

Trail and Transportation Projects for Service and Conservation Corps

Recreational Trails Program Toolkit | Summer 2020



**The
CorpsNetwork**

Strengthening America through
service and conservation

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RTP Project: Corpsmembers with Appalachian Mountain Club serving on Mt. Prospect in Massachusetts.

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Introduction

Purpose of This Toolkit

In partnership with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), this toolkit is designed to assist Service and Conservation Corps in navigating their state Recreational Trails Program (RTP) to plan, fund, and implement Corps-appropriate projects and agreements.

Many Corps have successful, strategic partnerships with their state trails program. Corps meet partner capacity needs through completing backlogged maintenance projects, leveraging program funding for Corpsmember training, and serving as a workforce development voice on state advisory committees. We want to strengthen and expand upon this success by providing step-by-step guidance, best practices, and ready-to-use resources so that your Corps can start building state relationships while improving trail and infrastructure needs in a cost-effective manner.

The intended audiences for this toolkit are Service and Conservation Corps program staff and leadership looking to access additional funding sources, and project partners that will support mission-driven Corps programs. The goal is to provide the institutional knowledge, direction, and framework to cultivate new partner relationships needed for RTP contract and agreement negotiations. Corps with existing RTP experience may use this toolkit for guidance on optimizing their state resources and funding, maintaining partner relationships, and exploring next steps for Corpsmember career pathways.

This toolkit is organized into five main sections:

- General Overview of the Recreational Trails Program
- Flow of RTP Agreement Negotiations for Corps
- RTP and Corps Project Best Practices
- Corps Budget Tabulations and Financial Guidance
- Corps Resources

Why Should Corps Pursue RTP Funding and Partnerships?

Service and Conservation Corps enroll youth, young adults, and veterans in service to their communities and public lands. By serving on trail, transportation, and recreation improvement projects with your state trail program, Corpsmembers receive transportation and recreation workforce training and learn new trail-building skills. Corpsmembers have the opportunity to learn about careers in the outdoor recreation economy and network with professionals in resource management.

General Overview of the Recreational Trails Program

What is the RTP?

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) assistance program that provides funds to the states to administer grants that develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities. Each state works in partnership with Corps, businesses, communities, agencies, and nonprofit organizations to service recreational trail priorities. Each state also manages a State Recreational Trail Advisory Committee that provides public input on policies and project selection. Since its inception in 1993, more than \$1.3 billion in RTP funds have been obligated by states, making this one of the largest federal sources for recreational trail funding for Corps programs to access.¹

In some states, the RTP is a part of an overall state trail program, but in others, the RTP may be the primary or only source for trail project grants. This toolkit focuses on the federal RTP, but the concepts may be applicable to other state trail programs.

What is a “Recreational Trail”?

The RTP legislation (23 U.S.C. 206) defines the term “recreational trail” as “a thoroughfare or track across land or snow, used for recreational purposes,”² and includes the following activities:

- Pedestrian activities
- Skating or skateboarding
- Equestrian activities
- Nonmotorized snow trail activities
- Bicycling or use of other human powered vehicles
- Aquatic or water activities
- Motorized vehicular activities³

¹ 2019 Recreational Trails Program Annual Report - Funding by State, FY 1993-2018: https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/overview/report/2019/

² Federal Highway Administration Program Legislation and ‘Recreational Trail’ definition: https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/legislation/#recreational

³ Motorized vehicular activities include all-terrain vehicle riding, motorcycling, snowmobiling, use of off-road light trucks, or use of other off-road motorized vehicles.



RTP Project: Fresno Local Conservation Corps (CA), crosscut saw training.

Funding and Administration

RTP funding comes from the Federal Highway Trust Fund, which collects an estimated \$270 million per year in motor fuel excise tax from nonhighway recreational fuel use. These funds represent fuel used in recreational activities with snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), off-highway motorcycles, and off-highway light trucks.⁴

States are required to use 40 percent of their RTP funds for diverse recreational trail use, 30 percent for motorized recreation, and 30 percent for nonmotorized recreation. Each state develops, manages, and administers its own program. The federal share is usually up to 80 percent of the project cost, with a required 20 percent project sponsor or other partner cash or in-kind match contribution. The federal share may be higher in western states with large percentages of federal public lands.

Permissible uses of State RTP Funding

There are eight categories of permissible uses for how states may use RTP funds for projects. Trail maintenance and restoration are the most commonly funded projects, followed by trail facilities and trail construction. Since the program's inception, 10 percent of RTP funds nationally have been awarded for Equipment, Acquisition, Assessments, and State Administrative projects combined. For the purpose of this toolkit, we will focus our guidance around the four most common uses of state RTP funds relevant to most Service and Conservation Corps.

We recommend that Corps align their partner development and project solicitation efforts to these categories: Trail Maintenance and Restoration; Trailside and Trailhead Facilities; Construction of New Recreational Trails; Education for Safety and Environmental Protection. It should be noted that funding and project considerations will not always align with all eight of these funding categories each grant cycle. States may decide to administer grants to a select amount of these categories based on needs and priorities.

⁴ 2019 Recreational Trails Program Annual Report - Funding and Administration: https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/overview/report/2019/

While projects and grants under 'Assessments' is typically an underused funding category by both states and Corps, it should be noted that some states have a strong need for trail system evaluation work. It's common for Corps to have staff, interns, or crews work alongside partners to perform the assessments, collect and analyze the data, and use it to help inform future trail needs ([See Best Practice, pg. 24](#)). If you find that your state is not prioritizing trail assessment grants and projects, contact your state trail agency and start a conversation around how your Corps can help improve the conditions of your state trail system. Your state trail administrator and trail advisory committee may not know that this is a service you can provide.



Types of Corps-Appropriate Projects under RTP Funding Categories

Maintenance and Restoration

- Trail Restoration, Rehabilitation, Maintenance
- Trail Relocation
- Ski and Snowmobile Trail Grooming
- Bridge and Boardwalk Restoration and Rehabilitation

Trailside and Trailhead Facilities

- Trailhead Work
- Parking Lots
- Trail Signage
- Accessibility Features
- Trailhead and Trailside Facilities

Construction of New Recreation Trails

Trails, Bridges, and Boardwalks

Education for safety and environmental protection

Development and dissemination of publications and educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection.

