

Accreditation Standards

Summary

The Corps Network's Advisory Committee is dedicated to the promotion of high quality programming and standards for conservation corps across America. The Corps Network (TCN) Advisory Committee ensures that programs have the capacity to meet the desired outcomes for participants as well as meet the high quality and production requirements of resource management partners.

The TCN Full Accreditation Process involves an in-depth review of general operations, financial management, risk management, governance standards, and Corps operations. By completing the accreditation process, Corps will demonstrate their accountability to both Corpsmembers and their communities. Independent accreditation provides the assurance of quality that partners, particularly publically-funded government agencies, donors look for and recognizes a Corps ability provide safe, appropriate, meaningful experiences completing service meeting community and conservation needs.

Full Accreditation, if granted, will last for 5 years with annual updates. Newly formed Corps will need two years of operations and experience before beginning TCN Full Accreditation process. Newly formed Corps can gain provisional status and can work with the Advisory Committee to review Corps models, capacities, and experiences they possess.

Part 1 – Required Accreditation Elements

Applicants must have two years of experience operating a Corps program and must present evidence of substantial compliance with all of the standards in both sections below:

- A. General Operational and Governance Standards. All Organizations demonstrate compliance with Organizational and Governance standards. These are standards which can be applied to any public or private organization, including those programs embedded in universities, community action agencies or larger non-profit agencies. [Includes relevant 21CSC universal standards along with TCN Excellence in Corps Operations (ECO) sections Purpose & Activities (PA) and Organization and Management (OM).]
- B. Corps Operational Standards. Organization demonstrates compliance with (meets definitions of) general Service and Conservation Corps program standards. [Includes relevant 21CSC universal standards along with ECO sections Program Design (PD), Corpsmember Development (CD), Work Experience & Service Projects (WS) and Evidence of Success (ES).]

Outcome of Part 1A&B: Corps is accredited by The Corps Network.

Part 2 – Optional Specific Capacity/Experience

Applicants can choose as many optional specific verifiable competencies.

- A. Corps Models.
- B. Specific Capacity/Experience.

Successful applicants will be 'generally accredited' and then have additional 'designations' listed for any sections of Part 2 where they are approved as meeting those Part 2 standards.

Outcome of Part 2: Corps is accredited in specific designations in addition to the general accreditation.

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Part 1 - Required Accreditation Elements

Applicants must present evidence of substantial compliance with all of the standards in both sections below:

- A. General Operational and Governance Standards.
- B. Corps Operational Standards.

Outcome of Part 1A&B: Corps is accredited by The Corps Network.

Part 1A. General Operational and Governance Standards

1.0 Governance and Accountability.

- 1.1 The Corps, or its sponsoring organization, operates under the authority of a governing body according to the requirements of federal, state, County law or University Charter. Corps may be organized as any one of the following: Non Profit tax exempt organization, Indian tribe, a unit of State or County managed Corps, Federally managed, University managed Corps. The Corps identifies its organizational provenance as well as the persons, structure and legal authority responsible for governance and day-to-day management.
- 1.2 The governing body complies with and has a timely response to all applicable federal, state and local laws. The organization has no significant financial or compliance judgments imposed by any governmental entity. Corps is not aware of any pending or threatened litigation, claims, or assessments, or unasserted claims, and has not consulted a lawyer concerning litigation, claims, or assessments. There have been no communications from grantors and regulatory agencies concerning noncompliance.
- 1.3 The governing body operates under by-laws or an equivalent based on its corporate charter, articles of incorporation, parent charter or legislation from the sponsoring organization. The governing body of the Corps, other than a non-profit, may delegate Corps oversight to a subordinate body including but not limited to: senior staff management teams, citizen advisory Boards or professional committees.
- 1.4 The by-laws or their equivalent describe roles, rights, and responsibilities of the governing body.
- 1.5 The governing body adopts a whistle-blower policy (Sarbanes Oxley act).
- 1.6 The governing body (or management team) periodically reviews and, as necessary, revises the by-laws or self-governing document.
- 1.7 The governing body adopts a document retention process per the Sarbanes Oxley Act requirements.
- 1.8 The governing body adopts policies to ensure compliance with IRS prohibition on political and partisan activities by persons representing the Corps.
- 1.9 The governing body adopts policies around nepotism, interested parties, conflict of interest and fraternization.

