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**The  
CorpsNetwork**

Strengthening America through  
service and conservation

## STARTING A CORPS MANUAL

CASE STUDY: THE GULF COAST RESTORATION INITIATIVE

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## **Introduction:**

In 2013, The Corps Network embarked on an extensive multi-year initiative to expand the presence of local Corps in the Gulf region following the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. Named the Gulf Coast Restoration Initiative (GCRI), the program's primary goal was to develop the infrastructure to sustain existing, and establish new, Service and Conservation Corps programs in communities located in all five Gulf States. The Corps Network saw the need in the Gulf for local workforce development programs that could prepare young adults for jobs in the growing coastal restoration market while providing much needed service work for their communities.

Using a staunchly place-based approach, The Corps Network convened local community stakeholders, community based-organizations, and various private and public partners to determine the Corps-structure that would best meet the communities' needs. Out of these discussions and partnership, the GCRI was able to create two new Service and Conservation Corps: Climb CDC Conservation Corps (Climb CDC) located in Gulfport, MS and the Conservation Corps of the Forgotten Coast (CCFC) located in Apalachicola, FL. With guidance from the TCN GCRI team, tireless effort, and support from local champions, Corps Staff at both Climb CDC and CCFC have successfully established their Corps as sustainable solutions to local issues of youth unemployment and coastal degradation.

Using the CCFC and the Climb CDC Corps as case studies, The Corps Network developed this *Starting a Corps Manual: Gulf Coast Restoration Corps Case Study* as a tool for individuals interesting in starting their own Corps program. Our goal is to provide a step-by-step guide, including milestones and benchmarks, to take a Corps from the exploratory phase all the way to full operation. The past two years implementing the Gulf Coast Restoration Initiative provided great insight into the challenges and benefits for starting a Corps program. We hope that with this edition of the "Starting a Corps" manual individuals can learn from the successes and missteps of the GCRI to inform their own path to establishing a Corps.

The manual is broken down into two parts. Part one will focus on the basics of starting a Corps. This includes background on Corps programs, their missions, and their essential elements. Part one will then follow the planning roadmap which guides readers through the three stages of Corps development. Each stage will include Corps examples for across the nation. Part two of the manual will focus on the Climb CDC Conservation Corps and the Conservation Corps of the Forgotten Coast as case studies for the starting a Corps process. We will discuss who each Corps navigated the various stages outlined in the planning roadmap as well as particular challenges the GCRI and Corps staff faced. Part 2 will conclude with a list of the most important takeaways about Corps development process in the Gulf.

The Corps Network would like to thank all the individuals, partners, and funders that helped make the GCRI a reality. Now in its third year, this initiative continues to be successful in establishing a strong Corps presence throughout the Gulf and teaching TCN new important

lessons on how to start a Corps. The Corps Network would particularly like to thank the Walton Family Foundation for their support in the initial planning and implementation of the Gulf Coast Restoration Initiative.

## Part 1: Starting a Corps Manual

### Overview:

#### What is a Corps?

**Purpose:** Service and Conservation Corps are youth/young adult development organizations that engage a new generation of young people and recently returning veterans in service to community and the environment, often blending service with workforce development, education, civic engagement, and community development.

**Structure:** Corps can be:

- Independent non-profits,
- Housed within a larger non-profit (for example, within a youth-serving agency, a Community Action Agency or Economic Development agency, or within a university)
- Housed within state or local government (for example, within the Department of Natural Resources or as an independent state agency)

#### Program Elements

Corps manage service projects, Corpsmember development, the organization itself, its administration and financial management—and the funding to support all three elements.

Corps Elements		
Service Projects	Corpsmember Development	Organizational Operation
Funding		

**Service Projects:** Corps flexibly meet local needs. Once a Corps has chosen areas of service, it often develops specific expertise and partnerships and remains focused on that area. Common areas of service include but are not limited to:

- **Conservation and environmental restoration:** planting trees, restoring streams, building trails on public lands

- **Building construction and renovation**, often with a green focus through weatherization and retrofits
- **Disaster relief and recovery**, including immediate disaster response assistance (blue tarping roofs and mucking out flooded homes, assistance with sheltering, supplies distribution) when requested by local emergency management officials and rebuilding or repairing homes after disasters.
- **Education and healthcare**: tutoring, delivering wellness outreach and information.

**Corpsmember Development:** Corpsmembers serve in crews or teams (usually 6-8 members) under the guidance of qualified leadership. Corps select from these methods, among others, to develop Corpsmembers during their terms of service:

- **Personal growth:** Setting goals and tracking progress, often through formal Individual Development Plans, Corpsmembers determine how they want to grow and gain through the program. They learn to track personal progress, and assess challenges and success.
- **Workforce readiness:** By serving in crews, Corpsmembers gain skills that prepare them for jobs and careers. They learn to take responsibility, give and receive help, value and work through difference, communicate, listen, negotiate, and arrive to the service site on time and ready to serve.
- **Education:** All Corps increase learning, whether in programs leading to the GED or high school diploma, in experiential service-learning, or in some combination of the two. Corps encourage Corpsmembers to pursue and succeed in further education to support employment, personal growth, and service.
- **Civic engagement:** Corpsmembers develop the ethic of service, seeing themselves as valued resources to communities, responsible for making a difference now and in the future.

**Organizational Operation:** Whether free-standing or within a larger organization, Corps need to master administration and finance: human resources and payroll (timesheets and stipend payments to Corpsmembers); procurement and maintenance of vehicles, tools, uniforms, and equipment; risk management (liability and insurance including service project coverage); and professional development.

**Funding:** Sources of start-up funds include combinations of foundations, state and local support, and some corporate support. Once the program is up and running, fee for service projects are a common additional source of funding. Corps' size, and therefore budget, vary from program to program. In this guide, we provide a budget you can adjust up or down, which describes costs for starting a Corps with three crews of eight

Corpsmembers. A Corps this size will need approximately \$110,000 for six months of pre-program work, and close to \$600,000 for six months of running the program.

## **Roadmap to Planning**

This guide breaks down the process of starting a Corps into three stages.

We estimate **three months for the first stage**—in which you assess needs, bring on a Director if possible, create a planning committee, make key decisions about service focus, Corpsmembers, and the organization, and raise needed funds

**Three months for the second stage**—hire staff, set up the home of the Corps, plan, design, and implement systems, and identify and negotiate service projects, in preparation for

The **six months of the third stage**, when you go into full operation with your first class of Corpsmembers.

This scenario makes the entire process one year in length—while, in reality, you may take more or less time in any of these stages. You can adjust the roadmap to meet your needs. Here's an overview:

### **Stage One:**

***Responsible: Once the planning committee is created, those individuals play a large part in all of these tasks. As soon as a Director can be hired, the Director takes the lead.***

1. Meet with community organizations and others to gauge interest and need.
2. Identify leads—the person or people who are going to drive this first stage. Hire a Director as soon as possible to drive the process.
3. Create Planning Committee and, if possible, identify a Champion.
4. Identify local needs, assets, and program feasibility.
5. Create mission.
6. Design the program: service focus, Corpsmember focus, terms of service, needs for Corpsmember development and support, and likely sources of funding.
7. Determine where the Corps will operate.
8. Create organizational chart and budget.

### **Stage Two:**

***Responsible: Now the larger burden of work falls on the Director and the staff.***

1. Create job descriptions and hire staff.
2. Hire financial/administrative staff or partner with an organization that provides these services.
3. Identify service projects, create MOUs with partners.
4. Do outreach and Corpsmember recruitment.

5. Train staff. Design trainings for Corpsmembers.
6. Design evaluation and data tracking system for Corpsmembers and project outcomes.
7. Procure vehicles, tools, and equipment.
8. Design policies and procedures for Corps and Corpsmembers.
9. Continue to market, raise funds, build community and partner support.
10. Join the national movement.

### **Stage Three:**

***Responsible: The Director and staff are largely responsible for these goals.***

1. Enroll Corpsmembers and start projects.
2. Run program and continue to improve and refine policies and procedures, fine-tuning training, assessment tools, and data tracking.
3. Identify new funding sources, additional partners. Strengthen existing relationships with stakeholders and funders.

## **Stage One: Planning and Feasibility Assessment**

In the first three months of starting a Corps, you need to ask questions, bring together the right people, figure out the best model for your community and your Corpsmembers, find a home for the Corps, raise money, and hire your Director. What are you going to need to run the program and support it financially? Who can help you understand this and even help you to do it?