RTP Project: AmeriCorps members with Maryland Conservation Corps serving at Patapsco State Park.



RTP Project: Onondaga Earth Corps (NY) serving on beautification project along the Onondaga Creek Walk in Syracuse, NY. This RTP project was made possible through collaboration with the New York State DOT and the City of Syracuse.

Using State Education Funding

A state may use up to 5 percent of its RTP apportionment each fiscal year for educational programs that promote safety and environmental protection relevant to recreational trails. Many Corps have used RTP education funds for Corpsmember trainings, certifications, and orientations that directly benefit trail work.⁵ With state agency approval, the following are some of the ways your Corps program can use education funds for Corpsmember trail training and education:

- Trail planning, design, and construction courses
- Certifications (Wilderness First Aid, Leave No Trace)
- Corpsmember orientations and trainings
- Environmental and conservation workshops
- Trail equipment safety courses, such as chainsaw, rigging, mechanized equipment, etc.
- Speaker or trainer fees and expenditures
- Designing and developing trail brochures, websites, and maps
- Trail interpretation and signage
- Trail patrols to monitor trail use, safety, environmental impacts, or provide emergency services

Some state trail programs may use their 5 percent apportionment for statewide education programming; some will open the education funding for bids with their own grant announcements and deadlines; others may elect to not use their education funds altogether. Reasons vary and can range from states wanting to prioritize more trail work while others recognize that putting funding towards education ensures that trail work is done properly. If you find that your state trail program is not using its education funds, you can recommend that your state trail agency consider supporting Corpsmember education and safety trainings. Make the case that funding trail training and education grants not only ensures that trail work is executed correctly, but helps prepare the next generation of trail and recreation professionals, users, and stewards.

⁵ Additional FHWA guidance on RTP trail assessments, education, training, and State administrative costs can be found here: https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/guidance/assess_educ_costs.cfm

How the Funding Flows

The following chart details how RTP funding is apportioned by the FHWA to the state trail programs each fiscal year. Six states and the District of Columbia administer their programs within their State Department of Transportation (State DOT); the other state programs are housed within various state-level resource agencies, such as Department of Natural Resources or State Parks.

State Trail Agency Administration			
State DOTs	State Resource Agencies		
Arkansas	Alabama	Maine	Ohio
California *	Alaska	Massachusetts	Oklahoma
District of Columbia	Arizona	Michigan	Oregon
Iowa	California *	Minnesota	Pennsylvania
Maryland	Colorado	Mississippi	Rhode Island
New Mexico	Connecticut **	Missouri	South Carolina
West Virginia	Delaware	Montana	South Dakota
	Florida	Nebraska	Tennessee
	Georgia	Nevada	Texas
	Hawaii	New Hampshire	Utah
	Idaho	New Jersey	Vermont
	Illinois	New Mexico	Virginia
	Indiana	New York	Washington
	Kansas	North Carolina	Wisconsin
	Kentucky	North Dakota	Wyoming
	Louisiana		
<p>* California DOT is known as CalTrans. 40% of RTP funds is administered by CalTrans; 60% is administered by California State Parks.</p> <p>** At the time this toolkit was published, Connecticut has opted out of the RTP.</p>			

How RTP Projects are Selected

This infographic details the general flow of the RTP project review and selection process within most state trail programs. The project selection process, specific steps, and order will vary among the states. For example, RTP project funding in Oregon is determined by regional committees that will not convene unless a certain quota of participants is met. Minnesota and Vermont use independent, nonprofit trail committees that serve as their state advisory committees for project selection. Your RTP administrator is your best contact for helping you to navigate the project selection process, timelines, and key officials to know for introductions.

It should also be noted that Corps working as direct grant recipients or contracting with project sponsors should not begin work until the project has received both federal and state approval. Work prior to project approval is not reimbursable.⁶

The Project Selection Process	
1	State trail agency opens a solicitation for trail project applications.
2	Project sponsors submit applications to administrators (or grant managers).
3	State trail program staff perform initial review to ensure compliance with federal and state eligibility and environmental requirements.
4	State trail advisory committee members review, rank, and recommend projects. Some state committees select projects, but most recommend.
5	State agency approves selected projects. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State performs environmental reviews. In many states, this will require approval from the State DOT.
6	State agency submits selected projects to state DOT and applicable metropolitan planning organizations to include in statewide and metropolitan Transportation Improvement Programs.
7	State agency submits selected projects to FHWA for federal review and approval. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects with questionable eligibility or environmental concerns may need revision or may need to be withdrawn.
8	Following FHWA approval, the state trail agency will finalize the process by executing awards with the project sponsor. This is when state agencies will enter into agreements with Corps that work directly with the State.
9	Project sponsors may begin work. This is also when project sponsors will enter into fee-for-service agreements with Corps.

⁶ There are limited cases where preapproval planning and environmental compliance costs incurred within 18 months prior to project approval may be used as project match, if the State allows.

Who to Know in Your State Trail Program

1. State Trail Administrator

Every state has a state trail program administrator responsible for project work priorities, grant cycles and awards, programmatic and financial compliance, project selections and site inspections, and partner and community stakeholder development. Administrators also usually manage trail advisory committees, recommend member appointments, and facilitate committee meetings and activities. This is the most important partner contact a Corps should connect with for any RTP engagement. For a listing of RTP state administrators, visit: https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/rtpstate.cfm.

2. State Grant Manager

In states with larger populations and/or federal public lands, there may be an additional state contact that specifically manages RTP grant awards and grant cycle inquiries. A Corps should be engaged with this contact when submitting applications, reporting deliverables, or addressing specific funding questions. In some cases, there may also be a specific grant or program manager for motorized trail programs.

3. State Recreational Trail Advisory Committee

Every state trail program has a recreational trail advisory committee comprised of various recreational trail community stakeholders representing motorized users and nonmotorized users. Some include conservation nonprofits, foundations, and associations, federal and state agencies, and other recreation professionals. Sometimes known as boards or councils, advisory committees play a role in the type and quality of trail work and educational programming administered in their state.

