



The Corps Network

Strengthening America through
service and conservation

The “Green New Deal” and Service and Conservation Corps

A Call for Bold Action: The “Green New Deal”

America is rapidly headed into the green economy: a massive mobilization of people and resources to increase our energy efficiency and conservation. The transformation is being advanced by a vibrant popular will, supported by millions of citizens who know that there is no holding back the tide: our nation must change the way we use energy.

The Corps Network, as a member of the Green Jobs and Service Collaborative, calls for a “Green New Deal”—a plan for bold leadership and bold action that will harness this opportunity. The green economy will not only change our relationship to energy use, but will strengthen local economic development and provide good new jobs through investments, including green building, transit jobs, climate and renewable energy solutions. Indeed, to truly realize its potential, the path to the green economy should be a road to social justice, economic inclusion, and community empowerment. America’s Service and Conservation Corps can play a key role in making that happen.

The centerpiece of the Green New Deal is the Clean Energy Corps, built on the experience of the nation’s Service and Conservation Corps and current legislative initiatives including the Green Jobs Act of 2007 and the proposed American Conservation Corps—but bringing programming to a far larger, more ambitious scale. Through the Green New Deal, Corps will turn the vision of the green economy into a reality—and in doing so can change the lives of disconnected young people and the communities in which they live.

The Green New Deal will update Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal of the 1930s. When FDR inherited the Great Depression from Herbert Hoover, the brilliance of his solution was to take two crises—a decayed infrastructure and massive unemployment—and combine them to form a single success. Through programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Americans were given a chance to act in the face of disaster and make a contribution to the greater good—while lifting themselves up out of poverty. The same opportunity exists today.

The Green Jobs and Service Collaborative’s Green New Deal

We propose **\$10 billion in new funds over the coming decade for enhanced national environmental service** combating climate change, including Americans of all ages but

with prime focus on a Clean Energy Corps, where low-income disconnected young men and women in Service and Conservation Corps would improve energy efficiency in their communities while preparing for jobs in the green economy.

We also propose **\$50 billion for state and local green jobs development** during that time, to provide low-income and working-class Americans with the training and other assistance they need to gain jobs in the clean energy economy. At least half this new investment should go toward job preparation, matching, and retention efforts for the unemployed or poor. This investment will pay for itself in direct energy savings, increased worker productivity, reduced social service and health costs, and reduced green house gas emissions.

\$140 billion for a revolving loan fund will help to capitalize this work. Supplemented with other public dollars from states and cities, and used throughout to leverage private capital investment, the fund would be paid for through realized energy savings.

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The Centerpiece of the Green New Deal: Clean Energy Corps

In an era of rapid climate change, making the improvements needed to protect, conserve, and preserve our natural resources will require a new corps of trained workers making careers in the green economy.

In the spirit of the CCC, we propose a national Clean Energy Corps (CEC) to significantly reduce energy consumption and aid in reducing greenhouse gas emissions through weatherization, energy conservation, and environmental restoration; create transportation enhancements and other energy related infrastructure improvements—and attack the problems of persistent youth employment and disconnectedness.

Just as FDR changed the lives of the many unemployed youth of his era who served in the CCC, modern out-of-school out-of-work youth can find meaningful opportunities through service to their own underserved communities. Young men and women can change their lives—improve their communities—and contribute to the creation of the green economy and the greening of America.

The Problems of Equity

Disproportionate Impact on the Poor

Shortages in oil, gas, and electricity drive up costs for consumers, especially low-income people. It also increases costs for the private sector, reducing the rate of growth in the economy, and adversely affecting our national security. We remain dependent on foreign

oil—and demand for energy continues to grow. Total US residential energy consumption is projected to increase 17 percent by 2015.

In addition, the poor spend a disproportionate share of their income on energy.¹ Further, almost half of those eligible for weatherization have one or more family members who have disabilities or are elderly, living on fixed incomes, and have special needs.

Growing Numbers of Disconnected Youth and Young Adults

Across the country, we face a growing crisis of “disconnected” youth and young adults: individuals between the 16 to 24 who are not in school and not working. Nationally, the population is estimated to be between four and six million. In our major economic centers the numbers are frightening: 200,000 in New York City, 93,000 in Los Angeles, 97,000 in Chicago. Yet this challenge also reaches smaller cities and towns, as well as rural communities, where more and more of this generation lives on the margins of our society and economy, leading to statistics such as these:

One in three youth who start high school will not graduate four years later.² More than half of youth of color in low-income communities will drop out.³ In 2004, two-thirds of large school districts had four-year graduation rates of less than 60 percent.⁴ However, this is not just an issue of race; nor is it simply an urban issue. Poor white youth and youth in poor rural areas face virtually the same bleak future.

