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EN - Boston

**AMERICORPS USDA UPDATE
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS**

The Massachusetts USDA AmeriCorps program is conducting activities related to environmental awareness and conservation. The AmeriCorps members will participate in community landscaping, vacant lot clean-up, gardening, environmental awareness workshops, building a greenhouse, etc.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service office in Massachusetts is in partnership with the Suffolk County Conservation District and the Franklin Field Franklin Hill Dorchester Healthy Boston Coalition to implement the AmeriCorps program. The conservation districts are local partners in our delivery of conservation efforts around the country. We have long-standing agreements with these local governing bodies. The Healthy Boston Coalition is a non-profit community-based organization. An agreement has been established to conduct the AmeriCorps program.

In October a community based steering committee was formed to support the AmeriCorps program. The group has met four times. Together they have identified specific projects that can be done and community contacts. The steering committee helped recruit AmeriCorps members. The recruitment process generated 38 applicants, 33 of them were interviewed. Twenty AmeriCorps members were selected, two as team leaders, to serve in the Public Lands and Environment Corps.

December 5, 1994 was the start up date for this site. An orientation session was held for the members and the steering committee.

Early concerns were expressed by CNCS about too many groups working in the Dudley Street Area. NRCS has adjusted the geographic area and are now targeting the Franklin Field area of Dorchester. Plans are being made to expand the service to other communities in Suffolk County.

With the December start up date for the Boston site the following dates have been established for submitting the following:

Objectives, and quarterly report	January 16th
Plan of work and training plan	January 20th

The USDA project director is Marc McQueen (508) 295-1481

The site location for the 20 AmeriCorps members is:

Adolescent Life Health Center
895 Blue Hill Avenue
Dorchester, MA 02124
Contact: Jermiese Martin

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT THROUGH LOCAL INVOLVEMENT

**A SERIES OF PROJECTS DONE
THROUGH COMMUNITY NON-PROFIT CORPORATIONS
AND ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCIES TO**

**EDUCATE CITIZENS
CLEAN UP VACANT LAND
FUND LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE OF OPEN LAND
IDENTIFY HAZARDOUS WASTE SITES AND RANK THEM FOR CLEAN-UP
TEST WATER AND DEVELOP WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLANS**

An Americorps Project Application

Prepared by:

**The U. S. Soil Conservation Service's Community Assistance Unit
West Wareham, Mass.**

in cooperation with:

**The Environmental Diversity Forum, Inc.
The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, Inc.
The Massachusetts Bays Program
The Massachusetts Riverways Program**

April, 1994

Environmental Improvement Through Local Empowerment

An Americorps Project Application

USDA SCS

Issue Description:

Minority communities and inner-city neighborhoods in the city of Boston, such as Roxbury, Dorchester and Chinatown, have special environmental needs.

Residents in areas with a highly-urbanized mix of single-family, apartment buildings and "projects" see little connection between themselves and the environment. When faced with issues such as recycling, disposal of trash, household hazardous wastes, or motor oils, lawn or pet management, etc. most residents don't know what the environmental effects of their actions are, and are unaware of environmentally-sound alternatives. Residents speak a variety of languages, and some are not fluent in English. Information on environmental issues exists, but much is unavailable in Spanish, Vietnamese, Cape Verdean Creole or Chinese. Further, many of the materials written in English are written in "Techno-speak", and difficult to understand.

There are many parcels of vacant land. (The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, which covers 1.5 square miles and has a population of 24,000, has 1300 vacant parcels.) A few are city-owned, and have never been developed. Most of the parcels used to have houses on them; arson, vandalism, and official neglect and "disinvestment" have combined to create entire streets that are now empty. As these areas grow weeds and trees, they become dump sites and havens for criminal activity. Neighborhood activists are seeking short-and-long-term solutions to the problems that land vacancy creates.

