

CONNECTIONS

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Connecting Young Adults with Transportation Enhancements: The Benefits of Youth Corps

In fall of 2004, officials noticed that a pond in Maine's Cobbossee Watershed was suffering from pollution as a result of runoff from an eroding local road. During the next several summers since that observation was made, the city of Augusta has hosted young adults from across the country to stay for eight weeks at a time and work to improve the water quality of the distressed Woodbury Pond. As the youths worked their summers away to protect this community resource, they in turn gained valuable experience and skills.

This mutually beneficial relationship all began when the Maine Department of Transportation awarded Transportation Enhancements (TE) funds to ameliorate the runoff from the road. The TE award involved the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps. Corps participants were selected to work with the Friends of the Cobbossee Watershed on various aspects of the transportation project, giving them environmental insight and hands-on experience. The pollution in Woodbury Pond was a result of sediment runoff from the eroded ditch and shoulder of Hallowell Road. The runoff was washing out into a narrow strip of wetland, and being deposited into the pond. Work was initiated to pave the shoulder and stabilize the ditch to reduce future erosion. Certain segments of the ditch were dug up and later filled with gravel to provide additional runoff storage and act as a filter. The roadside was reshaped and stabilized with vegetation and erosion control mulch. The AmeriCorps participants helped to plant and maintain a sensitive length of the ditch, measuring 800 linear feet. The team's work provided ecological and aesthetic benefits to local landowners and the entire community.

Young adults are similarly engaged in TE projects all over the country through their involvement in youth corps. In Washington, DC, Earth Conservation Corps members worked on a major component of a transportation initiative known as the Anacostia Riverwalk and Trail. In Hawaii, the Lihue Gateway Project at the island of Kauai's airport was a popular landscaping and beautification endeavor involving Job



Youth Corps in Maine work on roadside replanting. (Photo: Zach Henderson)

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CORPS MEMBERS, PARTICULARLY THOSE AT RISK, SCORE HIGHER ON MEASURES OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, ARE MORE LIKELY TO VOTE, AND ARE MORE LIKELY TO EARN A COLLEGE DEGREE. ADDITIONALLY, CORPS GENERATE \$1.60 IN IMMEDIATE BENEFITS FOR EVERY \$1.00 OF COSTS.

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What Exactly is a Corps?

According to the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC), corps are state and local programs engaging primarily young adults (ages 16–25) in service. The majority of corpsmembers come to the corps looking for a better chance to succeed in life. In return for their efforts, corpsmembers receive guidance by adult leaders who serve as mentors and role models, a modest stipend and a wide range of member development services including significant educational opportunities, employment and training, life skill development, and the opportunity to invest in their communities.

Crews of 8–12 corps members are guided by adult leaders, who serve as mentors and role models as well as technical trainers and supervisors. The crews carry out a wide range of conservation, urban infrastructure improvement and human service projects. In return for their efforts to restore and strengthen their communities, corps members receive: 1) a living allowance; 2) classroom training to improve basic competencies and, if necessary, to secure a GED or high school diploma; 3) experiential and environmental service-learning based education; 4) generic and technical skills training; 5) a wide range of supportive services; and 6) in many cases, an AmeriCorps post-service educational award.

In short, corps programs are amazingly versatile and cost-effective. They allow young people to accomplish important conservation, community restoration and human service projects, while also developing employment and citizenship skills.



Corps. In Alaska, young adults from Serve Alaska Youth Corps are learning skills and keeping roadsides beautiful. Washington State now hosts a beautifully restored trail that leads to some of its most scenic areas thanks to work that Washington Service Corps contributed.

How Youth Corps Organizations Can Become Involved in TE Projects

Use of youth corps in Transportation Enhancements projects is encouraged by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). FHWA's role with youth corps began with a provision in the *Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century* (TEA-21) in 1998 that requires the US Department of Transportation to encourage states to enter into contracts and cooperative agreements with youth service and conservation corps to perform Transportation Enhancements activities. This encouragement is also included in the FHWA Guidance on Transportation Enhancements.

Although Transportation Enhancements funds are provided to states through federal legislation, each state has its own process to solicit and select proposals. Some states require that applicants for TE funds be a government agency, while others allow non-profits to apply for a TE award directly. Check with your state's TE Manager to determine who is eligible to apply. (To find the TE Manager for your state, see www.enhancements.org/contacts.asp). If only government agencies are allowed to apply for funds, it is possible for a youth corps to partner with an agency to propose projects. Youth corps staff, generally the Executive Director or a Program Coordinator, can work with project sponsors and partners to fashion a contract or a cooperative agreement to carry out all or part of an enhancements project.