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2.0 Purpose and activities.

- 2.1 Mission and Methodology - All Corps present a clear mission (as expressed in mission statement, vision statement, core values, etc.) and applicable programs consistent with the mission. The governing body annually reviews the current Corps program and planned program developments in the context of the mission. The Corps defines its methodology, target community, and specifies the public interest served by the Corps.
- 2.2 The Corps' service projects meet community needs consistent with the mission.

3.0 Organizational Development.

- 3.1 The governing body ensures that the Corps will have an annual operating plan consistent with the mission.
- 3.2 The governing body and staff prepare, implement and revise a long-term strategic plan and/or business plan to guide the Corps' direction consistent with the mission and emerging needs.
- 3.3 The governing body is committed to long-term sustainability planning, longevity and as well as a continuous improvement strategy. This includes ensuring that there is a quality assurance protocol for all aspects of the Corps.
- 3.4 The governing body will hire and ensure that competent and engaged professional leadership manage the day-to-day work of the Corps.
- 3.5 The governing body will adopt, review and approve revisions to personnel policies consistent with federal and state laws or University policies.
- 3.6 The organization will establish an annual salary scale consistent with budget and market realities and consistent with governing body policies.
- 3.7 The governing body will ensure that the Corps has a succession plan for key management positions.
- 3.8 The governing body is active and engaged. The governing body actively recruits and engages additional governing body members that meet organization needs and respond to emerging trends. The governing body identifies training needs and receives appropriate training/development.
- 3.9 The Corps attracts diverse funding.
- 3.10 Corps management and governing body shall maintain a forward-looking outlook and shall continually assess current and emerging local regional and national trends and their impact on the youth environmental and social needs of their community. Such assessments may be reflected in their strategic planning, sustainability planning and entrepreneurial initiatives.

4.0 Financial Management.

- 4.1 The Corps has policies and practices to exemplify financial integrity, internal controls, generally accepted accounting principles and transparency that results in competent management, its ability to comply with government and non-government contracts, cooperative agreements, and grants.

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- 4.2 Corps maintains adequate liability and workers compensation coverage to protect the Corps assets and ensure protection of Corps Members and staff.
- 4.3 Corps report a regular independent audit history and IRS and state tax filings when appropriate to their organizational structure.
- 4.4 Non-Profit Corps will establish protocols for regular financial oversight including oversight of an independent annual financial audit.
- 4.5 All Corps will have annual and realistic budgets based on likely income to ensure continuity of service to the community and contract completion.
- 4.6 Corps provides regular financial reporting to their governing boards.
- 4.7 Corps will demonstrate its financial health by providing evidence of completed sponsor contracts, contract renewals, lines of credit, clean audits, working capital balances and prudent cash reserves. Corps should have the financial resources sufficient to meet their financial obligations to honor the commitments to participants and project partners on the ground.
- 5.0 Organizational Risk Management.** These standards ensure that an accredited Corps is proactive and thorough in their efforts to mitigate and manage the inherent risks to their Corpsmembers and staff as well as maintain efficient, effective crisis management response systems.
- 5.1 Staff members are appropriately trained to meet the organizational risk management needs within their level of responsibility.
- 5.2 Corps operations embrace reporting transparency for public records (e.g. records that are public are indeed public).
- 5.3 Human Resource administration ensures that Corps has appropriate administrative systems and management capacity to meet the needs of Corpsmembers and staff. Corps has dedicated HR staff or trained managers and supervisors in HR procedures.
- 5.4 Corps has payroll systems in place and is able to manage stipends and/or living allowances and/or wages within current law.
- 5.5 Corps maintains accurate files and records (e.g. personnel files for staff and Corpsmembers, financial records, contract/agreement management, comprehensive insurance coverage's including Directors and Operators insurance, etc.).
- 5.6 Corps is in current compliance with applicable employment, labor and immigration laws, funding/contractual agreements, and HR systems are regularly updated.
- 5.7 Corps has appropriate policies to review potential staff, Corpsmembers and volunteer criminal histories.
- 5.8 Corps has appropriate policies to ensure drug free work place, equal employment opportunities, adherence to Americans with Disability act and establish the legal right to employment.