Corps that are active committee members or participants can provide consultation on cost-effective ways to complete trail work, vote on project applications, or serve as a workforce development voice. Corps may also serve as either voting or nonvoting members. Since many advisory committees select project and grant applications, some states may view Corps representatives as a conflict of interest and will only allow Corps as nonvoting members. However, in other states, this is not a problem and Corps can even vote on grant applications for all trail projects, including their own applications.

Most advisory committee members are appointed by the state governor's office or the state administering agency, with recommendations from the state trail administrator.⁷ Committee positions may vary from two to five years and may be responsible for selecting and/or reviewing grant applications, deliberating on priority trail work needs, and public engagement activities. Meetings convene at least once per year and are open to the public. Some Corps use these meetings to present on their Corps program and the services they can provide. Find out more about joining your state trail advisory committee, attending or presenting at meetings, or other engagements by contacting your state trail administrator.⁸

⁷ Minnesota and Vermont use independent, nonprofit trail committees that serve as their state's trail advisory committees and therefore the members are not appointed by the state or Governor's office.

⁸ The RTP legislation does not require in-person meetings. States may hold committee meetings that allow for public participation through teleconferences, video conferences, webinars, web meetings, or other platforms.

Flow of RTP Agreement Negotiations for Corps

Step 1 – Strategic Partnership Development

Do Partners Know What Corps Are?

The first step in your partnership development strategy is to connect with your state trail administrator. If you have never worked with your state trails program before, you may find that they do not fully understand Corps programs. This may be due to a number of factors, such as staff turnover and/or project sponsors and Corps not being aware of one another. RTP award recipients may also not know what Corps are and could assume that awarded projects aren't Corps-appropriate. Sometimes, it will be assumed that because a Corps is not locally based, then they can't serve on trail projects in that particular county, region, or state. Whatever the case, you may have to develop an action plan that will market your program to key state trail officials and project sponsors.

Start by scheduling an in-person meeting or presentation time with your state trail administrator and the trail advisory committee. Your goal should be to help them build a basic understanding of your program's mission and your competitive advantage as a qualified recreational service provider. Demonstrate that Corps provide workforce development and service-learning for young adults and veterans through recreational trails and community projects. Corps do not typically operate like general contractors and your state trail administrator and project sponsors need to understand this before partnering with you on potential projects.

Quality, impactful Corpsmember experiences may require thoughtful engagement and endorsements from partners. Invite partners to volunteer and work alongside your Corpsmembers on a trail project, have them meet Corps alumni, or have partners join you at a community event. If you feel like your existing state relationship is stagnant with the type of work and grant amounts you're receiving, you should try checking in periodically. Perform some investigative work to find out who's on your advisory committee, speak to their needs and priorities and explain how Corps can help meet those priorities. It's possible that your partners are not aware of the expertise and services you can provide.

Knowing the Needs and Emerging Issues of your State

It is critical that you learn the needs of your state trail program, priorities, and emerging issues. Each state administers its own funding program based on priorities and determinations set by the state trail agency, often with advice from its advisory committee, federal land management agencies, and community stakeholders. For example, Nebraska RTP priorities may revolve

around more asphalt and pavement work for weather and climate resiliency compared with Florida's priorities of serving water trails and the motorized ATV community.

There are a number of emerging issues facing some state trail programs that could affect their strategic planning in the short or long term. States that are experiencing the direct effects of climate change may be faced with an increase in immediate disaster relief and mitigation needs. Others are evolving with trends in e-mobility and new transportation technologies that are changing infrastructure projects in urban areas. Work with your state trail administrator to support and fund interns that can perform research, assessments, and data landscape analysis ([see Best Practice, pg. 24](#)) or fund crew projects to service trail systems affected by wildland fire or flooding. Staying well-informed of your state's needs will set you as a valuable community stakeholder, partner and service provider. Understanding these priorities upfront may help you decide whether it's worth pursuing RTP grants if they don't align with your Corps' mission, program model, and capacity.

Step 2 – Grant and Agreement Implementation

Procuring Sole-Source Agreements with your State

Section 1524 of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Act exempts contracts and cooperative agreements with Service and Conservation Corps from federal-aid highway contracting requirements under 23 U.S.C. 112.⁹ A state trails program may sole-source contracts and cooperative agreements to qualified Service and Conservation Corps for not just RTP-specific work, but any recreational trail, byway, transportation alternatives, bicycle and pedestrian, or safe routes to school project. "Qualified" has been determined by state trails programs as Corps serving on project work deemed "Corps-appropriate" and organizations listed on The Corps Network's "Members by State" page under recommendation from FHWA.¹⁰

Procuring sole-source agreements with your state trails program will be a challenging endeavor but a worthwhile long-term investment for your program. There are no particular guidelines or processes for any partners initiating procurements and such agreements are at the discretion of the state trails program. There's also no one right way for a Corps to approach their state with a procurement conversation. Corps with existing RTP relationships may have ongoing projects for years and will not have a state sole-source agreement (that could be due to a number of reasons), while some states are more receptive to the idea of having a sole-source agreement because it's administratively easier and they know the Corps program very well. As you are working on your long-term strategic plan for building state relationships, keep in mind that your efforts will be supported by federal statute.¹¹

9 23 U.S. Code § 112. Letting of contracts: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/23/112>

10 The Corps Network's Members by State page: <https://corpsnetwork.org/members-by-state/>

11 OMB guidance on sole source procurement can be found at 200.320(f): <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CFR-2016-title2-vol1/pdf/CFR-2016-title2-vol1-sec200-320.pdf>



RTP Project: AmeriCorps members with Nevada Conservation Corps, a program of Great Basin Institute, help improve the Tahoe East Shore Trail in Incline Village, NV.

