New Applicants Accreditation Process

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, fiscal management, risk management, governance standards, and Corps operations. By completing the accreditation process, the Corps demonstrates 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.

To help you through the accreditation journey, you will have a TCN accreditation team working with you.

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# General

There are two types of accreditation applicants – ***New Applicant and Renewing Applicant***

**New Applicant** Corps undergoing accreditation for the first time must satisfy the prerequisites, pay the accreditation fee, and complete each step of the New Applicant application process.

**Renewing Applicant**Corps go through a simplified process every other time. Corps renewing their accreditation after the first five years, must complete the renewal questionnaire and pay the accreditation fee. Please contact us if you are renewing as the process and application are different.

# 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 Stephanie Mathes at smathes@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.

# Save The Dates Calendar – New Applicants:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **March 31, 2025** | * Letter of intent submitted. |
| **April 15, 2025** | * Applicants accepted for the 2025 accreditation year notified |
| **April 30, 2025** | * Accreditation fee due |
| **June 30, 2025** | * Application narrative submitted.   *(If the application narrative is incomplete, the Accreditation Team will create a revision plan and you will have 5 business days to submit the completed document.)*   * Supporting documentation uploaded to Dropbox. * Remainder of the accreditation fee paid. |
| **After receipt of approved application and supporting documents** | * Reviewer site visits completed (site visits are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis following submission of the application) |
| **Adequate due date will be scheduled after site visit** | * Application revisions can be made based on site reviewer feedback. |
| **December 2025/January 2026** | * Corps Center of Excellence reviews and approves accreditation applicants. |
| **March 2026** | * Accredited Corps recognized at The Corps Network’s National Conference. |

# Accreditation Applicant Process

The following section details the steps for applying for an initial accreditation. If you are renewing, please ask for the Renewing Accreditation Process.

# Step 1: Letter of Intent

Corps planning to go through accreditation in 2025 must submit a letter of intent. Letters of intent, the Corps contact sheet, and a copy of your most recent financial audit are dueMarch 31, 2025, and should be e-mailed to scarter@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 April 15, 2025, if they are accepted to go through the accreditation process. Depending on demand, all Corps may not be accepted into the 2025 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/> . Please email [scarter@corpsnetwork.org](mailto:scarter@corpsnetwork.org) when you submit payment. If you need a payment plan, please contact [smathes@corpsnetwork.org](mailto:smathes@corpsnetwork.org)

for options. Accreditation fees must be paid no later than April 30, 2025.

* $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 June 30, 2025. 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 five (5) business days 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 2025 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 and the accreditation process will start over. This may have an effect on other TCN programs you are participating in so please be sure to discuss that with your accreditation team immediately.

# Step 4: Site Visits

Site visits for Corps going through accreditation for the first time will be scheduled after receipt of approved application and supporting documents. If an applicant completes their application in advance of the deadline, site visits can be scheduled sooner.

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 a second opportunity to revise their application based on reviewer feedback. An adequate due date for these revisions will be scheduled after the site visit. If the application revisions are not made by this due date, the application will be marked incomplete, and the Corps will not be eligible for accreditation in the 2025 program year and the entire process will have to be repeated with updated information.

# 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. The report will include a determination on if the Corps is in substantial compliance with the standards, highlight best practices, and, if applicable, make recommendations for continuous improvement.

The CCE will review the final report and decide whether to 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 smathes@corpsnetwork.org.

If approved for accreditation, the applicant will receive an electronic notice of their approval and a version of their accreditation certificate. Approved applicants’ accreditation plaques will be presented at The Corps Network’s 2026 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.

Sample Letter of Intent (New Applicant)

[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 2025 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 accreditation deposit by April 30,2025. Remaining balance due upon submission of completed application narrative and supporting documents.

*(check which applies)*

**☐** $3000 - Corps with an operating budget less than $4m

**☐** $4000 - Corps with an operating budget $4m or more

* Submission of our accreditation application by June 30, 2025.
* Completion of our reviewer site visit to be scheduled after receipt of accepted application and supporting documentation.
* Completion of application revisions no later than identified due date.

[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 |
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# Corpsmember Terms

From the listed months below, please indicate the 3 months that you will have the highest Corpsmember enrollment in which we could schedule a site visit.

August

September

October

November

December (only if necessary)

Sample Site Visit Agenda

Day 1:

Welcome and Introductions

Review Agenda and Schedule

Overview of CCE Accreditation Process (TCN Staff)

Overview of Corps program (Corps program staff)

Start review of accreditation standards (General Operation & Governance Standards) with appropriate program staff

Lunch

Continue Review of Accreditation Standards

Complete General Operational and Governance Standards

Start review of Corps Operational Standards

Stop for the day

Dinner (visitors alone or with program staff)

Day 2:

Continue Accreditation Standards review

Project site visit/Meet with members

Lunch - Site visitors meet alone, review notes, discuss feedback

Debrief meeting with program staff/Accreditation Visit concludes

Special NOTES to consider:

1. To prepare to have the **right staff present** we will go in order of the application as to what we will review.
   1. Governance and Financials – leadership, financial team, other as you decide
   2. Corps Operations – leadership and program staff, others as you decide
2. Often, programs will provide lunch, and we can use that time to meet with members or partners so we can cut that out in the afternoon to move up the debrief and end early. Corps decides this. Just let us know.
3. Often times, Corps arrange Dinner meetings for the same purposes of #2. We are open to that if the Corps decides it is necessary or desired.