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Part 1B. Corps Operational Standards

6.0 Participant Age.

6.1 Corps defines its targeted age range within an overall age range and operates programs that are age appropriate.

7.0 Citizenship.

7.1 Corps serves population legal to work in United States. Participants must be a US citizen, national, or lawful permanent resident alien of the United States, or possess approved work visa.

8.0 Emphasis on Diversity and Inclusion.

8.1 Corps encourages inclusiveness and diversity that reflects the communities it serves as appropriate to its Corps model.

9.0 Service.

9.1 A portion of participant's time includes being engaged in direct service and service learning opportunities.

9.2 A portion of each participant's time must be in direct service to the organizational mission.

10.0 Organization of Work.

10.1 Corps organizes as either: A) Crew/Team based with groups of participants working collectively and intensely together. Crews/teams are directly supervised by trained and experienced Crew leaders or Conservation professionals; and/or B) Individual or small team based with participants working individually or in coordinated teams under the direction of conservation professionals on initiatives that require specific skills and dedicated attention.

10.2 Participants identify as part of a larger group with a sense of a common purpose, common strategies and esprit de corps.

11.0 Corps Capacity.

11.1 Corps must demonstrate that it has sufficient capacity to meet community, participant and project partner needs.

12.0 Leadership and Governance.

12.1 Corps maintains a strong, engaged, continuous and competent leadership.

13.0 Staff Development.

13.1 Corps includes professional development and training opportunities for staff; continued staff development and staff retention is honored and encouraged.

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14.0 Risk Management and Safety. The following standards are designed to reduce the risk and hazards of Corps operations. The intent of these standards is to prevent harm to Corpsmembers, staff, partners, Corps and the community. The standards are crafted to focus on: (1) the entirety of the agency, (2) specifics of Corpsmembers and staff risks, (3) supervision, (4) small tool safety, (5) response and (6) vehicle policies.

14.1 A Corps culture of safety and risk reduction.

14.1.1 The Corps establishes a culture of safety and accident prevention through all aspects of Corps operations.

14.1.2 In addition to complying with standards listed below, the Corps buildings, facilities and programs will display printed media and/or will regularly discuss the need for constant attention to safety through things such as highly visible signage, inspection checklists, policies, trainings, and accident free day charts and provide hospital locations and preferred physicians.

14.1.3 Corps complies with workers compensation, state and federal OSHA requirements and drug free work place policies.

14.2 CMS Safety.

14.2.1 Corps has an appropriate to their job description procedure for ensuring that Corpsmembers do not have backgrounds that would create a hazard for crew operations, the environment or the community.

14.2.2 Corps has an appropriate procedure on collecting medical history information of participants as needed per Corps model to ensure that Corpsmembers are capable of performing Corpsmember tasks.

14.2.3 CMS have safety equipment appropriate to their assignment and tool usage including but not limited to gloves, boots, eye protection, and helmets. The Corps has emergency equipment and training as appropriate to their project types.

14.2.4 CMS receive frequent and appropriate safety training beginning with initial orientation and continuing with on-going daily briefings.

14.2.5 CMS are restricted from using high-risk tools unless trained by a competent professional and the CMS has demonstrated tool competency.

14.2.6 Corps maintains documentation of all safety training.

14.2.7 Corps maintains documentation and review of safety incidents.

14.2.8 The Corps has policies and procedure to assess project site hazards and to ensure safe storage and disposal of dangerous and hazardous materials. Corps follows OSHA Hazard Communication program if required.

14.3 Supervision.

14.3.1 All participants are supervised by trained, competent adult leaders.

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14.3.2 Staff and the trained competent adult leaders receive initial and on-going safety and first aid training appropriate to ensure their ability to provide safety of the Corpsmembers and maintain the culture of risk reduction and safety.

14.3.3 Adult leaders receive periodic substantive evaluation on their performance.

14.4 **Small Tool Safety.**

14.4.1 Staff are qualified and experienced to teach CMS tool safety for the tools used in their assigned projects.

14.4.2 CMS are trained to maintain their tools in working and safe condition.

14.4.3 The Corps has a plan for tool repair and replacement when no longer functional. Corps ensures that tools that are not in safe, working conditions are taken out of use.