Many of the vacant parcels are used for community or individual gardens. Although residents look for parcels with low levels of soil contaminants, or places where the soil has been removed and replaced, they may end up taking whatever they can find to put food on the table. Nearly all of the soils in these areas have been contaminated with lead. Testing, identification of the most usable parcels and remediation of others is vital for public health.

In some cases, ownership of vacant parcels is unclear, and needs to be determined. Parks and greenspaces are expensive to maintain. It takes money and willing local commitment to insure that open parcels can legally be used and maintained for parkland. City government has developed parcels that the community thought was "theirs", and had long been used for passive recreation. Maintenance and improvement funds have only been sporadically available. Once the funds are available, neighborhood groups must build the identification, capacity and commitment to carry out long-term maintenance.

According to the Environmental Diversity Forum (EDF) and the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), residents of poorer and minority communities have become accustomed to seeing some neighbors and "midnight haulers" from other communities come in and dump trash and hazardous wastes on abandoned parcels. DSNI, which covers 1.5 square miles and has a population of 24,000, has identified fifty-six hazardous waste sites within its borders. Most of these sites are current or former businesses which are contaminated with petroleum products. Inner-city neighborhoods have very few open streams or urban rivers.

The water is there; rain still falls, stormwater still runs off, but it goes into America's "underground rivers", the storm sewer or combined sewer overflow system. Urban contaminants may affect water quality more than runoff from agricultural land. With education, water testing and access to remedial options, it is possible to improve water quality in urban areas.

Project Description:

We propose a multi-part program, hiring up to 20 (twenty) Americorps participants, broken into two teams of 10 (ten) each, to address the issues outlined above. Tasks to be undertaken include:

- 1) Search land titles, to determine who owns vacant land, what development has taken place on the parcels, and what management options are available.
- 2) Research models for long-term maintenance of open land, and develop the local capacity to carry them out. This includes setting up endowments and other ways to pay for long-term maintenance, building the neighborhood identification with open lands, and organizing a committed work force.
- 3) Clean up vacant lots, removing trash, pruning, planting, and seeding eroding areas.
- 4) Test soils for lead and other contaminant content, solving problems where possible, educating landowners about what they can do on their own land, and informing residents about what areas are too toxic and should not be used for gardening or other contact.
- 5) Locate hazardous waste sites and, where possible, working with landowners and appropriate technical and regulatory agencies to clean them up. Where that isn't possible, fencing or otherwise keeping people away from public health risks.
- 6) Test storm drains to determine which have high levels of urban contaminants, assess their watersheds to determine probable sources, and develop remedial programs to improve the quality of water entering Boston Harbor.

7) Coordinate education and training programs for Americorps participants, as well as interested neighborhood groups.

8) Develop local interest and a volunteer corps to help carry out these programs.

Location:

Inner-city neighborhoods, such as those mentioned above, in Roxbury, Dorchester, Chinatown and other economically-depressed minority neighborhoods within the city of Boston.

Socio-economic conditions in the city of Boston, compared to the state of Mass:

	Boston	Mass.
Population:	574,283	6,016,425
Land base:	48.42 sq. mi.	7,838 sq. mi.
Density:	11,860 people/sq.mi.	767 people/sq.mi.
Per capita income:	\$15,581	\$17,224
Persons below poverty:	18.71%	8.93%
Education:		
Less than High School Graduate:	24.3%	20.0%
High School Graduate:	26.5%	29.7%
Some college, no 4-year degree:	19.1%	23.0%
Four-year degree or more:	30.0%	27.2%
Language spoken at home:		
Other than English:	25.6%	15.2%
Do not speak English "very well":	12.9%	6.2%
Race and Hispanic Origin:		
White:	62.8%	89.8%
Black:	25.6%	5.0%
Amer. Indian, Eskimo, Aleut:	0.3%	0.2%
Other race:	6.0%	2.6%
Hispanic origin (of any race):	10.8%	4.8%

NOTE: These data come from the 1990 Census of Population and Housing, U. S. Census Bureau.