### **1. Meet with community organizations and others to assess interest and need.**

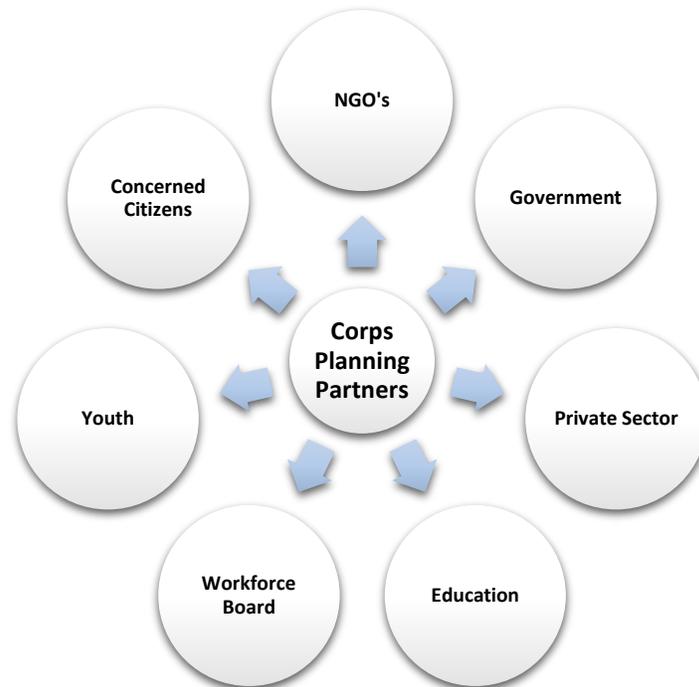
Find those who can help you get a larger and deeper understanding of community needs and assets. Describe to them what Corps can deliver and hear their opinions. Anyone you talk with now could be a partner in the future. This may include local government officials, public lands personnel, local business owners, NGOs, area educators, and others who you think may play a critical role in the development of your program.

***What are the critical needs and assets in your community? What improvements does the community or the environment need? What issues or problems do young people face?***

*Find the organizations meeting the community needs you hear about, especially those that could work for the Corps: public lands managers, recycling agencies, weatherization providers.*

Find those who are engaging the young people you are likely to target: educators, youth workers, faith-based and other community groups. How do these organizations approach these needs and assets? How are they funded and what funding remains stable over time?

*Ask funders how they see needs and assets:* community foundations, the United Way, fraternal and civic groups, all of them committed to community improvement, bring insight and history to the table.



There are a number of assets mapping tools that can be found online. Whether you decide to conduct a full S.W.O.T analysis or create your own community asset map you can find few examples of how others have assessed their community resources [here](#) and [here](#).

***Data provides big-picture perspective.*** Local needs and assets can come into focus through community mapping work that may be available through local government, Community Development Corporations, Community Action Agencies, and Housing Authorities, among others.

*What does data tell you about possible service needs?* What neighborhoods are eligible for LIHEAP funding (low-income home energy assistance programs)? What is the backlog of work in nearby national parks and forests? What existing volunteer groups need assistance with larger projects?

*What does data reveal about young people?* What are your drop-out and youth incarceration rates? What do school system surveys for programs like Drug-Free Schools tell you about problems identified by administrators, parents, and young people themselves? What programs exist for young people over the summers and for young people who are not in school? What do

employers and workforce professionals tell you about the job readiness of young men and women?

**Sources of Information:**

**Local organizations:**

*Youth serving organizations* (Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs, after-school programs)

*Service organizations* (fraternal organizations, AmeriCorps programs, faith-based groups)

*Funders* (United Way, foundations, city and state agencies)

**Data sources:**

*Economic Development Administration:* Provides links to state and local Community Development Corporations. <http://www.eda.gov/Resources/NationalEDOrganizations.xml>

*Community Action Partnership:* Provides links to local and regional Community Action Agencies. <http://www.communityactionpartnership.com/>

*Local Land Trust Alliance:* Provides a guide to local and state land trusts throughout the United States. <http://findalandtrust.org/>

*Public Housing Authorities Director's Association:* Provides links to housing authorities across the country. [http://www.phada.org/ha\\_list.php](http://www.phada.org/ha_list.php)

**2. Identify leads—the person or people who are going to drive this first stage. If you have funding, hire a Director.**

Once you have a good sense of the assets and needs of the community, and you start to block out what role the Corps can play, you need to identify the person or people who are going to be responsible for driving the process until you have raised money. Are you a team or an individual? If a team, determine roles and responsibilities. If you have a source of early funding even before you have done significant planning, hire a Director to drive the process.

**3. Create a planning or advisory committee and, if possible, identify a champion.**

Committee members should represent the community and aspects of the Corps program. They should be led and managed by the Program Director, who has primary responsibility for advancing the development of the Corps. The members of the Committee are the people who can advise the Director, help design the program and its operations, open doors for the Corps, and connect the Director to people that person needs to know. Options for representation in these categories include

<b>Service projects</b>	<b>Corpsmember development</b>	<b>Program Administration</b>	<b>Funding</b>
State or local public lands agency representative	Youth-serving professionals, social workers, counselors	Experienced non-profit CFO	Elected officials and public agency staff
Elected officials and public agency staff	Educator (K-12, community college, tutoring program)	Non-profit management professionals, and retired executives	Corporate and business leaders
Department of public works	Staff from local HHS offices	CPA	Chamber of Commerce member
Community leaders	Justice system (parole officer, judge)	Attorney	Community networker
Union representative	Workforce Investment Board representative	Auditing firm	Foundation officer or board member

When asking people to join the committee, explain what the group has done so far and what it is considering as the focus for Corpsmembers and service projects. Clearly define what responsibilities they are taking on in a written service description, emphasize the skills and knowledge you believe they bring to the committee, and ask them if they can help. If they can't serve on the Committee, ask if the Director or members of the Committee can continue to check in with them as the project moves ahead.

Once there is a strong initial group, bring them together, if possible, for a full day's strategic planning session, to determine jointly how they are going to help in planning, outreach, preparation, and fundraising. Establish a calendar of meetings, a timeline for key tasks, roles and responsibilities, and how members will work with the Director to accomplish shared goals. Using a third party facilitator will increase the effectiveness of the meeting and keep the group on task without having to express personal bias or opinions.

Also, during this meeting try to identify a champion for the Corps. The champion may be one of your Committee members, or another person. Successful programs have champions cheering for them in good times and challenging ones. They help build

support, link the Corps to resources, and provide credibility to an as-yet unproven program.

**Tools and Resources:**

**Management Help:** A national organization providing management assistance to nonprofit and for-profit organizations. <http://managementhelp.org/boards/boards.htm>

**Champions for Corps**

**Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa**

*Elected Official – Former Minnesota State Legislator Len Price*

Established in 1981 under the Minnesota state government, the Corps was a strong program that consistently faced budget cuts. In 1999, the Friends of the Minnesota Conservation Corps decided it was time for the Corps to become independent. At the time, Len Price served as a representative in the state legislature. He championed legislation allowing the Corps to become an independent nonprofit and supported a strong relationship between the Corps and state government. Len was such a devoted champion of the Corps, he joined the board of directors and now serves as the Executive Director of the Corps. With Len serving as a champion, the Corps has expanded both regionally and in the number of youth engaged.

**San Francisco Conservation Corps & All California Corps**

*Judge – Justice J. Anthony Kline*

Justice Anthony Kline presides over the 1<sup>st</sup> District Court of Appeals in San Francisco. As a fervent advocate for youth in the justice system, Justice Kline has advocated for Corps as a strategy to reengage disconnected youth. He has served on the San Francisco Conservation Corps Board of Directors and works closely with CalTrans (California's Department of Transportation) and the U.S. Department of Transportation identifying opportunities for Corps to strengthen these relationships.

**4. Identify local needs, assets, and program feasibility.**

One of the Director's first tasks, assisted by the Planning/Advisory Committee, is to dig deeper into the initial research. What are the local needs and assets? What needs can be met by the Corps?

Second, the Director and Committee need to begin exploring what funding sources might support the Corps, both in start-up and beyond and what possible home organizations exist for the Corps. Start tracking likely sources' funding cycles—when do community foundations, the United Way, and corporate foundations make funding decisions? Explore what the timeline would be for achieving 501(c)3 status, if the Corps wants to be its own independent non-profit. Alternatively, start having informational interviews with organizations and agencies that might provide institutional homes for the Corps. Even though a good deal of planning lies ahead, it is time to start exploring options and feasibility.