14.4.4 The Corps has policies and procedures to ensure tool security and releasing tools only to CMS qualified to use their assigned tools.

14.5 **Response and Crisis Management Procedures.**

14.5.1 Corps has both written internal and external emergency response and crises management plans and procedures. Corps trains staff, Board members and stakeholders in these areas.

14.6 **Vehicle Safety.**

14.6.1 **Drivers.** Corps has and follows policies on practical driver training (including, as needed, hazardous terrain and hazardous weather), licensing, insurance, and background checks in the operation of vehicles that meet national, state and local driver laws and regulations. Corps has a policy for insurance coverage's for drivers who use their own cars for Corps business (e.g. donor owned car liability, additionally insured, etc.).

14.6.2 **Vehicles.** Corps follows a fleet management plan/procedure that includes general maintenance schedules, personnel, vehicle records (purchase, maintenance), insurance, repair policies, reporting mechanisms, break down kits and communication plans, and replacement.

15.0 **Participant Outcomes.**

15.1 Corps exhibits consistency across programming, including full integration of work experience, service projects and educational/development activities, through learning through service, experiential education, and/or other means to ensure that participants meet the following three outcomes:

- **Life Skills.** Corps provides opportunities for participants to learn valuable life-skills such as; teamwork, leadership, public speaking, work ethic, and financial literacy.
- **Job Skills.** Corps provides opportunities for participants to learn valuable job-skills such as technical work site skills, work ethic, leadership and accountability.
- **Service Ethic.** Corps participants acquire an ethic of service.

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16.0 Participant Experience.

- 16.1 Participant Voice and Reflection. Corps offers opportunities for participant input and reflection.
- 16.2 Consistency and Integration. Corps exhibits consistency across programming, including full integration of work experience, service projects and educational/development activities, through learning through service, experiential education, and/or other means.
- 16.3 Term of Service. Corps provides limited duration; time bound experiences that typically last five weeks to a year. The actual term of service is adequate to meet desired outcomes.

17.0 Compensation.

- 17.1 Participants receive a tangible financial benefit (e.g. wage, stipend, living allowance, etc.) and/or academic award (e.g. school credit, scholarship, education award).

18.0 Participant Orientation, and Training and Supervision.

- 18.1 Participants receive adequate orientation, training and supervision to implement the Corps' mission and activities.

19.0 Commitment to Service Project Quality.

- 19.1 Corps has the ability to meet the technical and logistical needs of project partners including: organizational capacity, properly trained supervisors, ability to manage project from planning to wrap up, and appropriate participant training and support.

20.0 Evaluation.

- 20.1 Corps collects measurable data on the outcomes of its activities and implements a continuous improvement process based on outcomes.

21.0 Information Sharing.

- 21.1 Corps agrees to Share requested measurable data with the Advisory Committee and the Corps movement for data compilation and collective impact reporting.

Part 2 – Optional Specific Capacity/Experience

Part 2A. Corps Models

To obtain a Corps Model designation, Corps must provide written evidence that it meets the principles listed below for one of the specific Corps Models. A Corps can choose to apply for more than one Corps Model designations. The Corps Model could be a program of a larger Corps; the entire Corps program does not need to follow the Corps Model, just at least one program of the Corps. For each designation that it chooses, a Corps must indicate the average number of participants who take part in that model annually. In addition, the Corps will need to supply annual Profiles data that is specific to each

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designation that it receives. In responding to the models below, the Corps should also provide a brief narrative describing how their Corps meets the model description and principles.

22.0 21st Century Conservation Service Corps.

Corps that have been accredited through the U.S. Forest Service **or** have been granted provisional accreditation **or** have been accredited through CNCS do not need to justify how they meet the following standards. Otherwise, all Corps will need to respond to the following standards in order to be accredited and considered a 21CSC Corps.

