

Civilian Climate Corps for the Delaware River



SPRING 2021

THE FUTURE OF THE DELAWARE VALLEY

Proposals for the Civilian Climate Corps mark an important step forward for communities and the climate. With Americans reeling from a global pandemic, high unemployment, and a rapidly worsening climate crisis — compounded by a national reckoning with centuries of racial injustice — a national service and job training program is the right idea, at the right time. A new CCC provides a compelling solution to the compounding crises that Americans face by creating family-sustaining careers for underemployed and marginalized members of society while also addressing pressing climate and conservation needs.

Our Region: Primed and Ready

Philadelphia — and the surrounding Delaware River watershed region — are primed and ready for this investment. With public and private support, our region is already leading with workforce programs that train and put diverse people to work on environmentally focused jobs. With dedicated resources from the federal government, these programs and networks could readily expand to incorporate additional trades and skill sets and build stronger, more equitable pathways into long-term careers.

Five Pillars of Program Design

Our region can provide models, leadership and lessons for the expansion of the CCC nationwide. We are uniquely equipped to respond to the administration's call for a 21st-century CCC in service of a just and livable future. We know what works, and have already begun to build from there to scale programs for the greatest benefit to both communities and climate. To ensure success, our program design rests on five pillars:



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1. JUST AND RESPONSIVE RECRUITMENT

Our region’s most successful programs rely on a recruitment strategy that goes beyond racial diversity to respond to community needs and address systemic barriers. From young adults aging out of foster care to older adults reentering society, a program needs to embrace those whose circumstances position them to both bring the most to, and get the most out of, transformational workforce programs.

2. BUILD FROM WHAT WORKS

We can and should scale CCC programs based on what’s already working, in communities large and small. Urban programs like [PowerCorps in Philadelphia and Camden](#) and [Branches to Chances in Wilmington](#) have powerful recruitment engines and tackle ambitious projects in the cities and suburbs. Crew members leave these programs ready to invest back into their own communities and build relationships and networks that support long-term career prospects. Rural programs like the [Philipsburg Youth Corps](#) draw crews from smaller regional population centers, taking on projects in those towns and surrounding rural areas. These crew-based models are flexible and expandable, and can be activated in cities such as Bridgeton and Trenton N.J., Hancock and Port Jervis N.Y., and Chester, Reading, and Allentown, PA.

3. WATERSHED ORIENTED

Watersheds—the webs of water, land, and living beings defined by our rivers and streams—are the logical way to organize climate solutions. Projects implemented at the watershed scale are essential for addressing flooding, drought and water quality challenges. By protecting and restoring key landscapes, from forests to floodplains, we can also tackle drinking water supply issues, reduce the impacts of sea level rise, and sequester carbon. Our region’s nonprofit community has demonstrated a deep capacity for watershed-wide protection over decades and across jurisdictional boundaries. The William Penn Foundation’s [Delaware River Watershed Initiative](#), now in its 7th year, demonstrates the power of this regional approach.

4. INSTITUTIONAL PARTERSHIPS

Local water and wastewater utilities are foundational community partners with a deep interest in climate resilience, water quality, and nature-based solutions. Departments of Parks and Public Works also share these values, along with strong shared recruitment networks and project identification expertise. With additional funding, and building on the notable success of their existing workforce development programs, these bedrock institutions can provide a wide range of support connecting corps members to industry-specific, career-building projects and training, including in ecological land care, horticulture, and skilled trades.

5. BEYOND JOBS TO CAREERS

A reimagined CCC would draw from the tried and true apprenticeship model of the trades, preparing participants for the next generation of green careers — from forestry and agriculture to green stormwater management and trail maintenance. This long-term focus ensures stronger programs that can take projects from start to finish; forge partnerships between participants, businesses, and utilities; and set up participants with marketable skills for lifelong success.

President Biden’s proposal is timely but requires successful models and well-established networks to implement. We see an immediate opportunity for the Biden administration to leverage our regional network of workforce programs and conservation practitioners, and to integrate these five pillars into the core CCC program design.

By building on what works, and investing ambitiously but wisely, the Delaware River watershed can lead the nation in the mobilization of a new Civilian Climate Corps.

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