Definition of Qualified Youth Service and Conservation Corps under MAP-21 Section 1524

The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Act, Section 1524,¹² defines "qualified youth service or conservation corps" as those that are defined at 42 U.S.C. 12572(a)(2) and 42 U.S.C. 12656(c)(3). 42 U.S.C. 12572(a)(2) refers to the "Healthy Futures Corps," which is designed to identify and meet unmet health needs in communities. 42 U.S.C. 12656(c)(3) refers to the "urban youth corps," which means any program established by a state or local government or by a nonprofit organization that —

- a. Is capable of offering meaningful, full-time, productive work for individuals between the ages of 16 and 25, inclusive, in an urban or public works or transportation setting;
- b. Gives participants a mix of work experience, basic and life skills, education, training, and support services; and
- c. Provides participants with the opportunity to develop citizenship values and skills through service to their communities and the United States.

¹² MAP-21 Section 1524 - Youth Service and Conservation Corps Questions & Answers: <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/map21/qandas/qayscc.cfm>

Step 3 – Project Funding and Financial Compliance

The following is a general overview of a state RTP grant process for direct award recipients. Each state administers its own grants and therefore processes, required documents, and other deliverables will differ state by state.

Flow of a State RTP Grant Process

<p>Step 1: Announcement</p> <p>State trail agency announces grant availability and sets deadline for applications.</p>	<p>Step 2: Applications</p> <p>Applications are reviewed by the State, often with assistance from the State Recreational Trail Advisory Committee. States rank and select projects.</p>
<p>Step 3: Review Process</p> <p>State trail office will notify finalists to complete additional forms and documents. State forwards selected projects to FHWA for approval. FHWA notifies the state trail agency of the approved projects.</p>	<p>Step 4: Project Award</p> <p>State notifies finalists of application approval. state agency finalizes agreements with the project sponsors, including Corps that are direct recipients.</p>
<p>Step 5: Project Implementation</p> <p>Project work is to begin on-site within X days (varies by state). Quarterly progress reports will be submitted to the state trail agency.</p>	<p>Step 6: Project Completion</p> <p>A request for reimbursement and a final progress report shall be submitted by the Corps with required supportive documents to the state trail agency. A final on-site inspection will be made. Reimbursements will be processed for payment to the Corps. Additional supportive documents may be required.</p>

Award Announcements and Grant Cycles

Grant announcements and deadlines are posted on each state trail agency website. States have different application periods and grant deadlines. Some can be set either in the current year or a year in advance. During each grant cycle, state trail agencies may have minimum and maximum award caps, sometimes with caps on nonmotorized and motorized projects. Some states administer smaller grants for education, watershed conservation, or other kinds of projects. These grants may have their own announcement dates and deadlines.

Project Applications and Review Process

Project applications are reviewed, scored, and ranked by the state trail agency staff and some are reviewed by the state trail advisory committee. Approved projects will then be included in the state's recommended project selections and submitted to FHWA for Federal approval. After FHWA approval, the state trail agency will present each grant recipient with a project agreement.

Project Implementation

Before the work starts, it is recommended that you work with your state trail administrator to make sure that you have all of your necessary documents, forms, and deliverables ready for final reimbursements. Failure to provide required reporting and financials may result in not being fully reimbursed. Some states require specific reporting deliverables, forms that track project outcomes, and other State-specific documents. Additionally, state grants usually require quarterly reporting, so getting into the habit of tracking and documenting project outcomes will be key. Most state agencies conduct project site inspections. Coordinating these inspections with your own site visits may be an efficient use of your staff time and capacity.

Project Completion

A final progress report must be submitted with the request for reimbursement.
A final reimbursement will not be made until the final progress report is received.

State Reimbursement Guidance

State trail agencies provide funds to project sponsors as reimbursement grants. Permissible project sponsors include federal and state agencies, local governments, and many states allow nonprofit conservation organizations. Since RTP is a reimbursement program, the grant recipient must pay 100 percent of the cost before submitting a request for reimbursement. The RTP allows the donation of private funds, materials, and services at fair market value to be counted toward the grant recipient's required match.¹³ Unlike most other federal agency grants, the RTP grant may allow other federal funds, materials, programs (such as AmeriCorps), or services to be used as the grant applicant's match.

¹³ Independent Sector is an industry-recognized service that helps many Corps calculate the value of volunteer time of their service members to use a partner in-kind match contribution: <https://independentsector.org/>. Note that States are not required to accept rates from Independent Sector, and may recognize lower rates for volunteer time.



RTP Project: AmeriCorps members with Fresno Local Conservation Corps (CA) clearing brush along trails.

Corps direct grantees must keep accurate financial records for all RTP project expenditures – including documentation for in-kind and cash match contributions – and can include itemized receipts, invoices, timesheets, payroll records. Common Corps pitfalls when managing grants is unknowingly accruing unallowable expenses, leading to not being fully reimbursed for your services. It is recommended that you work closely with your state trail administrator on how to fully comply with allowable expenditures and other project compliance prior to the project implementation phase.

Most federal and state projects require a match or cost-share from the contracted entity. Make sure that your matching funds are allowable and available prior to the start of the project. A few common mistakes include planning to use in-kind goods or services without realizing a cash match is required, attempting to use goods or services as in-kind match that are not allowable, not realizing that federal funds cannot match other federal funds without authorization from both entities, and attempting to use indirect costs as match without a federally approved indirect cost rate.

Documentation of In-Kind Services

Many Corps who partner with federal land management agencies use in-kind service valuations to calculate their required match contributions. State grants have similar protocols but may require more stringent documentation and compliance for such valuations. If a Corps intends on using in-kind labor, equipment, value of volunteer time, and/or other donated items and services, some states may require specific documentation and proof of costs when Corps request reimbursement. Make sure you work with your state trail administrator to acquire the forms and guidance on permissible use of in-kind match contributions needed for reimbursement at the start of the project implementation phase.

AmeriCorps

Although this is a federally funded program, most state agencies allow for certain federal funds – such as AmeriCorps - to be credited toward the required in-kind match partner contribution. This is not always permissible in every state and may require an approval memo from your AmeriCorps State Commission office if you are using AmeriCorps member slots as value of volunteer time. Grant recipients are expected to keep accurate records of all RTP project expenditures and you may be required to provide staff and Corpsmember timesheets and payroll records, even for in-kind and cash match documentation.