- 22.1 Population served. Corps serves young people age's 15-25 and/or military veterans up to age 35. Corps may serve young people up to age 29 in an advanced capacity.
- 22.2 Participant Eligibility. Participants must be a U.S. citizen, national, or lawful permanent resident alien of the United States, meeting the same citizenship requirements as those for serving in AmeriCorps and Public Lands Corps.
- 22.3 Emphasis on Diversity and Inclusion. Participant recruitment should make deliberate outreach efforts to traditionally underserved communities, including low-income and disadvantaged populations.
- 22.4 Term of Service. Corps minimum term of service of: 140 hours of on-the-ground, hands-on direct service for full time students and summer only participants; or, 300 hours of on-the-ground, hands-on direct service for non-full time student participants. Corps maximum term of service of 3,500 hours of on-the-ground, hands-on direct service, with a limited exception for program elements that require more than 3,500 hours to achieve highly advanced outcomes. Service is compensated (not volunteer). Compensation can be in the form of wages, stipend, educational credit, or other appropriate form.
- 22.5 Organization of Work. Corps organizes its participants as either: a) crew-based where participants work collectively and intensely together directly supervised by trained and experienced crew leaders or conservation professionals; or b) individual or small team-based where participants work individually or in coordinated teams under the direction of conservation professionals on initiatives that require specific skills and dedicated attention.
- 22.6 Types of Work. Projects include significant outdoor activity and/or include "hands-on" direct impact and/or helps young people connect with America's Great Outdoors. Some Corps may include work that is primarily indoors—for example, science, policy or Corps internships—that have a clear benefit to natural, cultural or historic resources.
- 22.7 Participant Outcomes. Corps provides: a) job skill development to prepare participants to be successful in the 21st century workforce; b) community skill development to help participants acquire an ethic of service to others and learn to become better resource and community stewards; and c) a connection, improvement or restoration of the natural or cultural/urban environment or a greater understanding of our natural, cultural or historic resources.
- 22.8 Leveraged Investment. Corps leverages public investment through either financial or in-kind support, to the extent possible. Exceptions may be made to support new, smaller, or federal programs that increase diversity and inclusion.

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23.0 Human Service Corps.

All Corps provide some form of human service work. Service indeed is the hallmark and defining feature of a Corps no matter how specialized. The Human Service Corps, however, focuses on human service activities rather than environmental/conservation activities. Human Service Corps adhere to the following principles:

- 23.1 The Corps has within its mission and program intent to improve and remediate a variety of human service problems found within a defined geographic community or a target population.
- 23.2 The Corps needs to demonstrate the Corpsmembers have competency to complete the human service projects.
- 23.3 The Corps completes human service projects as a primary, on-going component of their program. Participation in periodic community service events, volunteer days, etc., does not qualify as a Human Service Corps. The Corps must provide a complete description of their mission, activities, Corpsmember training and competency levels, and expected results and outcomes.
- 23.4 The Human Service Corps may use one or more of the following modalities:
 - Recruitment, training and deployment of volunteers for any community based purpose;
 - Public education about critical issues impacting their community (AIDS prevention water conservation, recycling, fire safety and more);
 - Tutoring at all educational levels;
 - Direct service (e.g. staffing food banks, community assessments, community centers, Boys/Girls club, School Aides and more.);
 - One to one mentoring (e.g. Court Appointed Special Advocates, Big brother/sister, retention, youth leadership development);
 - Professional skill based volunteers (Legal Aid, cadet police, health Clinic, most Professional AmeriCorps programs);
 - Activities to promote economic development and public/ private capacity building

24.0 Education Corps.

Though all Corps have educational programming for their Corpsmembers, Education Corps provide direct and intentional curricula that allows Corpsmembers to complete a high school-level credential and prepares them for post-secondary education.

Corps with an approved certification from a recognized accrediting body as an Education Corps (e.g. approved charter by an authorized chartering agency as a Charter School, MOU with an authorized Charter School or traditional school district offering a high school diploma program in accordance with state education code or provide a GED program with state authorization to administer the GED Exam or a contract or MOU from a state authorized agency to administer the GED Exam such as a County Office of Education or Community College) are automatically considered Education Corps, if they also include a post-secondary element as defined in “24.8”

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If a Corps does not meet this criteria, and wishes to be considered an Education Corps, it must demonstrate that it meets the principles below:

