



FOREST PRESERVES OF COOK COUNTY  
CONSERVATION CORPS PROGRAM  
American Rescue Plan Act Proposal (item # 22-0637)

January 10, 2022

Dear President Preckwinkle and Cook County Board of Commissioners:

The Forest Preserves is pleased to share information about the Conservation Corps (CC) program, which benefits people, nature, and Cook County communities. We hope this information assists in your decision to allocate funds from the American Rescue Plan Act.



The CC has been providing youth and adults with gainful paid employment since 2005. Participants, many for the first time, gain basic jobs skills, grow their professional network, and obtain technical and green industry recognized certifications that prepare them for future full-time jobs.

The CC recruits and hires people from throughout Cook County with emphasis on engaging those from communities that have suffered disproportionately from decades of disinvestment and chronic high unemployment. Over 30% of participants are clients of the Chicago Housing Authority or the Housing Authority of Cook County. At least 20% of participants face employment barriers due to past involvement in the justice system and 70% self-identify as people of color and many have gone on to jobs in the conservation sector.



The CC anticipates potential barriers to successful employment by addressing challenges so that members can succeed. Examples include providing members with wrap-around services such as, transportation to Forest Preserves from central pick-up locations, resume/interview/application training, mentoring, and healthy meals for all youth members.

The need for these programs is high. The CC has received up to 1,000 applications for 100 open positions in the past. This funding would allow us to reach more Cook County residents who desperately need these jobs and the quality training for job and life skills CC provides. Funding would increase youth job positions by over 50% and adult job positions by over 40%. Conservation Corps programs are **nationally and regionally recognized and have received over 10 awards for its efforts to diversify the green workforce.**

Conservation Corps is scalable, adaptable and shovel ready!

Sincerely,

Alice Brandon  
Resource Programming Manager  
Forest Preserves of Cook County

**Conservation Corps Facts:**

2,590 alumni  
596,268 service hours  
  
49% Suburban  
51% City of Chicago

43% female  
56% male  
1% non-binary

50% Black  
15% Latino / Latinx  
5% Asian  
24% White  
5% Bi-racial  
1% chose not to answer

**Participants reside in all of Cook County's Commissioner Districts. Fifty percent reside in Commissioner Districts 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 11. Eighteen percent reside in the 4<sup>th</sup> District.**

**65 to 100% of adult alumni go on to a job in the green industry**

Alumni Survey Results:

- 90% agreed that it helped them gain basic and/or technical job skills
- 50% of youth members were interested in conservation / science careers post program
- Over 90% believe we should protect the Forest Preserves for future generations
- 55% of youth members reported they gained leadership skills from the program



*High school youth experiencing and learning about turtles with Forest Preserve wildlife biologists*