Step 4 – Post-Project and Maintaining Relationships

Ways to Show Partner Appreciation

Consistent and thoughtful follow-up with your state trail agency and project sponsors is an important way to maintain partners and existing relationships. Once the project has been completed, your focus should shift toward strengthening and maintaining all of your relationships with supportive partners who will continue to champion your program's mission and values. Consider the completion of your project as the first step in establishing a long-term partner strategy that will help you secure additional contracts, grant opportunities, and sole-source procurements.

1. Debrief

Schedule a debriefing call with your project sponsor or state administrator. This should be a time set aside to provide and receive sponsor feedback, project implementation, and talk through met and unmet goals. This is a great opportunity to remind the administrator and sponsors of your program's mission, Corpsmember workforce development, and service to the trails and community. Use this time to also address and unpack any challenges, barriers, and discuss solutions. This should not be the time to negotiate funding and reimbursement concerns. States must follow strict grant guidelines and compliance; you risk agitating and damaging partner relationships if you push for leniency or flexibility outside of their strictly mandated funding guidelines. The takeaways from these debriefing should give you a sense of whether its advantageous for your Corps program to continuing working with this grant program, particular project sponsor, and service project in the future. Ask yourself if the partners and the work align with your Corps' mission and whether or not the service work itself was a safe, meaningful, and inclusive experience for your Corpsmembers.

2. Small Acts of Gratitude

Planning, funding, and implementing projects with a state trail program can be a long and sometimes arduous process as well as being new and challenging for the many project sponsors and administrators who have never worked with a Corps program. When the project is complete, make a conscious effort to show appreciation and gratitude for their support. Document the project work on social media and share the links with partners. Write a blog post or Op-Ed about the experience. Small gestures like this, such as thank you cards, photos of Corpsmembers servicing the project, or even an in-person thank you can go a long way towards building and maintaining relationships with project sponsors and your state RTP.

3. Acknowledgment

During the project implementation phase, some states may ask that you display a temporary sign along the trail or work area for program and funding acknowledgment. For states that don't have this as a requirement, this could be seen as a nice gesture if you take the initiative to display partners that helped to support your project.

4. **Reporting**

Compile project results and accomplishments and request a presentation at the next advisory committee meeting to share these accomplishments. During the project implementation phase, record Corpsmember and intern accomplishments, certifications, and trainings earned while on the project and present to the advisory committee and sponsors. Illustrate your success through infographics, one-pagers, or presentations. If you are recording Corpsmember hours served on public lands for federal agency hiring authorities, share that as well. Use this opportunity to help market your program's capabilities and show that your Corpsmembers are on trail and transportation career pathways as a result of their partner support.

Important Considerations

Limits on Grant Applicants

Some state trail programs will not allow applicants with active RTP projects to apply for funding for new projects and/or only one project application per sponsor will be considered. There may be exceptions for some State and Federal Agencies, such as one application per recreation area.

Trails Conferences

Many trail administrators use national, regional, or statewide trail conferences to convene with colleagues, receive professional development, and network with partners. This can be a great opportunity to meet your state trail program staff, present at conference workshops, and network with your trail community. Do some investigating and start with your own State Park and Recreation Associations, who typically have their own conferences and summits.¹⁴

Public Records

Every grant cycle, state trail programs will post or provide (if requested) a list of project sponsors receiving direct RTP grants. You can typically find these lists published on each state website. Types of project sponsors can range from counties and municipalities, state parks, land management agencies, private contractors, nonprofits, and Service and Conservation Corps. Notes and recordings from trail advisory committee meetings and events also may be available for public access on websites, but you may need to request them from your state administrator.

Grant Workshops

Some states host grant workshops that provide applicants, project sponsors and award recipients with an opportunity to review administrative rules and guidelines, provide instruction on completing applications and required documents, meet key state officials, and explain the evaluation process. When provided prior approval, some Corps have used these grant workshops to present on the use of Corps for trail projects. This typically happens in states that already have special grant considerations implemented for Corps. Contact your state trail administrator for more information on how to attend and present at an upcoming grant workshop.

¹⁴ American Trails hosts a Trail Training Calendar with information about conferences and training opportunities: <https://www.americantrails.org/training/calendar>.



RTP Project: A Corpsmember with Texas Conservation Corps, a program of American YouthWorks, serves on the Whispering Pines Nature Trail at Tyler State Park. The area was originally developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Special Grant Applicant Considerations When Using Corps

Many state trail programs have implemented special considerations, exemptions, and strong encouragement for the use of Corps on trail grant applications. The extent of Corps acknowledgment varies and can include awarding additional points on applications if Corps are contracted, providing Corps expenditure exemptions for ineligible grant costs, and/or posting Corps encouragement language on state websites. Some will even link Corps websites and other related resources and provide Corps presentation time at grant workshops and advisory committee meetings. For example, the Colorado program posts Corps crew rates on its site, Maine exempts lodging costs for Corps when it's normally ineligible, and Arkansas awards extra points for the use of Corps on grant applications. At the time this toolkit was published, the following chart lists states that have special grant applicant considerations and/or strongly encourage project sponsors to use Corps.

States with Special Grant Applicant Considerations		
Arizona	Louisiana	South Dakota
Arkansas	Maine	Texas
California	Massachusetts	Vermont
Colorado	Minnesota	Washington
District of Columbia	Missouri	Wisconsin
Florida	New Hampshire	Wyoming
Georgia	Oregon	
Iowa	Pennsylvania	
Kentucky	South Carolina	



Corpsmembers with American Conservation Experience serving on the Pacific Crest Trail.

Public Lands Corps (PLC) Hiring Authority

Many RTP grants help to support federal land recreation projects at parks, national forests, refuges, and other public lands. If a Corps is performing work in partnership with an agency or sponsor on federal lands, it's possible the work may be eligible as a Public Lands Corps (PLC) project and can therefore accrue hours towards the PLC hiring authority for the Corpsmembers who served on these projects. All PLC projects are required to have a 25 percent partner match contribution, if a federal lands cooperative agreement with this authority is being used. This requirement is for any project that meets the definition under the Public Lands Corps (PLC) Act: conservation projects engaging youth 16-30 or up to 35 for veterans. Any documentation and approval of PLC hours will need to be managed by the Corps and agency partner, not the state trails office.

