support services, including communications systems and devices, film and audio-visual services and equipment, computer software and hardware, and Internet services.
- **Financial and Business Services:** Financial, sales, and distribution services to producers of agricultural products, including capital and land acquisition, banking, financial management and insurance, sales and product support, customer inventory, management, and storage.
- **Agricultural and Environmental Engineering:** Maintaining and supporting technological systems used to produce, store, and distribute agricultural and natural resource products, including production and production control equipment, structural facilities, and irrigation equipment.
- **Strategic Planning:** Long-range business planning to set the overall direction of the business and respond to projected changes in environmental conditions.
- **Legal Services:** Legal services that address all aspects of the organization, including purchasing contracts, leases, human resources, and risk management.
- **Government Relations/Legislative Affairs:** Managing government communications, lobbying, and managing relationships with government agencies at the federal, state, and local levels.
- **Human Resources/Training:** Business activities involved in recruiting and hiring employees, conducting performance reviews, compensation and benefits management, labor relations, and compliance with government laws and regulations, training and development of employees ranging from orientation to professional and management development.
- **International Marketing and Distribution:** International market analysis and management of product exporting.
- **Transportation Services:** Transporting agricultural and natural resource products by water, rail, land, and air.
- **University Research, Teaching, and Outreach:** Technical and educational services provided by universities to support agriculture and natural resource management.

#### PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

### ENVIRONMENTAL, AGRICULTURAL, AND NATURAL RESOURCE SYSTEMS

Agricultural programs give students the opportunity to incorporate and apply what they have learned in their academic disciplines while preparing them to enter Maryland's largest industry. Specific courses range from traditional production management and agricultural mechanics to biotechnology, veterinary science, and aquaculture. Programs offer students hands-on learning experience through use of specialized equipment and participation in supervised projects outside of the classroom.

Attachment C  
The Corps Network On-Ramp Model

**FIGURE 1**  
**Green Career Pathways Framework**  
*Postsecondary and Career Success for Low-Income, Disconnected Youth*

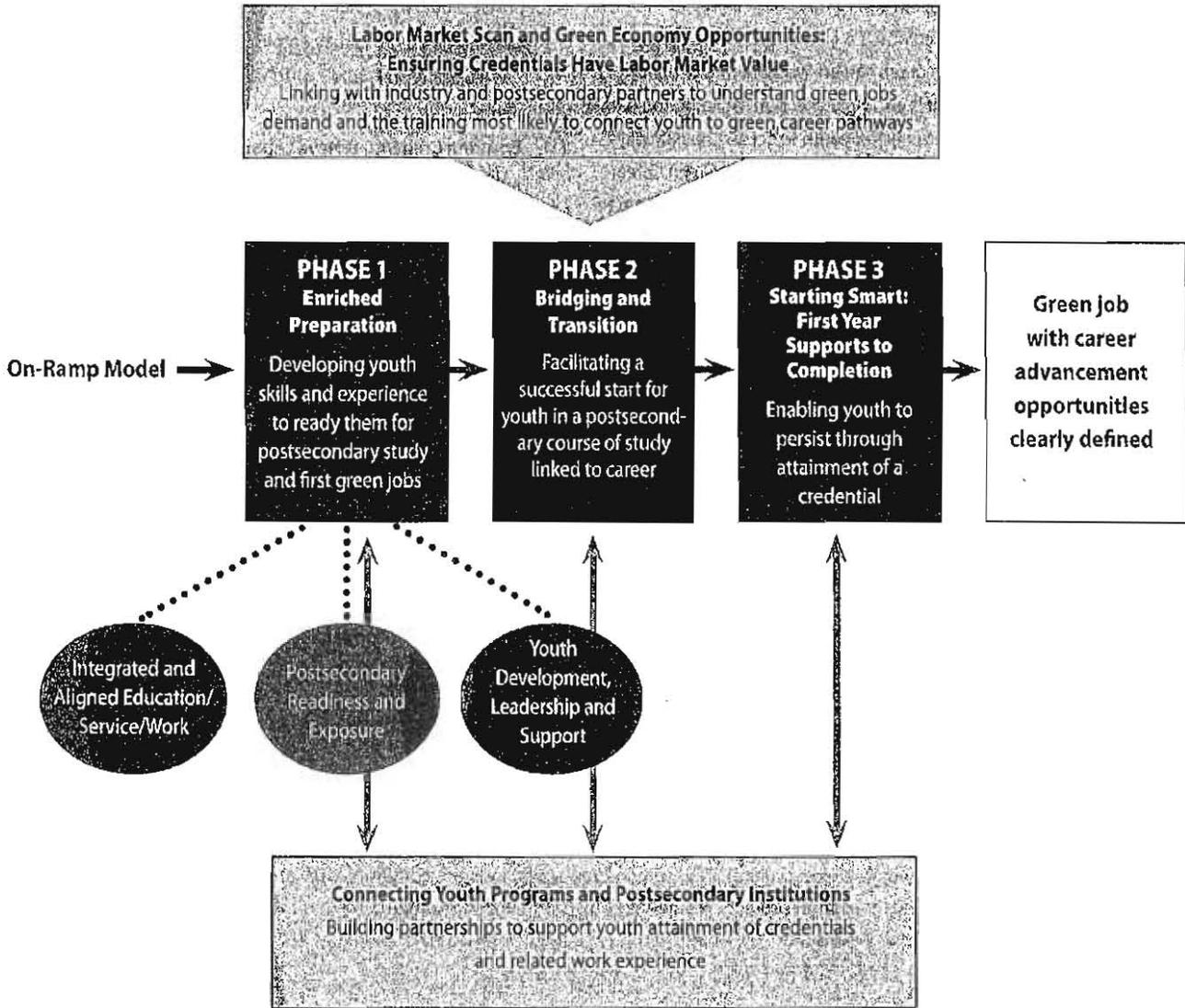


FIGURE 4  
Enriched Preparation: Detail