Benefits to TE and Youth Corps

The potential benefits that communities can gain from using youth corps in Transportation Enhancements are numerous. Young, eager workers who are actively seeking experience and training can provide a burst of energy to any project. Their work is significant in that it is an investment into the future of the whole community.

Use of youth corps through Transportation Enhancements projects is reciprocally beneficial. Corps members, by serving the transportation needs of a community, are also investing in their own future. The report "Youth Corps: Promising Strategies for Young People and Their Communities," from Abt Associates and Brandeis University, demonstrates that young people who join a corps experience higher rates of employment and higher average wages than their counterparts. The report further reveals that corps members, particularly those at risk, score higher on measures of personal and social responsibility, are more likely to vote, and are more likely to earn a college degree. Additionally, corps generate \$1.60 in immediate benefits for every \$1.00 of costs.



Washington's Cape Flattery Trail has new overlooks showcasing the rocky coastline and trail boardwalks protecting the vulnerable landscape. (Photo: Washington State Service Corps)

Washington's Cape Flattery Trail Restored

For years, some of Washington State's most breathtaking views of the Pacific Ocean's rocky shores and of its northwestern wilderness could only be seen after traversing a muddy, poorly maintained trail with dangerous plunging cliffs. The Cape Flattery Trail was in dire need of restoration. In 1996, the Washington Service Corps partnered with the Makah Tribal Council, and with the help of a Transportation Enhancements award, were able to repair and enhance this stunning trail.



Youth corps in Alaska are keeping Alaskan roadsides beautiful. (Photo: Sean Mellon)

The seven-member team began by cutting back the overgrowth of salal and salmonberry brush that had begun to impede on the trail. This cleared the way for the team to build a boardwalk and bridges through the scenic marshland. Cedar safety rails were constructed, as well as drains to keep rainwater runoff off the trail, protecting it from erosion and damage. The parking area at the trailhead was graded and interpretive signage and directions were posted. Future maintenance of the trail was ensured when team members recruited 25 community volunteers to organize a “Trail Watch program” to monitor the trail for damage due to vandalism, weather, and wear and tear.

As a result of this effort, the trail has become an economic resource to the area, contributing to the boom of ecotourism as a leading industry.

Youth Enhance Alaska’s Scenery

In 1996, the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (ADOTPF) was considering the use herbicides to clear brush from roadsides and guardrails. Herbicide use can be problematic for public and ecological health. Fortunately, the need for herbicides was avoided when Serve Alaska Youth Corps teamed up with ADOTPF ten years ago.

The Serve Alaska Youth Corps teams have since become an asset to the beautified Alaskan highways. Corps participants contribute to Transportation Enhancements projects that help conserve and beautify the scenic roadsides of Alaska. Crews have worked to

increase signage visibility, clear corners for sight distance, clear trees in areas of known animal crossings, increase and improve road drainage, and clear brush from under and around guardrails. The young adults are trained in highway safety, tool maintenance and operation, and flagging, giving them experience to help them succeed in the future. The success of the corps’ work is demonstrated by the scenic and herbicide-free roadsides of Alaska that continue to exist today.

FIND A CORPS NEAR YOU

There are several types of corps that exist. NASCC’s grassroots corps are local and state government or nonprofit entities. There are also federally run corps which differentiate from NASCC in operation and governance. Job Corps, for example, is an education and vocational training program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor. AmeriCorps’ National Civilian Conservation Corps is drawn from the successful models of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Each type of corps serves different youth populations.

For more information on each, see:

- National Association of Service and Conservation Corps: www.nascc.org
- Job Corps: jobcorps.doleta.gov
- AmeriCorps’ National Civilian Conservation Corps: www.americorps.gov/about/programs/nccc.asp

NTEC WANTS TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR PROJECT

NTEC is always looking for examples of TE funded projects in the 12 TEA categories. We use these examples as potential sources for Connections features, on the Project Examples page of the NTEC Website, and to inform the Clearinghouse of how TE funded projects affect the communities they are in.