Coalition for Recreational Trails

The Coalition for Recreational Trails (CRT) is a membership of trail-related organizations that work towards building awareness and understanding of the Recreational Trails Program. CRT also sponsors the Annual Achievement Awards as a way to build appreciation and recognize projects funded by RTP. Projects are honored at an awards ceremony on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC every year. One of the award categories – “Service and Conservation Corps” – awards and recognizes Corps RTP projects. Corps who receive a CRT award are honored in DC, meet with their representatives, and are known throughout the RTP community for their contributions and service to recreational trails.

- Listing of CRT Annual Achievement Award winners:
<https://www.americantrails.org/communications/awards/crtAwards>
- CRT Award Nomination Process:
<https://www.americantrails.org/organizations/crt-nominations>

Common Pitfalls and Challenges

Local and State Union Compliance

A major consideration is the presence of unions or organized labor in your state or project area. The presence of a union can have direct effects on your project activities, Corpsmember living stipends or wages, and other aspects of your program. If there are unions present, meet with the leadership to discuss your ideas, scope of work, and get their support. Explain that your Corps and the union can benefit each other by providing newly trained corpsmembers and supporting union staff capacity in completing essential projects. In some cases, a simple conversation is all that is needed; other times more in-depth conversations and negotiations will be required before the start of the project ([see Best Practice, pg. 23](#)).

Prevailing Wage Laws Under Davis-Bacon Act

State prevailing wage laws under the Davis-Bacon Act (Subchapter IV of Chapter 31 of Title 40) do not apply to Service and Conservation Corps.

40 U.S.C. § 3146 of the Davis-Bacon Act provides that the statute “does not supersede or impair any authority otherwise granted by federal law to provide for the establishment of specific wage rates.”¹⁵ Section 1524(b)(1) of MAP-21 requires the Secretary of Transportation to establish a living allowance or rate of pay for Service and Conservation Corps as required under state law or for Conservation Corps in states without such a state law, at an amount not to exceed the maximum living allowance authorized by section 140 of Public Law 101–610 (42 U.S.C. 12594), as amended.¹⁶ Section 140 of Public Law 101–610 statutorily sets the living allowance and other benefits that must be provided for AmeriCorps members. Therefore, participants using AmeriCorps members would not be covered by Davis-Bacon labor standards in accordance with 40 U.S.C. § 3146.¹⁷ In addition, according to the Department of Labor, AmeriCorps members are exempt from the wage and hour provisions.

Independent Contractor vs Service Provider

Corps are workforce development programs and service providers, not exclusively independent contractors. Your ability to convey this successfully to your state trail agency and project sponsors will directly impact their satisfaction with the project outcomes and Corpsmember experience. Corps are embedded in their communities, know the stakeholders, champion young adults and veterans through service-learning opportunities, and can get quality trail work done cost-efficiently. Partners need to fully understand this difference before entering into contracts and agreements with your program.

15 40 U.S. Code Subchapter IV—Wage Rate Requirements: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/40/subtitle-ll/part-A/chapter-31/subchapter-IV>

16 38 USC § 1524 - Vocational training for certain pension recipients: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/38/1524>

17 40 USC § 3146 - Effect on other federal laws: <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/USCODE-2011-title40/USCODE-2011-title40-subtitle-ll-partA-chap31-subchapIV-sec3146>



RTP Project: AmeriCorps members with Southwest Conservation Corps, a program of Conservation Legacy, serving on the McPhee Overlook Trail at San Juan National Forest.

RTP and Corps Project Best Practices

Best Practice: New Recreation Access and Rural Economic Impacts

Southwest Conservation Corps

In partnership with federal, state, and local community groups, the Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC) completed highly technical trail work connecting the McPhee Overlook Trail to the Town of Dolores, CO. Over a four-year construction period, SCC crews moved large boulders, built massive switchbacks, and constructed the trail through a narrow sandstone canyon. U.S. Forest Service staff performed bedrock blasting while SCC crews worked alongside USFS staff to complete trail alignment and refinement. SCC crews also worked with volunteers from the Southwest Colorado Cycling Association (SWCCA), who helped refine the tread. This work was performed using funds received by the Dolores Ranger District of the San Juan National Forest (SJNF) from a Colorado RTP grant. The following year, SCC received a National Forest Foundation Matching Awards grant for additional trail construction, tread refinement and cultural resource protection work.

The completed McPhee Overlook Trail consists of beginner to advanced terrain levels for all user abilities. Data analysis and reports completed for the Town of Dolores on the economic impacts of mountain biking detail that the completed trail is reported to have added an average of \$36.55 per day per person to the local economy. For user education, new interpretive panels have been designed for the town trailhead that highlight both the natural and cultural resources. Additionally, with its trailhead located within the town, the residents and tourists now have direct access to the trail system and the Ranger District.



RTP Project: A Corpsmember with the California Conservation Corps serving on the Arcata Ridge Trail .

Best Practice: Union Partnerships and Corpsmember Career Pathways

California Conservation Corps

The California Conservation Corps (CCC) and the California Department of Transportation (CalTrans) have a decades-long partnership supporting a trainee program that prepares Corpsmembers for entry-level positions at CalTrans. Through an interagency agreement, CCC commits to providing a set amount of Corpsmember service hours for CalTrans projects throughout the state in return for CalTrans funding.

