

September 30, 2020

Dear Member Corps,

**I want to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude** to each of your organizations, staff members, and Corpsmembers. This past year has been marked by grief and anxiety. A pandemic, a series of historic natural disasters, and the continuation of violence and racial injustices inflicted upon Black and Brown communities, all weigh on our collective pursuit for healthier communities and a more equitable future. I give my condolences to everyone who lost loved ones or their sense of security or faced a setback or detour in their plans for the future this past year.

While acknowledging the challenges of our current moment, the work of your organizations and Corpsmembers gives me reason for hope. When cities and states locked down, Corps rose to the occasion to serve on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response. As communities in the West and the Gulf experience fires and hurricanes, Corps have ensured the safety of their Corpmembers while addressing critical community needs. When the nation mourned the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the many others lost to police and racial injustice, Corps acknowledged their Corpsmembers' pain and encouraged them to use their voices to pursue change.

It is said that adversity can bring out the best or the worst in people. I believe 2020 has brought out the best in the Corps community. Many Corps shared their COVID-19 protocols to protect not just their own Corpsmembers, but to help keep all Corpsmembers safe. Many Corps joined The Corps Network's Town Halls to give examples of how Corps could support the mental health of Corpsmembers and the needs of local public health entities. Over email chains, working groups, our new online community, and countless phone calls, we leaned on each other to weather setbacks and build contingency plans. **There is little doubt that we will end this year a stronger community than before.** I have hope that these strengthened ties will propel us to meet new challenges and create opportunity out of struggle.

To quote Dr. Cornel West, "Optimism for me has never been an option. Because there's too much suffering in the world...But hope is something else, you see, because hope is not spectatorial. It's participatory. Hope is a verb as much as a virtue. Hope is as much a consequence of your action as it is a source of your action." As we move forward, let us steel ourselves by knowing that through our actions as individuals, as organizations, and as a movement, we can not only hope for a better future, but we can be the source of hope for the thousands of Corpsmembers and community members looking to us for leadership.

With gratitude for the hope that you have given me in these difficult times, I want to thank you for continuing to be a member of the Corps community and allowing me the honor of serving alongside you.

In Service,



Mary Ellen Sprenkel  
President & CEO  
The Corps Network

## Highlights: Our FY2020 Accomplishments

### Coronavirus Response

- Awarded 30 Corps a total of [\\$250,000 in emergency funding](#) to help cover costs associated with ensuring the safe and continued engagement of Corpsmembers during COVID-19.
- Launched [Corps Connect](#) and [The Corps Network Town Hall](#) to bring the Corps community together around important and timely topics.
- Created the [COVID-19 Resource Library](#) to share evolving information and promising practices. Among other topics, the library provides information on navigating the Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loans, developing COVID-19 safety protocols, and guidance from partner agencies and local governments.

### Programs and Services

- Awarded over \$6 million in AmeriCorps scholarships to Service and Conservation Corps participants through the [Education Award Program](#).
- Provided funding to support over 1,000 Corpsmember positions at Corps engaged in [GulfCorps](#), the Opportunity Youth Service Initiative, the AmeriCorps Transportation & Infrastructure Program, the [USFS Resource Assistants Program](#), and our National Park Service and US Fish & Wildlife Service National Cooperative Agreements.
- Developed the 6-part "Impact of One" Professional Development Curriculum, which was piloted among GulfCorps programs.
- Launched updates to The Corps Network's Jobs at Corps platform to improve the user-experience for people searching for service or job opportunities, and make it easier for Corps to manage open positions.

### Racial Justice

- Received a [\\$600k grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#) to continue the Moving Forward Initiative, which works to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion in the Conservation Corps Community
- Launched the Silence in Not an Option seminar series, which engages Corps staff in discussions around the social construction of race and the impact of racial inequality on their community and Corpsmembers.

### Advocacy

- Worked with external partners and coalitions to advocate for the passage of the [Great American Outdoors Act](#) – an unprecedented piece of legislation that will invest \$1.9 billion annually to address deferred maintenance needs on federal lands and support local and state parks by permanently funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund at its full \$900 million per year authorization.
- Built a nationwide coalition calling for the establishment of a [21st Century Civilian Conservation Corps](#) to help put Americans, unemployed due to COVID-19, back to work addressing critical conservation and environmental needs.

### Events

- Hosted The Corps Network's 35th Anniversary National Conference, which included more than 40 individual sessions.
- Successfully organized the first virtual Corpsmember Professional Development Day, which brought together Corpsmembers, agency partners, and employers from across the country.



For The Corps Network's 35th Anniversary in 2020, Leslie Wilkoff, Director of AmeriCorps Programs, created a new quilt using patches and uniforms from member organizations of The Corps Network. Thank you to Leslie and to all the Corps that contributed to this project. The quilt hangs on display at The Corps Network's office in Washington, DC.