The Potential of Green Jobs

Jobs in the green economy offer reliable wages and career pathways out of poverty. Young people can start with relatively low-skilled tasks (foam insulation, home energy audits) and move, through apprenticeships and supplemental educational opportunities, to more skilled and lucrative work, including managing larger projects, and ultimately to ownership of small businesses. Our task is to ensure that the benefits of the green economy are available to all.

The American Solar Energy Society reports that renewable energy investments could yield nearly 8 million new jobs over the next 23 years while energy efficiency improvements encompassing building retrofits and other activities could generate another 32 million jobs and generate \$4.5 trillion in revenues. The new opportunities would appear not just in engineering fields, the group said, but also in fields like accounting, manufacturing, construction and management. Solar, wind, ethanol and fuel cells as renewable energy industries likely to see the most growth. "The green collar job boom is here," said Neal Lurie, the group's director of marketing.

¹ Roger Colton, Energy and Low Income Housing: Energy policy Hurts the Poor, www.nhi.org/online/issues/76/energy1

² Gary Orfield, Daniel Losen, Joanna Wald, and Christopher Swanson, *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youths are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis*, The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, 2004, 2.

³ Orfield et al., *Losing Our Future*, 2.

⁴ Orfield et al., *Losing Our Future*, 90.

In low-income communities, weatherization has been an economic stimulus, supporting 8,000 technical jobs in low income communities nationwide, which represents 52 jobs for every \$1 million invested by the Department of Energy. Increasing the number of homes weatherized and other conservation investments will create new jobs. According to a cost-benefit analysis conducted by Oak Ridge National Laboratory, every dollar invested in weatherization produces \$3.71, of which \$1.83 is energy-related benefits and \$1.88 is non-energy-related.⁵

The green economy will also invest in transportation enhancements to help “shape a truly multi-modal transportation system that enhances transportation choices for Americans and visitors.”⁶ Since 1991, the federal government has invested billions of dollars in such enhancements and the reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Act in 2009 is likely to continue, and even increase, such investments. Transportation enhancements can create alternatives to cars, make structures more energy efficient, and enhance the quality of life.

The Key Role of an Expanded National Service

National and community service is key to this proposal because—as in the era of FDR—it is a delivery system that has been successfully deployed to address society’s unmet needs. The genius of service is that it simultaneously benefits those who serve as well as those who are the objects of the service, contributing to individual *and* community development, and holding out the prospect of revitalizing our civic society.

America’s continuum of government-supported service reaches elementary and secondary school children and college students through the Learn and Serve America program, enrolls mainly youth and young adults through AmeriCorps, and taps the talents of older Americans through a network of senior volunteer programs.

The “Green New Deal” will expand green national service opportunities, tapping the desire of Americans of all ages to help in the fight against climate change.

Learn and Serve programs have the potential to reach every student in our public education network—and many in private schools, including post-secondary institutions.

Through *school-based green service-learning* children and their families will promote environmental stewardship, increase energy efficiency in their homes and in schools, and gain vocational skills leading to jobs in the clean energy sector.

College and university-based environmental Learn and Serve programs will enable young men and women to give back to the communities where they attend school,

⁵⁵ US Department of Energy, “Non-Energy Benefits of Weatherization, January 2003,” p. 1 summarizing results of Martin Schweitzer and Bruce Tonn, Non-Energy Benefits from the Weatherization Assistance Program, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, April, 2002

⁶ DOT, *Enhancing America’s Communities*, p.3

organize large volunteer initiatives, educate and partner with community members to address needs ranging from habitat restoration to home weatherization.

AmeriCorps programs, which largely recruit young adults—many of them combining pragmatism with idealism, and many passionately engaged in the issue of climate change, will focus on green apprenticeships and pre-professional experience, focusing on the environment in the wide range of AmeriCorps programming: tutoring, mentoring, running after-school programs, responding to disasters—or cleaning parks and streams, weatherizing houses, and mobilizing and managing community volunteers.