CCC manages interns and crews completing electrical, invasive species control, landscaping, planting, and irrigation projects along trail and walkway corridors. For some trail projects that require the use of heavy equipment and tools, CCC ensures that Corpsmembers are working alongside CalTrans union employees so that they receive their guidance and expertise. By supporting this trainee program, CalTrans acknowledges that having a succession plan is critical for the growth and health of the agency. Ensuring that CCC Corpsmembers are receiving the guidance, direction, and training needed to become the next generation of union and agency employees is a high priority. CalTrans identifies and designates hard-to-fill, entry-level positions that qualified Corpsmembers can fill once they complete the trainee program requirements. Many of these positions are civil service and union positions. Supported by CalTrans grants, CCC hires a navigator, also known as an educational liaison, for each trainee program statewide to work closely with Corpsmembers on getting them career-ready. Navigators provide guidance on CalTrans job applications and help to meet any educational or training requirements.

The CCC-Caltrans trainee program and partnership has been invaluable for the hundreds of Corpsmembers who have found career access and opportunity with a state agency. Many Corps alumni have moved on to equipment operator and management positions within CalTrans. This partnership is a best practice for how interagency and union collaboration with a Corps program can lead to successful career pathways and experiences for Corpsmembers.



RTP Project: AmeriCorps members with Maine Conservation Corps; stone steps they installed at Grafton Notch State Park.

Best Practice: Statewide Trail Assessments with Single Placement Interns

Maine Conservation Corps

The Maine Conservation Corps (MCC) hired two Environmental Steward interns who worked alongside Corps staff and an external evaluator to establish a system for assessing the current environmental condition and quality of Maine's recreational trail systems. The interns had expertise and experience in data collection, statistics, GIS, trail construction, and outdoor skills prior to the start of the project and connected with land managers to inform them of the project. During their term of service, the MCC interns collected feedback on trail priority areas, organized action plans for the initiation of the trail assessments, conducted extensive research, created and tested measurement tools, and assessed equipment and field protocols.

The interns completed advanced assessments on trail characteristics and conditions by documenting trail structures, problem areas, unique features, and trail signage, and general trail conditions. This systematic assessment of Maine's trails will provide quantitative measures to test the effectiveness of trail construction and maintenance interventions, prioritize future rehabilitation needs, and create a data set of trail characteristics to form a statewide trail classification system. The data the interns collected will be used by multiple agencies, including the state trail program, to guide future decisions and priorities. The success of this collaboration between MCC and Maine trail program will help to bring consistency and best practices to the forefront of Maine's recreational trails.

Corps Budget Tabulations and Financial Guidance

Example 1 – National Park Service

The following is a budget tabulation for a National Park Service (NPS) crew project in partnership with a local Corps. The Corpsmembers completed historic preservation and restoration work, trail construction and maintenance requiring specialized tools and equipment, and maintenance of various visitor facilities. The Corps served as a subrecipient on the NPS funding award and was reimbursed periodically throughout the project performance period.

Project Partner	National Park Service
Duration of work	3 Months
Type of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Historic Preservation and Restoration• Maintenance of Park Visitor Facilities• Trail Construction and Maintenance

- 1. [PERSONNEL]** If the partner organization staff aren't paid, then their staff time can be used as in-kind match. Value of staff time can be used as a cash contribution if their salary or wages are using non-Federal funds. For example, a Corps may use foundation or non-federal grants for staff wages and salaries.
- 2. [PERSONNEL]** For Corpsmembers, Crew Leaders, and interns, Corps may use the intern or volunteer time valued at [IndependentSector.org](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2013/04/11/2013-07834/independent-sector-employment), then subtract the actual Corpsmember or intern compensation. This is a valid method for calculating in-kind services. The partner organization must track the actual hours worked by the Corpsmember or intern and provide clear documentation. Note that while federal agencies accept the Independent Sector rate, some states do not, and may require a lower rate.
- 3. [SUPPLIES]** For supplies – such as Corpsmember gear, personal protective equipment, and small tools – if these items are donated, the value of the donated goods can be used as in-kind. If these items were purchased with non-federal funds, then they can be used as a cash contribution match.

Federal definition for Supplies: 2 CFR §200.94 Supplies.

Supplies means all tangible personal property other than those described in §200.33 Equipment. A computing device is a supply if the acquisition cost is less than the lesser of the capitalization level established by the non-federal entity for financial statement purposes or \$5,000, regardless of the length of its useful life. See also §§200.20 Computing devices and 200.33 Equipment.

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Personnel	Federal Share	Corps Match Share	Total Project Costs
Conservation Corps Manager	\$4,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$8,000.00
Field Coordinators	\$1,750.00		\$1,750.00
1 Crew Leader (\$400/week for 12 weeks)	\$3,200.00	\$1,600.00	\$4,800.00
5 Corpsmembers (\$300/week for 11 weeks)	\$12,000.00	\$4,500.00	\$16,500.00
Fringe Benefits			
Conservation Corps Manager Benefits		\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00
Travel			
Gas	\$50.00		\$50.00
Vehicle Repairs and Maintenance		\$100.00	\$100.00
Supplies			
Corpsmember Uniforms	\$2,150.00		\$2,150.00
First-Aid-Kit	\$50.00		\$50.00
Personal Protective Gear	\$110.00		\$110.00
Gear Repairs	\$200.00		\$200.00
Training (Contractual)			
First-Aid/ CPR Certifications (x5)		\$50.00	\$50.00
Instructor Costs for Training and Education		\$375.00	\$375.00
Other			
Criminal History Checks (FBI and State)		\$350.00	\$350.00
Corpsmember Orientation		\$267.00	\$267.00
Corps Indirect Costs	\$3,672.00		\$3,672.00
TOTAL	\$27,182.00	\$13,242.00	\$40,424.00
	67%	33%	

Example 2 - Park Concessionaire

This is an example of a fee-for-service budget in partnership with a park concessionaire. The Corps managed two crew deployments that completed highly technical trail construction, restoration, and rock work that required the use of heavy equipment. The project agreement only required a simple invoicing mechanism sent to the sponsor at the end of the project. As such, a partner match contribution was not required for this agreement since the work was in the service of the concessionaire and not the park itself.