## **5. Create a mission.**

The Corps' mission statement articulates your values, your largest purpose, and what makes you unique, in a few words. For example, the mission statement of Seattle's EarthCorps is *Building global community through local environmental service*--seven words, easy to remember and understand. EarthCorps uses its mission almost like a tagline, including it on all publications and on Corpsmember t-shirts.

To develop a mission statement, the planning committee should answer these questions:

- What is the end goal of our program?
- What active verbs describe our purpose?
- Does the proposed mission inspire?
- How will the proposed mission statement impact service projects and Corpsmember development?

Once you have a mission statement, those words should guide all the Corps' choices: recruitment, project selection, approach to education and civic engagement. Every time the Corps makes a decision about starting a new program or continuing an old one, it can turn to its mission statement.

### **Resources and Tools:**

**Boardsource:** National organization provides resources on board and committee management. <http://www.boardsource.org/>

## **6. Design the program: service focus, Corpsmember focus, terms of service, needs for Corpsmember development and support, and likely funding sources.**

Once the Planning Committee has created its mission statement, it needs to immediately turn to program design. If the mission statement is poetry, program design is hard prose. What are you going to actually do and how are you going to do it?

*Program Design:* Because Corps are so flexible, there are many decisions to make about how to shape your Corps. The following chart provides a guide to the basic choices, and sidebars illuminate some of the issues with examples.

Topic	Questions
<b><i>Service Project Focus</i></b>	Will Corpsmembers meet the needs of low-income residents by weatherizing their homes, or will they green neighborhoods and encourage healthy eating by creating and maintaining community gardens? Will they restore streams or build trails on public lands?
<b><i>Corpsmember Target population</i></b>	What Corpsmembers will the Corps recruit? Will you engage 14 to 16 year-olds or 18 to 24 year-olds? Will they be college biology majors or young people who have dropped out of school and need to get their GED? Will the Corps engage a range of young people in different programs?
<b><i>Length of term of service</i></b>	How long should Corpsmembers be in the program to achieve program goals?
<b><i>Seasonal or Year-Round programming</i></b>	Should you run seasonal programs? Many do, because of long, cold winters when project work is unavailable or because their Corpsmembers are students during the school year but looking for summer jobs. A summer program would enable a new Corps to learn a good deal and limit costs. A year-round program, on the other hand, could attract resources at a larger level and enable you to staff up fully.
<b><i>Residential or non-residential programming</i></b>	Do Corpsmembers live on site or only participate in the program during the day? Corps running backcountry programs restoring public lands often camp for a week to several months.
<b><i>Size of crew</i></b>	What is an appropriate size of crew given the Corps service projects and Corpsmember needs? Crews typically vary in size from 8 to 10 youth and 1 to 2 crew leaders but can be smaller. What role will crew leaders play for Corpsmembers?
<b><i>Weekly schedule</i></b>	How much time will Corpsmembers spend on education, job training, and other non-service related work? Many Corps devote 20 percent of time to education and/or training, but this is structured in different ways from program to program.

<b>Training</b>	Will your Corpsmembers need training in specific skills? What kinds of work readiness skills do you want them to gain? How much emphasis will the program put on civic engagement? Should the Corps place Corpsmembers into internships as a way to make the transition into employment?
<b>Education</b>	How formal will education be in your Corps program? Will the Corps develop its own curriculum or partner with an education organization? Will you need to run a GED program? Do you want to establish service-learning as a part of Corpsmembers' service projects? How can you connect to resources in the school system and local community colleges?
<b>Wrap around services</b>	<p>What services do your Corpsmembers need? Should the Corps provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case management?</li> <li>• Counseling?</li> <li>• Child care?</li> <li>• Transportation?</li> <li>• Other?</li> </ul> <p>Will the Corps these provide these services in-house or through a partnership?</p>
Post-program support	<p>What supports do Corpsmembers need after exiting the program? Will the Corps provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job counseling and/or placement?</li> <li>• Additional service opportunities?</li> <li>• Alumni networking?</li> </ul>

*Sources of funding.* Once the program model has been determined, the Planning Committee can begin working on funding sources. The chart below suggests a few typical sources, and the sidebar provides some examples from Corps in California, Colorado, and Wisconsin. Corps funding generally falls in the following three categories, and many established Corps have a mix of all three types:

- 1. Program-Based Funding.** A single funding source provides substantial funding, usually requiring detailed grant application, to *support a specific program model*. Examples include funding through the Corporation for National and Community Service's AmeriCorps programs, and support for YouthBuild programs, funded through the U.S. Department of Labor.

**2. Work-Based Funding.** Public land management agencies and other government or non-profit entities fund Corps *to complete service projects*. Corps negotiate project-by-project cooperative agreements with service project sponsors who pay the Corps a lump sum based upon project completion or a weekly rate for the services of a crew.

Activity	Potential Funding Sources
Weatherization	State weatherization provider, local utilities
Public lands improvement	Federal land management agencies, state and local parks and forests, state department of natural resources, local conservation groups, municipal (city parks and recreation) and county governments
Construction	YouthBuild, funding through the US Department of Labor, housing authority, construction companies as sponsors
Recycling	City and county contracts; non-profits for recycling services at events
Disaster Preparedness and Relief (operating emergency call centers, clearing debris, distributing emergency kits)	Federal and local emergency planning offices, local fire departments
Education/Human Services, including mentoring/ Healthcare	Foundation and private grants

**3. Corpsmember-Based Funding.** Some sources fund Corps *to enroll and provide services to Corpsmembers* who meet specific eligibility criteria. Funding often requires tracking the development of specific Corpsmember skills—gains in education, independent living skills—but some funding is tied simply to the provision of direct services—child care, bus passes, mental and somatic health care. There are various fund streams for Corpsmember-Based in the State, Federal, and local government. A specific example is the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act funding which administered by the federal and state Departments of Labor.

Activity	Funding Support
Educational funding	State Education Agencies and local districts fund Corps by supporting Corps who run Charter Schools or by providing Corps with ADA support (funds paid on the basis of “average daily attendance”), to enroll Corpsmembers in classes leading to a high school diploma or the GED. Community colleges can provide in-kind support through partnerships, co-enrollment, and use of their facilities and faculty for training.
Counseling support	Human services agency, community foundation, justice agencies
Work readiness training	State and Local Workforce Investment Boards use Workforce Investment Act resources to fund Corps to provide summer and year-round job programs including work readiness and independent living training to eligible participants. Work readiness can also be supported by human services agencies, justice agencies, Chambers of Commerce, and local companies
Supports (wrap-around support, work readiness training) reducing recidivism for formerly incarcerated or court-involved youth	Juvenile and adult corrections agencies including probation and parole, United Way, health and human services agencies, community action agencies, city bus agencies for bus passes. Local, state and national agencies fund Corps to provide services to former TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) recipients through welfare to work programs.
Civic engagement training and materials	Foundations, fraternal organizations

## 7. Determine where the Corps will operate.

Corps can be included in other, larger non-profits, in universities, in state and local government, or be their own independent non-profit. This chart provides a summary of pros and cons while the sidebar gives examples from Miami, Utah, and Maryland.

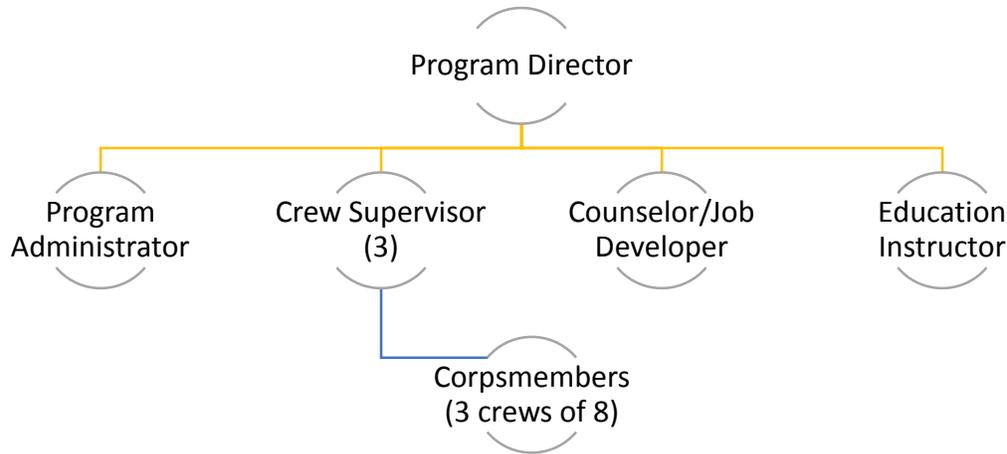
Organizational Structure	Start Up	Pros	Cons
<b>Independent non-profit organization</b>	Requires establishment of a 501(c)3 organization, complete administrative and financial (as well as programmatic) policies and procedures, and requires independent start-up capital	Autonomy and flexibility	Requires extensive planning, increased startup expenses
<b>Larger, existing non-profit organization</b>	Requires an agreement with division of responsibilities and supports from different departments or programs, clear definition of accountability and authority, budget projections for several years	Saves initial start-up planning, provides administrative and financial infrastructure. Brings connections to the community and resources.	Agency may charge overhead rate, less autonomy
<b>Government agencies</b>	May require legislation or decision by elected executive; requires inclusion in state or local budget.	Often provides seed money or in-kind resources (i.e. space or vehicles), although additional fundraising is often required, saves initial startup planning, provides an administrative and financial infrastructure	Agency may charge overhead rate, less autonomy, more bureaucracy

