



## ACCREDITATION APPLICATION

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# Corps Center of Excellence Accreditation Overview

The Corps Center of Excellence (CCE) is dedicated to the promotion of high-quality programming and standards for Conservation Corps across America. The CCE ensures that programs have the capacity to meet the desired outcomes for participants, quality and production requirements of project partners, and risk management measures to ensure participant and staff safety. The CCE also ensures accredited programs are fiscally sound, follow preferred practices for general operations, and appropriately mitigate organizational risk and liability.

The 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 demonstrate their accountability to both Corpsmembers and the communities they serve. Independent accreditation provides quality assurance to partners and funders, particularly publicly funded government agencies, and recognizes a Corps' ability to provide safe, appropriate, and meaningful experiences.

Below is an overview of the 2023 accreditation process. Corps undergoing accreditation for the first time must satisfy the prerequisites, pay the accreditation fee, and complete each step of the application process. Corps renewing their accreditation after the first five years, must complete the renewal questionnaire and pay the accreditation. An explanation of both the new applicant and renewing applicant accreditation processes are below.

If you have questions or would like to discuss what is expected of Corps applying for or renewing their accreditation, please contact Bobby Tillett, Senior Manager, at [btillett@corpsnetwork.org](mailto:btillett@corpsnetwork.org).

## Prerequisites

Corps interested in applying for accreditation must comply with the following requirements:

- Corps must be in existence for a minimum of two years.
- Corps must have completed an independent financial audit within the past two years.
- Corps' managing entity does not have significant financial or compliance judgments imposed upon it by a governmental entity. \*
- Corps' managing entity does not have any significant pending or threatened litigation, claims, or assessments. \*

*\*If your Corps does have compliance judgements and/or pending litigation, claims, or assessments and you are unsure if it disqualifies the organization from pursuing accreditation, contact Bobby Tillett at [btillett@corpsnetwork.org](mailto:btillett@corpsnetwork.org).*

## Expectations for Staff Capacity

Corps should not apply until they are able to devote the necessary capacity to complete the application and assemble all the essential documents and evidence. This process generally takes several months to identify, edit, and/or create the required materials. Many Corps that

have successfully completed the process have reported dedicating 8 hours per week over a period of three or four months to complete the narrative portion and assemble supporting documentation.

Corps should expect that internal review and discussion, TCN staff review of materials, the site visit and CCE action will take the full calendar year. The Corps should also expect specific items to require Board approval or changes to internal processes. TCN recommends that Corps engage all levels of the organization in the process as it will likely touch on every aspect of the organization's general operations.

## Calendar – New Applicants:

<b>April 30, 2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Letter of intent submitted.</li></ul>
<b>May 5, 2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Applicants accepted for the 2023 accreditation year notified</li></ul>
<b>May 12, 2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accreditation fee due</li></ul>
<b>September 1, 2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Application narrative submitted.</li><li>• Supporting documentation uploaded to Dropbox.</li><li>• Remainder of the accreditation fee paid.</li></ul>
<b>September 1 – November 15, 2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reviewer site visits completed (site visits are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis following submission of the application)</li></ul>
<b>November 15, 2023 – February 1, 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Application revisions can be made based on site reviewer feedback.</li></ul>
<b>February 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Corps Center of Excellence reviews and approves accreditation applicants.</li></ul>
<b>March 19 – 21, 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accredited Corps recognized at The Corps Network's National Conference.</li></ul>

## Accreditation Applicant Process

The following section details the steps for applying for an initial accreditation. Steps for applicants applying to renew their accreditation can be found here.

### Step 1: Letter of Intent

Corps planning to go through accreditation in 2023 must submit a letter of intent. Letters of intent, the Corps contact sheet, and a copy of your most recent financial audit are due April 30, 2023, and should be e-mailed to [btillett@corpsnetwork.org](mailto:btillett@corpsnetwork.org). Please use the template letter of intent and Corps contact sheet included on pages 5-6.

## Step 2: Acceptance & Accreditation Fee

Corps will be notified by May 5, 2023, if they are accepted to go through the accreditation process. Depending on demand, all Corps may not be accepted into the 2023 accreditation cycle.

If accepted, you are required to submit your accreditation fee based on the fee scheduled below. You can submit payments via The Corps Network secure payment portal found here: <https://corpsnetwork.org/accreditation-dues/> . If you need a payment plan, please contact [btillett@corpsnetwork.org](mailto:btillett@corpsnetwork.org) for options. Accreditation fees must be paid no later than May 12, 2023.