Ideal projects should:

- Be recently completed or well under construction
- Include community sponsorship or participation

- Illustrate how TE funds made the project possible
- Make a strong visual statement using images & plans
- Include funding and cost breakdowns, as well as project contacts

Please direct project examples to:
National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse
 1100 17th Street NW, 10th Floor
 Washington, DC 20036
ntec@enhancements.org

DUBUQUE, IOWA

Paving of a 1 ½ mile stretch on Dubuque's Heritage Trail is complete, providing a key link in the 26 mile county-wide trail system. The new stretch extends the city trail into the greater county area. The project, which cost \$158,000, was funded by Dubuque County in conjunction with a Transportation Enhancements award. Plans are afoot to create further connections over the next five years between the city and Heritage Trail system. [*The Telegraph Herald*, November 5, 2005]

OUTVILLE, OHIO

Finishing touches have just been placed on the restoration of the historic Baltimore and Ohio Railroad depot originally built in 1899 in Ohio. Time had been leaving its marks on the depot, which was closed in 1940. Up until April 2005, the building was weather-worn, battered and infested with raccoons. With the help of a \$120,000 Transportation Enhancements award, the depot was restored with new windows, fresh paint on both interior and exterior surfaces, replacement of cracked wood, and a new chimney built with old bricks. There are plans to build a historical display within the depot, which is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. [*The Newark Advocate*, November 27, 2005. Outville, OH]

PORTAGE, MICHIGAN

A bicycle-friendly community is continuing to improve their trail system. Pedestrians and bicyclists in Portage now enjoy two more miles of trails along the Northwest Portage Bikeway, constructed this past spring with the help of a \$276,000 Transportation Enhancements award. The additional miles meander through residential areas, connecting trail users with city parks, elementary schools and a major retail center. Small rest areas were constructed where the bikeway intersects with major roads. Signs and stripes were installed to warn motorists of the non-motorized presence. [*American City & County*, December 1, 2005]

RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA

The interchanges heading into Riverside County along Highway 60 are getting a makeover with \$1.6 million dollars in Transportation Enhancements funding and \$4.4 million of Jurupa Valley redevelopment funds. The project, begun in October 2004, is now nearing completion. The dusty and weed choked on and off ramps that used to greet motorists on the way to Jurupa have been revamped. Now 126 palm trees, 394 other trees, and 20,000 drought-tolerant plants have been installed, and are already drawing positive comments from passers by. [*The Press Enterprise*, December 18, 2005]

RESOURCES

The Transportation Research Board's National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) Report 541, **Consideration of Environmental Factors in Transportation Systems Planning** investigates attention to environmental issues related to transportation planning at the state and local level. The report examines the effect of transportation planning on air and water quality, ecosystems, watersheds as well as social and community impacts. It evaluates current practices and offers alternative approaches geared toward successful implementation. Read the report at http://trb.org/publications/nchrp/nchrp_rpt_541.pdf

An updated version of **A Guide for Seeking Transportation Enhancements Program Funds in Partnership with State and Local Governments** was recently released by the National Park Service's Park Facility Management Division, and now incorporates changes under SAFETEA-LU. This guide serves to help NPS personnel gain a basic understanding of Transportation Enhancements, and discusses how to effectively partner with state and local governments to improve park transportation assets through TE. Neighborhoods and communities surrounding parks, in cooperation with the park, can provide transportation systems to serve multiple users and achieve environmental, cultural, economic and social goals. Read more at www.nps.gov/transportation/alt/documents/TE_Funds_Guide_112205_final.pdf



The Sierra club has named America's best new development in their recently published **Building Better: A Guide to America's Best New Development Projects Fall 2005 Sprawl Report**. The report highlights development that epitomizes livability and sustainability. Qualifying communities had to meet several criteria, including that it offer "a range of transportation choices, including walking, biking, and public transportation." The report looks at geographically and economically diverse communities, including small and large cities, suburbs, and small towns. Read more about Sierra Club's top picks at www.sierraclub.org/sprawl/report05/

The study **Integrating Land Use Issues into Transportation Planning: Scenario Planning** by Keith Bartholomew, Assistant Professor at the University of Utah, examines 80 planning projects in more than 50 metropolitan areas that use scenario planning. Scenario planning examines a series of scenarios to gauge possible future conditions, in order to identify an appropriate course of action. This study describes precursors to scenario planning throughout history, as well as its status in land use-transportation planning today. Check out the findings at http://faculty.arch.utah.edu/bartholomew/SP_SummaryRpt_Web.pdf

Overcoming Hurdles of Using Youth Corps at the DOT: Lessons from California

By John Haynes, TE Program Coordinator, CALTRANS

California has a number of Transportation Enhancements projects in which the California Conservation Corps (CCC) and other conservation groups are involved. The California Conservation Corps is a workforce development program that offers young men and women the chance to serve their state and become employable citizens by providing life skills training and experience in environmental conservation, fire protection and emergency response. Like the legendary Civilian Conservation Corps created during the Depression, today's CCC teaches young men and women the job skills and the direction they need to be productive and successful for life.