### 8. Create organizational chart and budget.

Now that the Planning/Advisory Committee has found a home for the Corps and determined the focus of service projects, the kinds of Corpsmembers you will recruit and engage in service, what the Corps will need to develop and support them, and where funding is likely to come from, it can draft an organizational chart and twelve

month budget. The following sample organizational chart and budget provide a place to start as the Committee designs an organizational structure and projects costs for the first year.

Here is an organizational chart for a Corps running three crews where the Corpsmembers will need education and counseling support:



Here is a basic budget broken down by quarter, for this Corps' first year of operation.

<b>Stage One (3 Months)</b>		
Program Director		\$ 19,250
Benefits @ 22%		\$ 4,250
Computer and cell phone		\$ 1,350
Other	Office donated by partners, minimal costs for local travel	
<b>Total Stage One</b>		<b>\$ 24,850</b>
<b>Stage Two (3 months)</b>		
<b>Staff Expenses</b>		
Program Director	Train staff, work with service site partners, MOUs, purchase tools,	\$19,250

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	vehicles, equipment, meet with partners, ongoing staff supervision.	
Program Administrator	Set up financial and grant management systems, oversee MOUs, procurement, negotiate in-kind support agreements, FFS agreements, HR including member files in coordination with Crew Supervisors, manage bookkeeping.	\$16,500
3 Crew Supervisors	Design staff training, work with service site partners, interview and hire Crewleaders and Corpsmembers, work with Counselor/Job Developer on intake/IDPs and with Education Instructor on service-learning	\$33,000
Counselor/Job Developer (hire 6 weeks before enrolling Corpsmembers)	Train, coordinate with partners, outreach to employer network, do Corpsmember intake and initial IDPs in coordination with Crew Supervisors	\$5,000
Education Instructor (hire 6 weeks before Corps enrolls Corpsmembers)	Select and adapt curricula, work with Crew Supervisor and Crewleaders to develop service-learning projects integrating learning into service	\$4,500
Benefits @ 22%		\$17,250
<b>Capital Expenses</b>		
Facility space	If facility space is not donated by partners, add \$17,500 for 3 months.	
Furniture and equipment	5 office units @ \$850; phones, copier, FAX	\$ 7,000
Staff computers		\$ 5,500
Server		\$ 3,500
Classroom		\$ 4,000

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Classroom computers	8 computers	\$ 8,000
Education materials		\$ 2,400
Field communications	Cell phones and service	\$ 800
<b>Total Stage Two</b>		<b>\$ 126,700</b>
<b>Stage Three (6 months)</b>		
<b>Salaries and Benefits</b>		
Program Director		\$38,500
Program Administrator		\$33,000
Crew Supervisor	3 crews; each with a supervisor	\$66,000
Counselor/Job Developer		\$25,000
Education Instructor		\$22,000
Benefits @ 22%		\$40,590
Payroll taxes @ 9%		\$16,605
Crewleaders	3 crews; 2 member Crewleaders per crew @ \$12/hour, 40 hours/week for 26 weeks	\$ 74,880
Corpsmembers	3 crews; 8 Corpsmembers per crew @ \$8/hour, 40 hours/week for 26 weeks	\$ 199,680
Corpsmember health insurance		\$ 28,800
<b>Total Salaries and Benefits</b>		<b>\$ 545,055</b>
<b>Field Expenses</b>		
Field safety supplies	\$2,500 per crew	\$ 7,500

Tools	\$2,500 per crew	\$ 7,500
Tool storage		\$ 2,500
Vehicles	3 vans @ \$27500; 2 trucks @ \$17000	\$ 133,500
Gas and Insurance		\$ 34,000
<b>Total Field Expenses</b>		<b>\$ 185,000</b>
Facility space	If facility space is not donated by partners, add \$35,000 for 6 months.	
<b>Total Stage Three</b>		<b>\$ 730,055</b>

## Stage Two: Defining Systems and Corps Structure

### 1. Create job descriptions and hire program staff.

Corps can find sample job descriptions on The Corps Network's ECO Resources section of its website.

### 2. Hire financial/administrative staff or partner with an organization that provides these services.

Create or adapt policies and procedures including financial, administrative including human resources, safety and risk management. Get insurance that covers the program, its projects, staff, and Corpsmembers. Set up basic accounting systems and systems for organizational and programmatic risk management ranging from emergency procedures to external audits. Establish an automated accounting system allowing identification of expenses by project and budget cost categories or partner with an agency with comparable accounting systems.

### 3. Identify service projects, create MOUs with partners.

#### *Creating and Running Service Projects*

Before the program starts, you need to have as many service projects ready to go as can fit into the calendar. Service projects require detailed agreements with project sponsors, trained crew leaders, and clear outcomes and expected results.

Here are some steps you can take to securing and implemented a service project:

- **Cultivate potential project sponsors to identify projects.** This is the responsibility of the Director until Crew Supervisors are hired, at which point they manage project

identification and negotiation under the Director's supervision and with the support of the Program Administrator.

- **Establish the specifics of the project:**
  - What will be accomplished by the project?
  - What support will the partner provide? For example, supervision, training, tools, financial support.
  - What is the timeline for the project?
- **Draw up a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) detailing project outcomes, fees, timeline, and specifics on payment.** Some partners will have standard agreements; you can also find samples on The Corps Network's website. Get your standard MOU reviewed by a lawyer during the first year of the Corps' operation and regularly thereafter.
- As Corpsmembers work on and complete the project, **invite the project sponsor to the site** to observe and make suggestions.
- Develop and use a standard form to **get written sponsor satisfaction feedback and assessment** from the partner at the end of the project.

#### *Supporting Service Projects*

Service projects need to be supported by strong training and strong administrative and financial systems. As Corps staff develop and sign MOUs, they track the skills that Corpsmembers will need to accomplish those projects well and safely. These lists feed in to training curricula.

Program Administrators, working with Crew Supervisors on issues directly related to program delivery, can create strong systems for:

- Cost allocation accounting systems for grants management and fee-for-service projects, which are often run on a reimbursement basis
- Systems to track vehicle maintenance, repairs, and fuel use
- Systems to track inventory and when tools and equipment are used and returned
- In residential or backcountry programs, systems tracking camping equipment and food
- Systems to track which Corpsmembers are supported under different funding streams
- Timesheets tracking Corpsmember attendance and hours, including differentiation on service hours, training hours, and education hours
- Systems to track when Corpsmember complete training, acquire certifications (including safety certificates), and pass key exams, and last but in many ways most important
- Systems to train, maintain, and retrain program staff in safety, and to enable them to train Corpsmembers and keep them from harm. The Corps Network has strong sample manuals and materials on program risk management and safety based on decades of experience in the field.

#### **4. Do outreach and Corpsmember recruitment.**

Strategies for recruitment differ based on your target audience. No matter what the group, however, you need to set targets for partners, outreach, and recruitment numbers, and track success, especially in this first year where you will be trying out a range of sources. You will need a standard application and standard interview protocol, so that every young person has the same first experience when approaching the Corps. You set the tone from the beginning.

To recruit and enroll disconnected young people, including formerly incarcerated and court-involved youth, reach out to justice agencies, and human service agencies and nonprofits serving youthful offenders. Develop youth-friendly recruitment materials and strategies. Put an eye-catching sign on your building. Go where they are: if you are looking for college students, reach out through on-line networks like Idealist. If you recruit only locally, do outreach in popular locations during off-hours and weekends when youth and young adults are likely to be out and about. Involve young people in developing recruitment strategies and find young people to be your recruiters—and after your first class is finished, employ a former Corpsmember as a recruitment coordinator.