Project Partner	Park Concessionaire
Duration of work	1.5 Months
Type of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trail Construction and Restoration• Rock Work• Drainage Design

1. **[INDIRECT COSTS]** Only the Corpsmember wages and fringe were detailed under personnel costs. Any staff time, administration, and indirect costs were compiled into one negotiated and approved indirect cost rate (ICR).
2. **[MATCH]** Although the project work took place on federal lands, the work itself was in the service of the concessionaire and therefore the project sponsor did not require a partner match contribution.
3. **[MATCH]** The project sponsor is responsible for the partner match contribution (if required). If the project sponsor hires the Corps, then the Corps has zero responsibility for match.
4. **[OTHER]** In some cases, fee-for-service budgets, like this one, with non-federal partners do not need to be as detailed as the ones federal land management agencies typically require.

	Total Project Costs
Personnel	
1 Crew Leader (\$16.50/hour, 240 hours)	\$4,000.00
4 Corpsmembers (\$15.00/hr, 960 hours)	\$14,400.00
Fringe Benefits	
Crew Leader (1)	\$510.00
Corpsmembers (4)	\$1,860.00
Travel	
Crew Truck Mileage	\$1,200.00
Crew Truck Lease Costs	\$1,050.00
Supplies	
Corpsmember Equipment and Personal Protective Gear	\$1,120.00
Other	
Perdiem Costs (\$15.00/day, 40 days)	\$1,800.00
Corps Indirect Costs (21%)	\$5,520.00
TOTAL	\$31,420.00

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NOTE: A partner match share was not required for this agreement

Example 3 – Fish and Wildlife Service

In this example, the Corps provided a crew that performed wetland conservation, habitat restoration and monitoring, and trail maintenance on refuge trails and roads. Corpsmember gear and supplies were provided both by the Corps and charged to the federal share and clearly documented for reimbursement.

Project Partner	Fish and Wildlife Service
Duration of work	2 Months
Type of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coastal and Wetland Restoration• Trail Maintenance and Restoration

- 1. [TRAVEL]** Vehicle rentals and other related travel expenditures are not always allowable with some state trail programs, while others may provide special Corps cost exemptions. A common pitfall for Corps is unknowingly accruing ineligible costs and then not being reimbursed at the end of the project. Before drafting project cost estimates, make sure to work with your state administer on allowable costs in your state.
- 2. [SUPPLIES]** In this budget example, the Corps is charging most of its small field tools to the federal share under the Supplies category. In other cases, Corps may include chainsaw costs and repairs under this category as well, which is allowable. Chainsaw expenditures should fall under Supplies, not Equipment. See below for Federal definition.

Federal Definition: 2 CFR 200.453 Materials and supplies costs, including costs of computing devices.

(a) Costs incurred for materials, supplies, and fabricated parts necessary to carry out a federal award are allowable.

(b) Purchased materials and supplies must be charged at their actual prices, net of applicable credits. Withdrawals from general stores or stockrooms must be charged at their actual net cost under any recognized method of pricing inventory withdrawals, consistently applied. Incoming transportation charges are a proper part of materials and supplies costs.

(c) Materials and supplies used for the performance of a federal award may be charged as direct costs. In the specific case of computing devices, charging as direct costs is allowable for devices that are essential and allocable, but not solely dedicated, to the performance of a Federal award.

(d) Where federally-donated or furnished materials are used in performing the federal award, such materials will be used without charge.

Personnel	Federal Share	Corps Match Share	Total Project Costs
Conservation Corps Program Director	\$600.00	\$400.00	\$1,000.00
Administrator		\$1,210.00	\$1,210.00
Program Coordinator	\$8,950.00	\$2,750.00	\$11,700.00
Field Manager (\$16.00/hour)	\$8,950.00	\$2,750.00	\$11,700.00
4 Corpsmembers (\$11.00/hour)	\$24,790.00	\$1,370.00	\$26,160.00
Fringe Benefits			
Corpsmember and Field Manager Health Insurance		\$2,800.00	\$2,800.00
1 Travel			
Vehicle Rental, Maintenance, Gas	\$1,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$3,000.00
2 Supplies			
Corpsmember Gear	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$1,000.00
Corpsmember Uniforms		\$300.00	\$300.00
Project and Field Supplies	\$1,200.00	\$470.00	\$1,670.00
Training (Contractual)			
Corpsmember Certifications	\$1,000.00	\$350.00	\$1,350.00
Other			
Criminal History Checks (FBI and State)		\$150.00	\$150.00
Liability Insurance		\$600.00	\$600.00
TOTAL	\$46,990.00	\$15,650.00	\$62,640.00
	75%	25%	

Corps Resources

The following are ready-to-use resources and reference pieces to help support your partner negotiations with state trail programs or help you start the conversation for sole-source procurements.

Model State RTP Contracts and Agreements

The Corps Network has been working with state trail administrators to compile sample RTP contracts and agreements between states and Corps. To compliment this toolkit, these models will be compiled on the Trail and Transportation page on The Corps Network's website and may help guide how you negotiate and develop your business plan with partners. Keep in mind that many states have their own cooperative agreements that are mandated by their governor's office and cannot be substituted. However, if you are pursuing an agreement with a project sponsor or grantee, these models can show you what a successful Corps partnership agreement can look like.

<https://corpsnetwork.org/our-impact/trails-and-transportation/>

The Corps Network Support Letter

Some states award additional points for the use of Service and Conservations Corps on projects ([see Special Grant Applicant Considerations, pg. 19](#)) and will typically require some form of documentation included in the application process to authenticate that Corps will indeed be used. The Corps Network developed a support letter, signed by our President and CEO, that members of The Corps Network may use for documented evidence on your applications and other partnership development activities. Please contact The Corps Network's Programs team for more information.

Contact Information

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Social Media:

Find us on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook @TheCorpsNetwork

Cover Photo Credit

Front:

- Left: A Corpsmember with Nevada Conservation Corps, a program of Great Basin Institute. (photo likely taken on Tahoe East Shore Trail in Incline Village, NV)
- Right: Corpsmember with Onondaga Earth Corps serving on the Onondaga Creek Walk in Syracuse, NY.

Back:

- Left: Corpsmembers with Mile High Youth Corps (based in Denver, CO), carrying a stringer into place to help control trail erosion at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument.
- Right: AmeriCorps members with the Ancestral Lands Program of Conservation Legacy.

