



# The Corps Network

Strengthening America through  
service and conservation

## Accreditation



### About Corps & The Corps Network

Corps are locally-based organizations that engage young adults (generally ages 16 – 25) and veterans (up to age 35) in service projects that address recreation, conservation, disaster response, and community needs. Through service to our country, Corps participants – or “Corpsmembers” – gain work experience and develop in-demand skills. Corpsmembers are compensated with a stipend or living allowance and often receive an education award or scholarship upon completing their term of service. Additionally, Corps provide educational programming, mentoring, and access to career and personal counseling.

Established in 1985, The Corps Network is the national association of service and conservation Corps. Our 130+ Corps provide young adults and veterans the opportunity to serve our country through service on public lands and in rural and urban communities. The Corps Network supports Corps by advocating on their behalf, providing access to funding and projects, and offering expertise in Corps operations and programming.

### What is an Accredited Corps?

The Corps Network’s Accreditation program is administered by the Corps Center of Excellence (CCE): an advisory committee of former Conservation Corps leaders, former federal land management agency staff, and other experts in workforce development programs. Accreditation is granted to Corps that:

- Provide safe, appropriate, meaningful experiences to program participants
- Provide high-quality project outcomes to partners
- Demonstrate a high level of accountability to funders and donors
- Responsibly manage finances, staff, and day-to-day operations



To become Accredited, a Corps must undergo an in-depth review of its operations and programming. The process involves a site visit by CCE representatives, as well as an assessment of the Corp’s administrative documents and policies. Accreditation lasts for five years with the requirement that Corps provide an annual update to the CCE.

### Accredited Corps Benefits

To assure land management agency partners that Corps participating in various funding opportunities are of the highest quality, The Corps Network will reserve the following benefits for Accredited Corps only starting in FY20.

- Access to national-level Cooperative Agreements
- Access to capacity-building grants (excluding Emerging Corps programs)

**Photo:** American Conservation Experience (ACE). ACE was officially recognized as an Accredited Corps in 2017.

## The Accreditation Process

**Requirements:** Organizations must have at least 2 years of experience operating a Corps in order to apply for Accreditation. Corps not ready for Accreditation can request a volunteer mentor.

**Peer Reviewers:** The Accreditation process is handled by a group of Peer Reviewers: a team of experienced staff from Corps throughout the country and staff of The Corps Network.

**Step 1: Notice of Intent** - Corps submit a notice of intent to undergo the Accreditation Process.

**Step 2: Application** – Corps submit a written application that includes their supporting documents (internal operations documents, data, etc.). Based on the quality of the work submitted, Peer Reviewers determine whether to move to Step 3 (a site visit) or recommend that the Corps pursue Mentorship.

**Step 3: Site Visit** – Two to three Peer Reviewers visit the Corps to witness day-to-day operations.

**Step 4: Report & Decision** – The lead Peer Reviewer prepares a summary report of findings and shares it with the CCE Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee shares the report with the applicant, allowing them the opportunity to respond to any remaining issues, and makes a decision on whether to grant Accreditation.

## Endorsements

Corps can be endorsed as one or more of the following Corps Models.

### 21st Century Conservation Service Corps:

Organizations that have been officially recognized by the U.S. Forest Service as a 21CSC program.

### Education Corps:

Corps that provide curricula that allows Corpsmembers to complete a high school-level credential and prepares them for post-secondary education.

### Workforce Development Corps:

Corps with YouthBuild or Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding, or have formalized their commitment to increasing the work-readiness of individual Corpsmembers by connecting them to supportive services and employers.

Learn more about Accreditation by contacting  
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## The Standards

### General Operational & Governance Standards:

#### Examples these standards include...

- Corps has a governing body to which they provide regular financial reporting
- Corps maintains adequate liability and workers compensation coverage
- Corps has policies to ensure drug-free workplace, equal employment opportunities

### Corps Operational Standards:

#### Examples of these standards include...

- Corps has procedures to assess project site hazards
- Corpsmembers have appropriate safety equipment
- Staff have qualifications to teach Corpsmembers safe, proper tool usage
- Corps has emergency response & crisis management plan
- Corps offer opportunities for Corpsmembers to offer input and reflection
- Corpsmembers receive a tangible financial benefit (stipend, living allowance, etc.) and/or academic award (school credit, scholarship, etc.)

## Why do Corps undergo Accreditation?

### Continuous Improvement

Accreditation offers Corps the opportunity to assess their standards and compare every aspect of their operations to peer-determined best practices.

### External Validation

Accreditation offers objective validation that the Corps is capable of meeting high standards.

### Professional Relationships

Accreditation builds confidence and trust among all stakeholders (the Corps' board, funders, partners, staff, Corpsmembers and their families, community members).

### More Opportunities

Accredited Corps can access specific funding streams and national cooperative agreements through The Corps Network that are not available to non-accredited Corps.

## Do Corps pay for Accreditation?

Yes: Corps pay on a sliding scale based on their annual budget. The fees fully fund the staffing and administrative costs to run the Accreditation program. Corps also pay for site visitors' accommodations and meals in addition to the flat fee for administrative costs.