#### **5. Train staff. Design trainings for Corpsmembers.**

Crew Supervisors are responsible for providing opportunities for Corpsmembers to grow in hard skills, work readiness, teamwork, education, civic engagement, and responsibility. Fortunately, others have gone before them and designed effective guidelines and training. See The Corps Network's ECO Resource website for sample manuals that will enable the Corps to train Crew Supervisors—and enable them to orient, train, and continue to develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities of Crew Leaders and Corpsmembers.

#### **6. Design evaluation and data tracking system for Corpsmembers and project outcomes.**

Establish clear measurement tools for evaluating overall program success. Use data from evaluation to manage the program, making changes to consistently improve results. Demonstrate and clearly communicate program impact in the community and on the individuals enrolled.

## **7. Procure vehicles, tools, and equipment.**

Tools and equipment can be an extensive and ongoing expense for Corps. While it is never a sure thing, community business partners and supporters of your program can be a source for donated tools, vehicles and other equipment. Grant writing for specific donations is also a recommendation. On occasion car manufactures and dealerships will sponsor organizations by providing vehicles. Chain saws and other tools also require ongoing maintenance and upkeep.

## **8. Design policies and procedures for Corps and Corpsmembers.**

Everything described above should be formalized and put in writing. See The Corps Network's [Resource Library](#) for adaptable sample materials.

## **9. Continue to market, raise funds, build community and partner support.**

Raising support for your program is always going to be a challenge. This is where a champion for your program could be beneficial. They can assist with promoting your program to donors and be your greatest advocate in the community. Social media, grant writing, fund raisers and actively seeking support is an ongoing and never ending part of sustainability.

Creating good publications (Fact Sheets, Fliers, Brochures) is critical for telling your story.

Developing and maintaining a website, using Facebook, Tweeter and other tools can help get the word out about all the great things you are accomplishing. Utilize the local media outlets when you have special events by sending out a well written press release.

## **10. Join the national movement.**

Join The Corps Network to gain access to information and technical assistance based on more than three decades of experience in helping Corps get established, thrive, and grow. Additionally, by joining the Corps Network you become part of a national movement, gain a voice on Capitol Hill, and gain access to funding opportunities, cost-effective health insurance and education awards for Corpsmembers. Your program will be connected to the wisdom of The Corps Network's network of 120+ Service and Conservation Corps nationwide. TCN holds its annual Conference in Washington D.C. every February. This is a great opportunity to build those important relationships with other Corps that can lead to collaborative partnerships, new training opportunities and valuable resources for your program.

As an Emerging Corps member of The Corps Network, you are entitled to:

- Participate in national initiatives where The Corps Network sub-grants program funds from agencies and organizations including the Department of Labor, the

Corporation for National Service, the National Park Service, and the Open Society Institute;

- Participate in The Corps Network's Corps Center of Excellence Accreditation program;
- Participate in The Corps Network's AmeriCorps Education Awards Program, an excellent opportunity to receive AmeriCorps Education Awards for Corpsmembers;
- Access competitive Health Insurance for Corpsmembers;
- Receive information regarding funding opportunities, weekly e-newsletter , Updates for the Hill, Corps profiles, training and technical assistance
- Participate in the development of national policy and legislation; *and*
- Attend The Corps Network National Conference in Washington, DC held annually in early February.

Membership information, including a membership form, is available on The Corps Network [website](#). Each Corps brings something new to the national Corps movement from unique program ideas to serving a new region of the country. As part of your Corps development process, identify the unique contribution that your Corps will bring to the national network of Corps. The movement becomes stronger with the addition of each new Corps.

## **Stage Three: In Operation**

### **1. Enroll Corpsmembers and start projects.**

Bring on your Corpsmembers, hold an Opening Day celebration, and move into the field. Hold staff meetings as needed during these first weeks and months, as personnel are likely to need advice, encouragement, and appreciation for the challenges and excitement of the first experiences of the Corps. Keep in touch with your community partners, build the leadership of your Corpsmembers as well as your staff, and be forgiving—but learn from every mistake. Document your projects, your progress, and the moments when the Corps comes together.

### **2. Run program and continue to improve and refine policies and procedures, fine-tuning training, assessment tools, and data tracking.**

While getting crews into the field, continue to develop and implement administrative systems and practices that support safety, provide the basis for reports on Corpsmember training, development, and project outcomes, track funds, and ensure accountability and clean audits.

### **3. Identify new funding sources and additional partners. Strengthen existing relationships with stakeholders and funders.**

Draw on the Corps' Planning Committee and your champion to continue to build community support.

Return to the three basic areas of Corps operations: Service projects, Corpsmember development, and Administration. How can you enrich what the Corps does in each of these areas with external partners and helpful friends of the Corps? Now that you are up and running, return to all of the targets you approached for the Planning Committee, take a second look at all of the potential partners you've spoken to as you solicited service projects, let them know about your progress, and find out if they can be helpful.

Marketing and fundraising can be enriched by all of the planning the Corps has done:

- Use your mission and your program design to create a clear and simple description of the Corps' aims and its role in the community.
- In fundraising, return to the budget often, so that you ask for what you need the most.
- Keep widening your network. Marketing and fundraising can start with the partners you already have, but you can also return to sources that didn't work out the first time if you think they could be interested now, and you can ask current partners who else you should be talking to.

- Report to funders accurately and thoroughly, and survey them to incorporate their insights into program improvement.

Local support can be enhanced with public events, and Corps provide opportunities for plenty of them. Hold an Opening Day celebration, plan days of service with partner organizations—whether with local youth-serving organizations or with businesses who are interested in getting employees to volunteer together to build morale—and when the first class finishes its term of service, hold a graduation.

In the meantime:

- Approach the local newspaper, radio station and news network about the Corps program.
- Post the Corps' logo at all work sites
- Attend public meetings to learn more about opportunities and to demonstrate the Corps' support for other efforts
- Ask local employers to speak to your Corpsmembers about career paths and local elected officials to speak to your Corpsmembers about civic engagement
- Develop Corpsmembers' awareness of current local issues, and encourage and equip them with the skills to attend public meetings and speak out
- Cultivate your service partners—and cultivate potential partners
- Invite local partners to the service site—and encourage and equip Corpsmembers with the skills to guide them in a visit.

#### **Resources and Tools:**

**Association of Fundraising Professionals:** Provides education and support to fundraising professionals. <http://www.afpnet.org/>

**Foundation Center:** Directory of private philanthropic and grant making foundations on the Internet. <http://foundationcenter.org/>

**Grants.gov:** Tool to help programs find and apply for federal grants. [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov)

## Part 2: Gulf Coast Restoration Corps Case Study

### Overview:

The second part of this manual will take the information described above and provide examples of two Corps programs putting the manual into practice; Climb CDC Conservation Corps located in Gulfport, Mississippi and Conservation Corps of the Forgotten Coast located in Apalachicola, Florida. Both Corps were established under the Gulf Coast Restoration Initiative with the help of The Corps Network’s GCRI team and the key partners and funders list below. This portion of the manual will show readers how the CCFC and Climb CDC navigated each stage of Corps development as well as their best practices and common challenges.

As these case studies demonstrate, the Corps development process can be a tricky and fluid process. Due to this fact, these case studies do at times deviate from the timeline proposed above. The Corps Network acknowledges that no two experiences are alike and recommends that all individuals taking part in starting a Corps understand that **flexibility is key**. The above timeline, benchmarks, and milestones are only recommendations - what is of the utmost importance is that your Corps secures each of the main program elements so that Corpsmembers have a successful Corps experience.

These two case studies represent two different but very common starting a Corps scenarios. The Climb CDC scenario demonstrates an already established organization incorporating a Conservation Corps to their program portfolio. The CCFC scenario demonstrates a coalition of community leaders and community based-organizations working together to start a Corps from scratch. Both scenarios have their challenges and rewards and are equally effective in Starting a Corps. Because each scenario has its own methodology, Stage two and Stage three of the case studies will be split into a Climb CDC section and a CCFC section.