- 24.1 Corps has a formalized and documented commitment to increase the educational attainment of individual Corpsmembers.
- 24.2 Corps orientation includes an academic assessment for each Corpsmember.
- 24.3 Corps provides Individualized Learning Plans (ILP) for Corpsmembers, which includes setting goals and assessment of barriers to education, to ensure they reach their academic goals, and provides guidance, support, and additional instruction when necessary.
- 24.4 Corps partners with local education agencies (LEAs), charter schools (if appropriate), the local school system, and/or GED services (if not in-house), and institutions of postsecondary education.
- 24.5 Corps education curriculum is aligned and sequenced toward increasingly challenging subject matter.
- 24.6 Corps regularly assesses Corpsmembers to customize learning and understand academic progress and evolving learning needs.
- 24.7 Corps staff regularly uses assessment data to measure performance and improve programming.
- 24.8 Corps provides, or is working toward providing, postsecondary educational transition support.
- 24.9 Corps, when required by funding sources, provides or makes connections to supportive services for Corpsmembers.
- 24.10 Corps can demonstrate that Corpsmembers make academic gains.
- 24.11 Corps offer to provide services to exited Corpsmembers- maintains contact with, and offers support and follow-up services to, Corpsmembers at least 12 months after graduation or Corps completion, as determined by the Corps. [This standard is optional; the Advisory Committee will continue study of whether this should be mandatory or be modified.]

25.0 Workforce Development Corps.

Corps with YouthBuild and/or Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Youth funding are automatically considered Workforce Development Corps. Other Corps that wish to be considered a Workforce Development Corps must demonstrate they meet the principles below:

- 25.1 Corps has a formalized and documented commitment to increase the work-readiness and employability of individual Corpsmembers.
- 25.2 Corps engages youth, young adults, and/or veterans who are unemployed or underemployed, face barriers to employment or education, and/or are low-income.
- 25.3 Corps provides assessment for accepted Corpsmembers that includes academic, work and skills, and support services need categories.

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- 25.4 Corps provides Individual Development Plans (IDP) that includes individual growth goals and examples of career ladders.
- 25.5 Corps provides or makes connections to supportive services.
- 25.6 Corps provides opportunities for work experiences through a variety of projects.
- 25.7 Corps provides education and training around exploring career options, and enables the Corpsmember to develop a variety of transferrable hard and soft skills.
- 25.8 Corps places Corpsmembers post-program into a job, internship, apprenticeship program, certificate or credential program, other postsecondary education program, or the military.
- 25.9 Corps has, and seeks out new connections with local employers, apprenticeship programs, certificate/credentialing programs (if not in-house), local workforce investment boards (WIBs), post-secondary education institutions, and community partners to help lead Corpsmembers to careers or further education.
- 25.10 Corps maintains contact with, and offers follow-up services to, Corpsmembers for at least 12 months after graduation, or program completion, as determined by the Corps.
- 25.11 Corps reports on known job or education placements, types, and retention rates at 6 months and 12 months.

Part 2B. Specific Capacity and Experience

Part 2B covers specific capacity and experience that the Corps possesses in a number of different areas. This process documents that a Corps has these capacities and experiences through review of written materials, but does not verify or assess the quality of such attributes.

Corps will ‘check the boxes’ of the general categories where they specific capacity and experience and will then provide specific narrative and documentation about the various capacities and experiences in each category. Corps under all categories will also provide information about their experience level on a generalized chart from novice to expert.

26.0 Project Capacity and Experience.

- Enhance recreation on public lands
- Protect wildlife and preserve public lands (ecological restoration)
- Protect communities and public lands from the devastating effects of wildfire
- Prepare communities for disasters and respond when needed
- Save energy and promote energy independence
- Preserve historic structures
- Enhance neighborhoods and community public spaces
- Educate Americans about the environment
- Support/Construct affordable housing
- Improve educational achievement of community students
- Improve the health care of community members
- Promote healthy futures and food security

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- Provide services to veterans

27.0 Corpsmember Development Capacity and Experience.

- Specific Corps elements to promote Corpsmember development, train and educate Corpsmembers and build civic engagement
- Provide supportive services
- Provide alumni outreach and services
- Engaging veterans as participants
- Engage as participants individuals engaged in the justice system
- Engage people with disabilities as participants
- Engage senior citizens as participants