

Request for Proposals: Assessing the Impact of Conservation Corps on Future Conservation Action

AN EVALUATION PARTNERSHIP OF THE PUBLIC LANDS SERVICE COALITION AND THE NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION

The Public Lands Service Coalition (PLSC), an unincorporated coalition of more than 40 conservation corps and other organizations that promote and support efforts to expand youth service on public and tribal lands and waters, hold a shared goal that this service leads to careers in natural resource management and the development of the next generation of environmental stewards. Roughly 10,000 corps members ages 16-25 participate annually across PLSC programs, which typically run from the spring through the fall calendar year. In recent years, PLSC corps have increased their intentionality and commitment to programming that engages Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and participants with other identities that have been historically underrepresented in the conservation field as well as in established cultural narratives about who belongs on public lands.

Over the past decade, PLSC conservation corps programs have partnered to examine a number of facets of their [shared logic model](#). An evaluation of PLSC conservation corps programs conducted between 2010 and 2013 examined the impact of environmental stewardship programs on corps member development (e.g., Duerden, et al., 2013; Education Northwest, 2013). The results of this evaluation provided strong evidence that service with a conservation corps program significantly increases the corps members' knowledge, skills and attitudes toward community engagement, environmental engagement, leadership, communication skills and grit. Between 2014 and 2017, PLSC conservation corps and researchers from the North Carolina State University, College of Natural Resources, completed an evaluation to measure the impact of AmeriCorps members on resource conservation. This second PLSC evaluation provided statistically significant evidence demonstrating the efficacy of conservation corps programs to improve trails and habitats on public lands, resulting in enhanced recreational access and experiences, reduced fire risk, and improved ecological conditions for native species. Most recently, PLSC conservation corps and researchers from the North Carolina State University, College of Natural Resources, are finishing a third evaluation that assesses the ability of conservation corps programs to increase organizational capacity and provide value added benefits to their public land agency partners.

With the project outlined by this RFP, PLSC conservation corps has an opportunity to better understand and communicate the benefit of its programs for conservation, youth service, and the land, with emphasis on benefits to young adults who participate in our programs, their connection to public lands and the conservation community, values of stewardship, and the ways in which these attitudes and beliefs translate to actions after their service.

With funding from the National Park Foundation (NPF), a cohort of corps programs in the PLSC seek a partner to conduct a national mixed-methods evaluation that assesses the impact of its conservation service programs on corps members. Preference will be given to quasi-experimental and mixed-methods approaches. While not limited to conservation corps programs in partnership with the National Park Service (NPS), this will be an area of focus for the evaluation.

The evaluation seeks to:

- Deepen knowledge about the ways in which conservation corps participants continue conservation action after their program, including in future education and career pursuits.
- Further understanding of the aspects of conservation corps programs that drive this future action, with specific attention to BIPOC participants and participants with identities that have been historically underrepresented in the conservation field.
- Inform future changes to corps to program design and curriculum, and inform recruiting and training for participants and program leaders.

Preliminarily, the evaluation will focus on the following broad research questions:

- After a conservation corps experience, are participants more likely than their peers to take actions that reflect a commitment to conservation, including through career choices?
- What are the ways in which conservation corps participants continue future conservation action after their experience, including but not limited to career choices?
- Is there a linkage between a conservation corps experience and a future career in a conservation, environmental, or green jobs field? And what are barriers that prevent or hamper that linkage?
- What are the ways in which conservation corps programs can be effective strategies to connect BIPOC youth and young adults and other underrepresented populations with conservation jobs?

The ideal evaluation plan will build on its findings year-to-year rather than conducting fixed repeated measurements. Applicants are encouraged to propose their own ideas about how to approach the evaluation objectives in their narrative.

Participating corps seek collaboration with the evaluator throughout the project, including refining the research questions, identifying outcomes to be evaluated, and developing practical approaches to data collection and analysis. The evaluator should have demonstrated experience leading evaluation projects that involve the active engagement of multiple stakeholders. Equitable and culturally responsive evaluation should be considered within the proposal and process, as outlined in the American Evaluation Association [Statement on Cultural Competence in Evaluation](#).

Through funding from the National Park Foundation, the budget proposals should not exceed \$75,000 per year for three years. Within this budget, the PLSC seeks an evaluator to complete the following:

1. In collaboration with participating corps, refine research questions to focus its primary questions
2. Develop data collection methodology, instruments, and protocols
3. Collect and analyze data
4. Prepare annual and final reports for multiple stakeholders (PLSC, NPF, NPS)
5. Annual/final presentations to the PLSC group virtually and at an annual in-person conference

The desired project start date is October 1, 2021, with data collection beginning in spring/summer 2022, and continuing thereafter for a total of three years.

Expected deliverables include:

- Progress meetings (once a month)
- Annual and final reports and presentations
- Electronic copies of report, protocols, and instruments developed for this evaluation, as well as any analysis outputs

Application Timeline:

- April 5th - RFP issued
- May 5th - Webinar with interested candidates at 4PM EST
- June 11th - RFP closed
- Week of July 5th - Finalist candidates notified
- Week of July 19th - Interviews with finalist candidates
- Week of August 2nd - Contract awarded
- Week of October 4th - Kick off meeting

Interested parties should email their applications materials to lmcclore@nationalparks.org no later than **June 11, 2021**.

Application materials should be submitted following the outline below:

- Description of agency and explanation of previous experience evaluating programs, particularly as it relates to mixed methods evaluation and quasi-experimental design.
- Description of approach to facilitating multi-stakeholders groups in the design and implementation of evaluation, and past experience doing so.
- Proposed evaluation approach to provide the scope of services noted above in this RFP.
- Potential timeline describing major steps in the evaluation process assuming questions, protocols, etc. are developed in fall 2021 and data collection begins spring/summer 2022.
- Name of primary contact and contact information, as well as list of key personnel with experience and role described for each listed person.
- An approximate, high level budget and narrative of all expected costs. Your price quote, not to exceed \$75,000 per year for three years, should cover the full scope of services and define estimated expenses for project management, design, and travel. Budget should include totals for: Personnel, Travel, Equipment, Supplies, Contracts, Other and Indirect costs.
- Description of previous experience with evaluations of individuals who identify as BIPOC and other identities that have been historically excluded from the conservation sector and from established cultural narratives about who belongs on public lands.
- Not required: Previous experience evaluating conservation programs for young adults from which this research can build off of previous findings.

The PLSC and NPF will hold an informational webinar on May 5th at 4 PM EST for all interested parties in order to answer questions about the RFP and learn about the applicants. Email lmcclore@nationalparks.org for the Zoom details.

About the Public Lands Service Coalition

Founded in 2009 by The Corps Network, Conservation Legacy and the Student Conservation Association, the Public Lands Service Coalition is an unincorporated coalition of more than 40 Conservation Corps and other organizations that promote youth and veteran engagement in stewardship of the Great Outdoors. The PLSC promotes and supports efforts to expand youth service on public and tribal lands and waters, with the goal that this service leads to careers in natural resource management and the development of the next generation of environmental stewards.

About the National Park Foundation

The National Park Foundation, the official charitable partner of the National Park Service, enriches America's national parks and programs through the support of private citizens, park lovers, stewards of nature, history enthusiasts, and wilderness adventurers. Chartered by Congress in 1967, the Foundation

grew out of a legacy of park protection that began over a century ago, when ordinary citizens took action to establish and protect our national parks.