Key Players			
GCRI Team	New Local Corps Staff	Initial Funders	Supporting Corps – Tech Assistance
John Hosey, TCN Joe Gersen, TCN Marie Walker, TCN Carolyn Benard, TCN Levi Novey, TCN	Lori West, Climb CDC Stephanie Mathes, Climb CDC JP Nicolais, Climb CDC Joe Tayler, CCFC Jeanette Taylor, CCFC Betty Webb, CCFC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walton Family Foundation</li> <li>• National Fish and Wildlife Foundation</li> <li>• The Nature Conservancy</li> <li>• City of Apalachicola</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Texas Conservation Corps</li> <li>• Community Training Works</li> <li>• Limitless Vistas Inc.</li> <li>• The Corps Network</li> </ul>

## **Stage One**

### **The Spark of an Idea and the Search for Seed Funding**

The assessment and initial planning stage began at The Corps Network in 2012 following the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and the passage of the RESTORE Act. The 2010 spill released 4.9 million barrels of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico, causing extensive damage to marine and wildlife habitats in Gulf States. Consequently, much of the Gulf's tourism and fishing industries suffered resulting in the loss of jobs and economic activity throughout the region. The devastation of the spill coupled with the recent history of equally damaging natural disasters has greatly impeded economic development and environmental sustainability for the Gulf States and the 22 million individuals who live there.

The corporations at fault for the spill were hit with massive fines under the Federal Water Pollution Act. In order to ensure that this money would be reinvested into the Gulf's damaged ecosystems and economies, President Obama, on July 6, 2012, signed into law the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States (RESTORE) Act. The RESTORE Act established the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund within the U.S. Treasury and ensured that 80% of all penalties paid would go directly into this new Fund. Under the Act, amounts in the Trust Fund would be made available for programs, projects, and activities that restore and protect the environment and economy of the Gulf Coast region.

Hearing that there would be a focus on workforce development and environmental service work in the Gulf, The Corps Network saw the RESTORE Act as a great opportunity to establish local Corps programs to benefit local youth and prepare them for the wide range of coastal restoration jobs made possible by RESTORE funding. In order to achieve this outcome, the TCN team first had to determine that there was a want and a need, as well as the local resources, to sustain Corps in the Gulf. Therefore, the first step TCN took was to begin building relationships with potential funders in the hopes that they could find seed funding to pilot a Gulf Coast Restoration Corps initiative.

In early 2013, TCN made a connection with the Walton Family Foundation. One of WFF's main focus areas is "strengthening the Gulf Coast" which was well suited for the TCN's potential GCRC. After a few meetings and pitches, TCN was asked to submit a letter of inquiry. One the letter of inquiry was approved, TCN submitted a full proposal for \$150,000 for the first year of the Gulf Coast Restoration Initiative. The budget was structured to include a full-time Director position to be located in the Gulf as well as partial staff time for DC-based staff to devote to program coordination and partner outreach. WFF approved The Corps Network's proposal and John Hosey was hired as the Gulf Coast Restoration Corps Director in the Gulf in December, 2013.

### **Best Practices: how to attain seed funding**

- Perfect your pitch. First and foremost, you need to develop your pitch for your potential program. It needs to a full story in a succinct and persuasive manner. Try to keep it to under a minute, if possible.
- Building relationships is key. A large portion of TCN's initial GCRI efforts where focused on seeking out potential funders that focus on the areas of coastal restoration, workforce development, national service, and the Gulf region. Once the connection is made try to meet with the funder and find out exactly what programs they are looking to fund.
- Be able to demonstrate your success. Promote yourself as someone with the background, knowledge base, and drive to be able to start a Corps. If you are weak in certain programmatic areas, work with others in your field or TCN Staff to strengthen those weak spots. TCN's 30 years of Corps-building experience helped immensely in demonstrating their capabilities which ultimately lead to access to seed funding.
- Be resilient and consistent. It is doubtful that you will be successful on your first few proposals, but do not let rejection phase you. You will constantly face rejection in this process and only those who are able to trudge through it end up being successful. Also adhere to a strict schedule - submitting a certain amount of proposals per quarter. Consistency will help you hone your proposal writing skills and keep you focused.

### **Assessing the Interest and Need for Corps in the Gulf**

Now that TCN could devote ample Staff time to the Gulf Corps Initiative, the next step was determining if local communities had an interest and a need for Conservation Corps. The GCRI team started by convening all three pre-existing Corps located in Texas, Louisiana, and Central Florida to inform them of their plans. The GCRI team made it clear that they would respect the existing Corps' boundaries and provide project work and funding in return for them providing technical assistance and training for the new Corps. This win-win agreement helped solidify the GCRI as a cooperative regional program and directly contributed to the future success for CCFC and Climb CDC's in Stage Three.

With the backing of the existing Corps in the region, John set out on his trip across the Gulf. Meeting with countless community leaders, workforce development professionals, education professionals, national service organizations, and environmental organizations, John was able to determine that various communities did find an interest in starting a Corps program to serve their community. The GCRI team was also able to develop the specific needs as indicated by local communities:

- Increased efforts to include community-based organizations (CBOs) in the planning and development of workforce programs that will focus on under-resourced and under-served populations in coastal communities.

- Advocating for inclusion of language in project RFPs being developed by state and local officials that will provide opportunities to engage local youth and veterans in these restoration projects.
- Accountability and oversight that ensures funds are being used for both socioeconomic and environmental restoration impacts associated with the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.
- Developing Corps programs along with ongoing support around capacity building, training and project management for CBOs interested in starting a Restoration Corps program.

Once the needs were identified, the GCRI team could use them as a roadmap to structuring Corps best suited for their own community. One demand that was made clear from the start was that no community wanted Conservation Corps from outside the community to come in, complete project work, and then leave. John found that in most communities interested in housing a Corps there was a strong desire to keep the Corps staff local, the Corpsmembers local, and the project work local. The GCRI team adopted a place-based strategy to ensure that any Corps they helped create would be developed in concert with the community by local CBOs and enroll local youth in their programming.

### **Scouting Community-Based Non-Profits to House Corps**

With the community needs now determined, the GCRI team could focus on finding the perfect community-based non-profits to house new Conservation Corps. Through connections he made during the needs assessment, John was able to pin-point a few organizations that were interested in housing Corps programs. Organizations were very enthusiastic but the GCRI team had difficulty finding any with sufficient infrastructure to successfully house a Conservation Corps on their own. One organization may have had great success in education programming but had no experience in service work. Another organization may have had great volunteer and service work components but had no experience in professional development. A third organization may have had both components but not the financial stability to handle government grants or projects paid as reimbursements. The GCRI team quickly understood that in order to start new Corps in the Gulf, they would need to create and employ innovative approaches and methods of cross-

#### **Best Practices: resources to assist in your needs and feasibility assessment**

- [Existing Corps in the Region](#)
- [State Service Commissions](#)
- City and Local Government
- Workforce Investment Boards
- Community Action Agencies
- Federal and State Fish and Wildlife
- State Environmental Quality Agencies
- Federal, State and Local Parks
- Public Works Department
- Regional Conservation NGOs (i.e. The Nature Conservancy)
- Land Trusts
- Department of Human and Health Services
- Community Colleges and Universities
- Prominent Leaders in the Community
- Faith-Based Organizations

sector collaboration to complete the entire Corps program design. This method, although comprehensive, was a lengthy process that took an ample amount of trial and error for success.

The first organization the GCRI team determined to be a feasible fit for housing a Conservation Corps was Climb CDC located in Gulfport, Mississippi. Climb CDC is a Mississippi non-profit and community development agency that provides workforce training, housing and financial counseling, housing development and disaster recovery services in the Gulf South Region. In partnership with local and regional organizations and donors, CLIMB CDC builds sustainable, community-based programs for low and moderate income residents that have created over \$145 million in community and economic benefits. The agency's Workforce Training Institute, which has served over 450 individuals, provides employment and business training related to construction, culinary arts, small business start-ups and computer networks and installation. The agency is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization that is governed by a Board of local community and business leaders.

Climb's program design is a standard Workforce development program with an AmeriCorps/YouthBuild component. They also provide in house and outside wrap around services to address all the needs of the students. The Corps program was designed to be an added technical skilled development program added to their other programs. Program participants enter Climb CDC for a one year term and can be incorporated in multiple technical skill areas throughout their term.

The second organization the GCRI determined feasible as a fit for a Conservation Corps was Franklin County Promise Coalition (FCPC) located in Apalachicola, Florida. FCPC was identified as having the history, infrastructure and community capacity to initiate an independent conservation corps program for the Apalachicola River Watershed region. John first visited FCPC after meeting with Mary Register from the Florida State Service Commission (Volunteer Florida). Mary remarked that FCPC had experience with national service programming and was housed in a community abundant with public lands and coastal habitat. John met with Joe Taylor, the Executive Director, who was very receptive to the idea of starting a Corps program in Apalachicola to serve Franklin County.