In addition to the CCCs, the California Department of Transportation (CALTRANS) TE program is also working with the local non-profit Marin Conservation Corps, as well as a quasi-state department that is affiliated with the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). NRCS's natural resources conservation programs help reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat, and reduce damages caused by floods and other natural disasters. Other youth corps work in California's TE projects entails landscaping, noxious weed removal, restoration and native plant revegetation. In addition, it has been proposed that the CCCs install sidewalks with tree cutouts. While this project has not yet come to fruition, it could provide valuable training to young men and women and may lead to direct employment with highway contractors.

Several issues arise when youth corps are involved in Transportation Enhancements projects, which should be addressed by the Department of Transportation for utmost efficiency and greatest benefit to all parties involved. First, it must be decided what entity and individual should direct the field work. Secondly, it is important to come up with an agreement regarding payment for the youth corps' work. Sometimes issues arise when the cost of a corps' work is not the lowest bid available. Additionally, some states forbid entering into a contract with a non-profit organization. This is problematic since many youth corps are themselves non-profit organizations. Fortunately, there are ways to make use of a youth corps successfully in TE, despite these potential roadblocks.

Directing the Work

There are significant differences in how work is directed in TE projects when a youth corps is involved. Generally, the corps work is directed by the Department of Transportation. The directing person could be a resident engineer. Often, a landscape architect will draw up schematic plans and direct the work in the field. On other projects, a restoration specialist directs the work.

It is important to keep in mind that management of youth corps can be challenging. It is important to make sure the corps members feel welcome and a part of the team. This will help encourage on-time arrival and hard work.

Compensating the Corps

In California, one of two different agreements are commonly used to pay for the youth corps work: the Cooperative Agreement or the Interagency Agreement. There are several benefits to using the Cooperative Agreement. The Cooperative Agreement can be done wholly within CALTRANS, which allows the agreement to be very specific regarding work to be done and how the organizations will be paid. The Interagency Agreement is more complicated in that it must be followed by a Service Contract. Both the Interagency Agreement and Service Contract must be approved by other state agencies, which adds complexity and time to the project.

Costs and Savings

To enter into any agreement other than a low bid contract, a Public Interest Finding must be submitted to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for prior approval. This is quite simple for conservation corps groups; simply use the language directly from FHWA's Guidance on Transportation Enhancements that encourages the use of these groups. Cost savings of youth corps groups' involvement does not have to be demonstrated since the legislation encourages their use. For all other groups, lower costs or other public benefits must be demonstrated for FHWA approval. If any of these groups are going to purchase materials, buy or rent equipment, or bring in a sub-contractor, they must follow federal contracting rules.

A great benefit of using youth corps is the savings that result from avoiding formal plans, specifications, and estimates. Since the work is being directed in the field, simple schematic plans are often adequate to complete the environmental documentation, cost estimates, and direction of the work. The cost of drafting plans and specification and of the Office Engineer and contract award are eliminated.

Contracting with Non-Profits

One interesting aspect in California is that CALTRANS is prohibited from entering into a contract with a non-profit group. This does not mean that non-profit youth corps are barred from TE, however. California's current project with the non-profit Marin Conservation Corps is on a right-of-way adjacent to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The National Park Service (NPS) is a partner in the project,

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Overcoming Hurdles of Using Youth Corps...

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and is providing a soft match by supplying native plants and an Americorps worker to assist with the establishment of the vegetation. Because CALTRANS could not hire the Marin Conservation Corps directly, they entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with NPS, who will hire the MCC to do the work on the right-of-way.

The use of youth corps in Transportation Enhancement projects provides numerous benefits that are immediate and tangible. In addition, such work provides an investment into the future of the community and the young men and women given the opportunity to work. State Departments of Transportation can help create a successful partnership with youth corps that will benefit everyone involved.

Connections is a quarterly publication of the National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration. Submission of articles as well as letters and other comments are welcome.

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