Within AmeriCorps, and as a sizable new initiative, the *Clean Energy Corps* will take environmental service to scale, using the experienced infrastructure of America’s Service and Conservation Corps. We propose funding at \$300 million a year for a decade. Annually this would increase the number of Corpsmembers to 40,000, double the number of Corps, result in 2 million hours of service, and generate over half a million unpaid volunteers in green service.

As an interim step—before the advent of a large new funding mechanism—the Corps Network is advocating for the American Conservation Corps, to be funded at \$65 million and administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, to address two major problems: our looming infrastructure crisis (including energy conservation) and the high unemployment, insufficient education and low skills that characterize millions of our nation's disconnected youth. The new American Conservation Corps (ACC) will focus on service projects related to infrastructure improvement, the environment, energy conservation and urban and rural development and will prepare young people for responsible, productive lives.

Senior Corps programs, which tap the experiences of hundreds of thousands of retirees, including the rapidly increasing numbers of retiring baby boomers, are ready to accomplish significant conservation work—whether through energy audits, direct home improvement, or other means—to leave a repaired environment for the generations to come.

Examples of Environmental Service from Youth Conservation Corps

Corps provide the natural home for the CEC thanks to their proven track record as a youth development strategy and long history of working in environmental service.

America’s Service and Conservation Corps have 25 years of experience in helping young people grow through service to the environment and the community. Corps are a research-based proven strategy for improving employment and earnings for youth, with particularly striking positive outcomes for young African-American men.

Corps are ready to take environmental service to scale. Scaling-up is necessary—the environmental challenge is immense—and clearly possible. Models exist.

Corpsmembers are already transforming America—and themselves. Today, Corpsmembers serving in teams build and weatherize homes in low-income neighborhoods, plant trees in bare urban landscapes, and install green roofs on government buildings. Through service, they gain workforce skills, grow in maturity, and improve and connect to the places where they live.

Participants in service and conservation corps have been trained to perform energy audits and to implement a range of conservation and weatherization technologies including installing energy efficient windows, lighting conservation, heating and cooling systems, insulation, blower doors, and sealing air leaks, and renewable installations, including photovoltaic installations.

Corps can provide a consistent, reliable, cost-effective and efficient source of highly motivated young people coming from these very communities to accomplish this work. A few examples:

Warm Homes Montana, a statewide program initiated by Governor Brian Schweitzer, enabled Montana Conservation Corps crews to help weatherize 600 low-income homes in 2005. The impact of the initiative convinced the Governor to increase funding the following year, enabling Corpsmembers to serve more than 1400 households.

In Ohio, the Ohio Civilian Conservation Corps at Quilter, housed in a Community Action Agency, builds professionals through service: Corpsmembers join the CAA weatherization team after they have had experience through service and achieved related certification.

Denver’s Mile High Youth Corps members install fluorescent lights, showerheads, a carbon monoxide/smoke detector, adjust 3 thermostats, replace toilets with high efficiency tanks, put aerators on faucets, and educate residents about energy conservation. The state estimates average annual energy savings at \$109.90 per home.

The California Conservation Corps (CCC) has partnered with local community based organizations to weatherize homes all over the state. Public utilities have trained Corps members in energy auditing, weatherization, lighting conservation and photovoltaic installations and the CCC has partnered with a community college for training in construction, lighting, HVAC, and solar hot water installations.

In Wisconsin, Operation Fresh Start crews build or rehabilitate homes that meet or exceed Wisconsin Energy Star standards on average, 25% more efficient than homes built to already tough Wisconsin building codes.

Conclusion

America’s Service and Conservation Corps stand ready to serve in the Green New Deal—drawing on decades of experience to build a Clean Energy Corps that will vigorously lead the nation in the daily, hands-on tasks of making change.

The challenge of transforming America’s energy use brings with it new opportunities:

- **Opportunity for service**, through the Clean Energy Corps, a significantly increased commitment to national environmental service;
- **Opportunity for equity**, through major new support for state and local green jobs development, including training, matching, and retention for poor and unemployed;
- **Opportunity for investment**, through the resources provided by the revolving loan fund, creating the essential up-front capital needed to refit and transform the American infrastructure.

The “Green New Deal” proposed by the Green Jobs and Service Collaborative opens the door to the greening of America and a new day of opportunity for Service and Conservation Corps and the young men and women who serve in them.