After months of conversation, Joe and the FCPC community decided that the most beneficial program design for an Apalachicola Corps would be having a 3-month High School program, a 6-month young adult program, and a 1-year advanced young adult program for returning Corpsmembers all of whom perform service focused on coastal habitat restoration, invasive species removal, living shoreline installation, oyster reef restoration, water quality monitoring and pine savanna restoration. The Corpsmember development and support focus for the program would include an education component once the Corps had enough project work to sustain itself. The goal was to fund the Corps on a "fee for service" model (as described in funding model under part one). The Corps would offer a cost-effective alternative to other contractors and provide benefits to the local community through youth engagement job

training. In 2015, the FCPC established the Conservation Corps of the Forgotten Coast as Apalachicola's first Service and Conservation Corps.

## Stage Two

### Expanding the Program Portfolio: Climb CDC Conservation Corps

Moving from the "planning" stage into the "setting up systems" stage of Corps development was not too heavy of a lift for Climb CDC. With 20+ years of experience in the fields of workforce development, engaging at-risk youth, and fee-for-service project work, Climb CDC already had many integral systems in place.

The one missing element was the trainings for staff and Corpsmembers in coastal restoration work. Climb CDC's background was focused heavily on home repairs and the culinary arts, therefore, the GCRI team decided that bringing an established Corps from the region might help Climb establish a more comprehensive environmental service curriculum to incorporate in their programming.

#### Best Practices: the stage two check list

- Organizational Chart and Budget
- Create job descriptions and hire program staff
- Hire administrative/financial staff or find entity that can provide those services
- Identify service projects and create formal agreements with partners
- Outreach and Corpsmember recruitment
- Design Trainings for staff and Corpsmembers
- Design evaluation and data tracking systems
- Design policies and procedures for program and Corpsmembers
- Continue to market, raise funds, build community and partner support
- Join The Corps Network

The Climb CDC scenario shows that incorporating a Corps program into an already established organization can significantly decrease the amount of time, effort, and resources a Corps developer needs to put into Stage two. Many Corps that exist today used this method which is why Corps can be found within a wide variety of host entities such as Community Colleges, Charter Schools, State Parks Departments, Land Trusts, Community Action Agencies, etc. Utilizing a host entity does cut down on costs but it can also jeopardize the program's autonomy. Climb CDC Conservation Corps is a great example of a Corps program with a supportive host entity but not all new Corps have been so lucky.

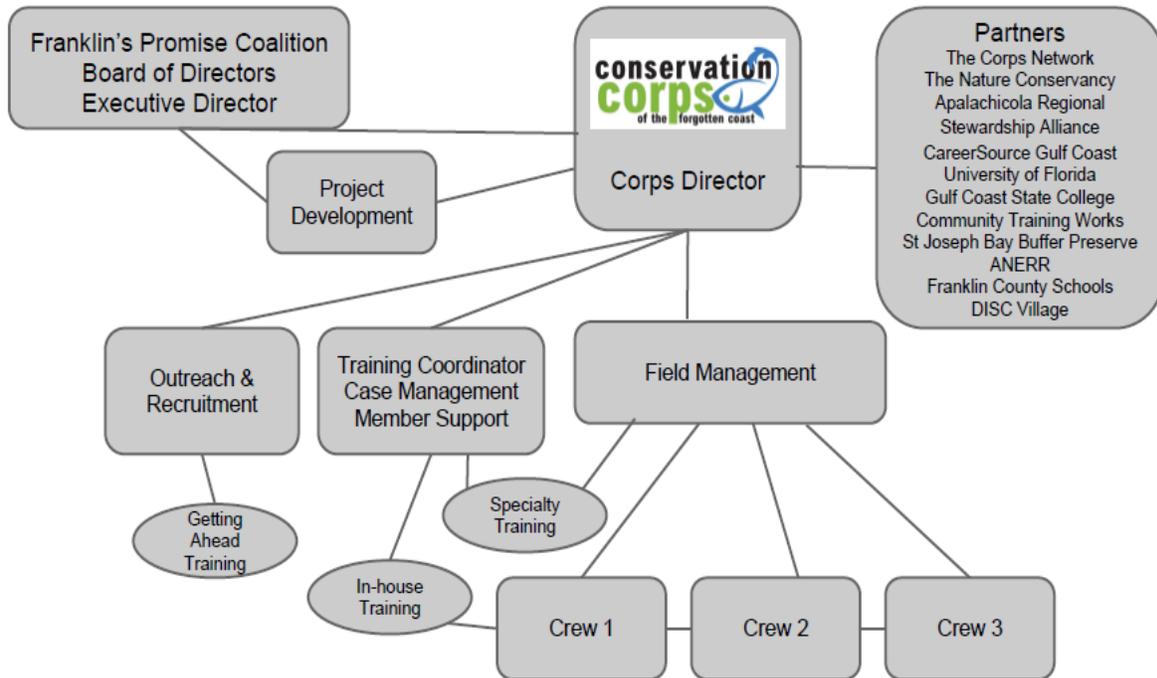
### Starting From Scratch: Conservation Corps of the Forgotten Coast

The CCFC scenario was very different from Climb CDC's. Over the course of two years, the Executive Director of FCPC, Joe Taylor, the City Administrator, Betty Webb, and the GCRI worked to find cross-sector collaborations that could support the necessary systems for the Corps. Although FCPC is a strong coalition with many contributing entities, the local team agreed that the CCFC would work better as its own unique entity supported by the coalition.

Once the CCFC was created it was housed within FCPC but the goal is to transition the Corps into an independent 501c3 non-profit in the near future.

The FCPC supports the CCFC by providing administrative and financial staff as well as education, training, and soft skill development for the Corpsmembers. The GCRI team worked to identify service projects, find long-term project sponsors, establish data tracking systems, and continue to market for the Corps. Betty Webb was named the Corps Director and, together with Joe Taylor, established their organizational chart, their outreach and recruitment strategy, and their mission statement. The mission statement is as follows: *The CCFC is a comprehensive youth development program for young adults 18-25 years of age (veterans up to 29, and summer internships for 16 and up) which provides participants with job training, academic programming, leadership skills, and additional support through a strategy of service that conserves, protects and improves the environment.*

Conservation Corps of the Forgotten Coast Organizational Chart



## Stage Three

### The Nature Conservancy Mississippi Pilot Project

With the integral Corps systems in place, Climb CDC was ready to embark on their first few projects as a Conservation Corps. There are two main approaches that most new Corps take when starting their first program year. The first is a full launch where Corps plan in advance a full term-of-service with projects, trainings, and development activities and then launch the fully-fledged program. This method is ideal if a program has ample funding, experienced Corps staff and long-term project partnerships up front. This method also can be risky if the program does not demonstrate success in its first year or is not able to adapt to project partners' needs quickly.

The second approach is the pilot project method where Corps start with a demonstration project, assess the results of the project, and adjust their program elements to better suit the project sponsors' and Corpsmembers' needs. This method is ideal for programs that have inconsistent funding streams, very few project sponsors with Corps experience, and/or Corpsmembers from particularly difficult backgrounds that need a lot of support. This method can be risky because pilot programs have a tendency to be over-analyzed which could slow momentum.

Climb CDC and the GCRI team decided that due to the lack of Corps-friendly project partners in the region, they would pursue a pilot project as the first demonstration of their new Corps program. The GCRI team and the local branch of The Nature Conservancy, in partnership with the Mississippi Audubon, and the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, were able to secure funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund to establish Climb CDC Conservation Corp's first few demonstration projects; The Nature Conservancy's Coastal Streams and Habitat Restoration and Management Initiative. Climb CDC took part in the initiative by engaging Corpsmembers in collecting baseline data from 29 sites across ten coastal streams that feed into the Mississippi Sound.

#### **Best Practices: get creative in your recruitment strategy**

The CCFC's outreach and recruitment strategy is a particularly interesting case study. The City of Apalachicola is dominated by the fishing industries and is known to some as the oyster capital of the world. Due to the economy's reliance on fishing, the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill have a particularly devastating impact on the community. Understanding the City's reliance on fishing, CCFC decided to partner with the president of the local fishing association who could guide young adults that needed to develop their professional skills before they could be offered a job into the program. The CCFC also partners with Workforce Investment Boards, Community Colleges, the Judicial System, and the Mayor/City government for their recruitment needs.