- \$3000 - Corps with an operating budget less than \$4m
- \$4000 - Corps with an operating budget \$4m or more

## Step 3: Written Application

Selected Corps must submit their application narrative and supporting materials no later than September 1, 2023. TCN will review each application for completeness. If your application is not complete, TCN staff will share a revision plan for your application which you have until September 29, 2023, to complete. If your application is complete, a review team will be assigned to conduct a desk review of the application and schedule a site visit. If application revisions are not made by the deadline, the application will be marked incomplete, and the Corps will not be eligible for accreditation in the 2023 program year.

Following the desk review, the review team will notify the applicant Corps of any questions raised by the written material and provide an opportunity to clarify or revise the application. Reviewers will then decide whether to move forward with a site visit based upon the quality and completeness of the application. In cases where reviews deem the applicant not ready for a site visit, TCN will redirect those applicants to a technical assistance process to help correct identified deficiencies in time for a 2024 site visit.

## Step 4: Site Visits

Site visits for Corps going through accreditation for the first time will be scheduled between September and November 2023. Site visits will be scheduled no sooner than 30 days after the completed application received. If an applicant completes their application in advance of the deadline, site visits can be scheduled prior to September depending on the applicant's preference.

Two peer reviewers will conduct a two-day site visit to the applicant Corps. Reviewers will assess supporting documentation that is only available onsite, meet with staff pertinent to operations outlined the application, and discuss areas of improvement identified during the desk review. Reviewers also will meet with Corpsmembers to hear their perspective on the program's effectiveness and impact. An example of a site visit agenda can be found below.

The site visit will conclude with a debrief where reviewers will provide feedback and follow-up information to the Corps. Applicants will have time to a second opportunity to revise their application based on reviewer feedback. All revisions must be completed by February 1, 2024.

## Step 5: Report and Decision

The review team will prepare a summary report for the Corps Center of Excellence Accrediting Committee which is comprised of former Corps leaders and federal partners with extensive experience in Corps operations. A draft report will be shared with the applicant who will have an opportunity to respond to any remaining issues. If there is a disagreement, the final report will include a statement from the applicant indicating their reasons for disagreement. The report will include a determination on if the Corps is in substantial compliance with the standards, highlight best practices, and, if applicable, may recommend recommendations for continuous improvement.

The CCE will review the final report and decide whether to the accredit the applicant or not. If the applicant is not satisfied with the final decision, they will have 60 days after receiving the official decision to submit an appeal. The appeal will be reviewed by the CCE Committee and responded to no later than 60 days after the submission date. Appeals can be submitted to Bobby Tillett at [btillet@corpsnetwork.org](mailto:btillet@corpsnetwork.org).

If approved for accreditation, the applicant will receive an electronic notice of their approval and version of their accreditation certificate. Approved applicants' accreditation plaques will be presented at The Corps Network's 2024 National Conference.

## Step 6: Annual Responsibilities

The accreditation is valid for five years. As an accredited program, Corps agree to the following:

- Corps will maintain yearly financial audits.
- Corps will complete TCN's annual profile.
- Corps will notify TCN of major changes in the organization, such as changes in executive leadership or major programmatic or funding changes.

If the Corps does not maintain these annual responsibilities, they are at risk of losing their accredited status. The CCE Committee will decide whether or not to revoke accredited status based on the degree of non-compliance.

# Sample Letter of Intent

[Date]

The Corps Network  
1275 K Street NW  
Suite 1050  
Washington, DC 20005

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter to inform you of [Corps Name] intent to apply for the Corps Center of Excellence 2023 accreditation cycle. Attached you will find our Corps contact sheet and a copy of our most recent financial audit.

This letter confirms our commitment to completing the necessary steps for becoming a Corps Center of Excellence Accredited Corps. If accepted, we understand that we are required to meet the following expectations and deadlines.

- Payment of our accreditation fee by May 12, 2023.
- Submission of our accreditation application by September 1, 2023.
- Completion of our reviewer site visit by November 15, 2023
- Completion of application revisions no later than February 1, 2024.

[If you are currently using or plan to apply for a TCN cooperative agreement or grant that requires accreditation, please include that information here]

Questions regarding our intent to apply can be sent to [name and email of the accreditation contact at your organization].

Thank you,

[Signature]

[Name]

[Title]

[Organization]

# Corps Contact Sheet

## Organization

Name of Corps:	
Parent Organization (if applicable):	
Street Address:	
City/State/Zip	
Phone:	
Website:	
Year Established:	

## Executive Leadership

Name:	
Title:	
Phone:	
E-mail address:	

## Accreditation Primary Point of Contact

Name:	
Title:	
Phone:	
E-mail address:	

## Additional Points of Contact

Name	E-mail Address	Phone Number

## Corpsmember Terms

Please use an "x" to indicate if you will have Corpsmembers enrolled or not enrolled during the months below:

	Corpsmembers Enrolled	Corpsmembers Not Enrolled
<b>September 2023</b>		
<b>October 2023</b>		
<b>November 2023</b>		