**Project Sponsors' Main Objectives:**

1. Collect baseline data from 29 sites across ten coastal streams that all feed into the Mississippi Sound.
2. Promote community resilience and enrich the Gulf Coast economy by training local young adults rather than outsourcing coastal restoration employment opportunities.
3. Assess deteriorating natural spaces in preparation of making steps to restore them.

**Climb CDC's Main Objectives:**

1. Provide young people in underserved areas a satisfying and productive pathway out of the challenges of their socioeconomic climate.
2. Increase awareness of the Conservation Corps model and its advantages to the natural environment and the community.
3. Build local organizational capacity to launch a Conservation Corps in Coastal Mississippi.
4. Build project capacity and experience for Climb CDC

Since Climb CDC had little experience in the conservation service training, the GCRI team brought in the Texas Conservation Corps, a program of American YouthWorks, to provide experienced staff and crew leaders to oversee project implementation as well as provide Climb CDC staff an opportunity to learn from seasoned Corps staff. The typical work week for this crew included four days of data collection and one day of training in water monitoring and stream assessment techniques, construction, and water safety/risk management. Other smaller projects included invasive species control, invasive fuels reduction, and the construction of bird nesting installations.

Once the pilot project was underway, the GCRI team took steps to track data, fine-tune training and assessment tools, and market the program so that the Climb CDC Conservation Corps could demonstrate its success to future project partners. The team made sure to track three separate metrics; Corpsmember outcomes, project outcomes, and crew efficiency. This outcome data was required by the grant but also represents the metrics most valuable to project sponsors and future funders. The data found that a Climb CDC crew was able to accomplish project work equivalent to 3.15 full-time staff. A post-project survey also indicated that 90% of the Corpsmembers now felt that they “now understood the impact of chemicals on streams and stream life” and that 100% of Corpsmember indicated that they now have an interest in “a career, training program and degree” in this field. A full write-up of the project accomplishments can be found [here](#). Local news articles highlighting the pilot project can be found [here](#).

Within phase 1 of the pilot project, the GCRI team and Climb CDC learned a few important lessons. The first lesson was that Climb CDC needed to be more involved in the planning of the project logistics and details. Although the project was successful and the project outcomes were impressive, there were difficult times were Climb CDC staff were not fully aware of what

was expected of them. The GCRI team and Climb CDC adjusted the planning for phase 2 which alleviated the issue. The second lesson learned was that Climb CDC staff and Texas Conservation Corps staff needed to focus more on building capacity for Climb CDC rather than completing project work. Many times project work can be complex and the focus on pleasing sponsors can cause tunnel vision, but Corps (especially new Corps) must be upfront with their project sponsors and emphasize that the program is focused on youth development first and foremost and that project work must be suited to that cause. Phase 2 went smoothly with Corpsmembers being having more experience coming into the project and Texas Conservation Corps and Climb CDC being able to focus more on staff development.

### **Apalachicola Nature Trail Demonstration Project**

A few months after the completion of the Climb CDC pilot, the Conservation Corps of the Forgotten Coast embarked on a pilot project of their own. An initial crew of seven individuals (two Crew Leaders, four full-time Corpsmembers and one volunteer) established the Apalachicola Nature Trail on a 700+ acre site owned by the City of Apalachicola, FL. The city used this land for refuse system spray fields. The completed section of the trail, a mile in length, showcases pine flat woods, oak hammocks and a native hardwood swamp.

The coalition of partners for this pilot project included Franklin County Promise Coalition (FCPC), Conservation Corps of the Forgotten Coast (CCFC), The City of Apalachicola, Community Training Works Young America Conservation Corps and The Corps Network. Each partner provided unique resources and expertise. The City of Apalachicola provided funds for the project and the land for the nature trail. The newly-established CCFC provided local Corpsmembers and program staff to provide logistical and back-office support for the project. Community Training Works, Inc., an established Corps program, provided experienced Crew Leaders to oversee the project and mentor future CCFC crew leaders. The Corps Network provided technical assistance and education awards (scholarships) for all Corpsmembers. Lastly, Franklin's Promise Coalition facilitated trainings for The Corpsmembers, providing the leadership and life skills training for the crew.

The crew worked nine weeks (a total of 2,910 hours) laying out the trail, cutting and removing vegetation, building 240 feet of raised boardwalk, blazing (marking) the path, and removing over 70 cubic yards of trash and debris. Entrance signs were erected at each of the two trailheads. The trail will serve the area residents, providing recreational and educational opportunities in the beautiful natural habitat of the Apalachicola Bay. What has thus far been completed was only the first phase of this pilot. The current trail, which is almost one mile, will double in length once CCFC crews undertake current development plans.

During their term of service, Corpsmembers participated in a number of training/ education opportunities that included:

- Financial Planning/Life Skills

- Chain Saw Safety
- Trail Lay Out and Blazing
- Raised Board Walk Construction
- Invasive Species Identification
- Basic Habitat Preservation Strategies

Similar to the Climb CDC pilot, the GCRI team worked to promote the project’s success through data tracking and marketing. GCRI and CCFC Staff, and the crew journeyed to Panama City to partake in the Restore Council Public Sessions on the Funded Priority List; during the sessions, CCFC Corpsmembers provided testimony about the value of their Corps experience and the importance of Service and Conservation Corps. This type of local community promotion along with the GCRI’s continued emphasis on building partnerships and raising funds led to the CCFC finding fee-for-service project work with Florida Fish and Wildlife and receiving funding for more NFWF projects in their area.

The CCFC learned very quickly that the biggest challenge for their program would be establishing the correct support systems for their Corpsmembers to be successful. Poverty and generations of substance abuse issues is a challenge in many communities, but in Franklin County it is one of their major challenges with young adults. This issue would necessitate FCPC staff to bolster their efforts in counselling, support and education with the young adults they recruited for the CCFC.

Due to their community and partners, the Franklin County Promise Coalition was able to provide the Corpsmembers support services. Community Training Works’ Crew leaders were able to assist in instilling a “crew mentality” among the Corpsmembers. CCFC staff and crew leaders will continue to work with local established Corps to reinforce their skill sets in Corpsmember intake, motivation, and discipline.

**Major Challenges and Potential Solutions**

Although both of these Corps have come a long way, there are still many outstanding challenges. Corps programs are constantly changing and take an ample amount of time to establish effective and efficient systems. Below are the major challenges that the Gulf Corps are still facing today and the solutions they are currently undertaking to combat those challenges.

Challenges	Solutions
Securing Consist Project Work that’s Engaging and of Value to Corpsmembers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop relationships with land managers, wildlife, parks and other possible project partners in the region</li> <li>• Secure long term agreements with state and federal park and forestry agencies.</li> </ul>
Training Crew Leaders and Corpsmembers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize local partners such as The Nature Conservancy, the Audubon Society, local experts, local colleges and project sponsors</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used trainings from The Corps Network and other TCN member Corps. Climb CDC even sent Crew Leaders to other Corps' Crew Leader trainings while they were still developing their own</li> </ul>
Recruiting Corpsmembers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use existing partnerships with schools, courts and other agencies that work with at risk youth.</li> <li>• Work with local colleges and universities to secure interns.</li> </ul>
Increasing Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submitted applications for AmeriCorps VISTAs</li> <li>• Utilized volunteers and donated community resources</li> <li>• Continue to pursue fund development activities</li> </ul>
Substance Abuse and Family Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide counseling and mentoring for corpsmembers.</li> </ul>

### **The Future of the GCRI and the New Gulf Corps**

Following the successes and lessons learned from the pilot projects, the new Gulf Corps have adjusted their programs as needed and gone on to complete more projects and serve more Corpsmembers. Additionally in 2015, The RESTORE Council proposed in their Initial Funded Priority List (FPL) to “invest in a Gulf Coast Conservation Corps Program (GCCC Program) that would benefit both the environment and coastal communities by equipping local citizens with the knowledge, skills and ability to implement and manage conservation projects.” The proposed “GCCC Program would build on existing training partnerships among federal, state, academic, and non-profit organizations; recruit and train local workers; and provide paid, hands-on work experience.”

After a public comment period and numerous listening sessions, the RESTORE Council voted on the FPL on December 9, 2015: they chose to allocate \$8 million over three years to implement the GCCC. As of publication of this document, it is not yet clear which agencies or organizations will be provided funding but should Climb CDC and CCFC be selected they will have a consistent source of funding and potentially set out to achieve the main goals of the GCRI.