Additional information for Dudley Street Neighborhood (Pers. Comm., DSNI, April 1994)

Population in Dudley St. Neighborhood	24,000
Land Base:	1.5 sq. mi.
Density:	16,000 people/sq. mi.
Race and Hispanic Origin:	
Black:	40%
Hispanic origin:	30%
Cape Verdean/Creole	20%
White:	10%

Number of Americorps Participants requested:

Up to twenty.

Type of Positions:

They depend on the specific project undertaken. Persons translating environmental information should have good speaking and writing skills, be fluent in one of the target languages as well as English, be able to convey environmental or natural resource concepts in plain language, and be acquainted with graphic layout and design techniques. People involved in research of titles or land maintenance models should be familiar with legal terms and willing to do the detailed, minute work involved in tracing deeds. Some participants will be laborers doing the seeding, planting, trash removal, etc. associated with site maintenance and rehabilitation. They will need no special skills.

Each Americorps Team will need a Team Coordinator, who will need organizational and communication skills, to keep track of projects, assign appropriate numbers of people, supervise their daily activities, prepare progress reports, etc. Those who will coordinate training will need good communication and organizational skills, and those involved in community outreach and development of local volunteer groups should be strong grass-roots community organizers.

Can the positions be funded within your current allocation?

No. The Community Assistance Unit Partnership cannot support this project from its allocation.

Project costs could be significant. This proposal calls for up to twenty people, and an overall cost of \$494,500 per year (\$20,000/person for stipend; \$4,725/person/year for educational award). The rest of the project: equipment and materials for soil and water testing, landscaping and soil stabilization, publications, community outreach and education, etc. will run into tens of thousands of dollars. These funds will have to come from others, such as foundations, local, state and federal agencies, corporations and interested citizens.

Expected characteristics of the participants (educational attainment):

For laborers and others where the necessary training will be provided, none. However, all of these individuals must have their High School diplomas or be enrolled in Graduate Equivalency Degree programs. For more specialized areas, such as title search and other research, applicants should have completed at least two years of college. Translators must be fluent in the appropriate language, and have at least two years of college, to insure some familiarity with environmental issues and approaches. Coordinators should be college graduates with work experience, seeking ways to go to graduate school. Community organizers should have some experience in community mobilization.

Specialized skills required:

Fluency in Spanish, Chinese or Vietnamese.

Partners involved in the project:

The Environmental Diversity Forum	YouthBuild Boston, Inc.
Mass. Department of Environmental Protection	Hawthorne Community Center
Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative	Mass. Water Watch Partnership
The Massachusetts Bays Program	Mass. Riverways Program
The Massachusetts Environmental Trust	Boston Parks Department
Suffolk County Conservation District	Boston Public Works Department
Roxbury Community College	Mass. Water Resources Authority
The Environmental Careers Organization	Mass. Audubon Society

Recruit locally or through the national pool?

Locally, through the partnership organizations mentioned above. They have newsletters, regular meetings and job bulletin boards, and regular publicity and news release programs. They are all involved in urban issues, committed to developing local capacity, protecting the urban environment, and strongly interested in promoting both economic and educational opportunity. In addition, several of the organizations maintain environmental advocacy and outreach programs, and fund work done by other environmental organizations throughout the Mass. Bays area.

Recruits from the national pool of applicants would be welcome to apply for these programs, however, as both the Environmental Diversity Forum and the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative have state (pers. comm., April 1994), the local population is highly diverse. Potential recruits from Roxbury Community College and other local institutions are familiar with area conditions, know residents, and have established local connections that it would take people from other parts of the country some time to develop. Minority students also have a wide age range; many have worked, and recognize the need to get a degree if they wish to get better jobs.

Measurable results of the project or activities:

1. Posters, brochures, news stories and other publicity (stencils for storm drains, for instance), education for pet owners in picking up their pets' wastes, how-to guides (for water quality monitoring, tree planting, erosion-control work, etc.). Participants would develop a portfolio they could show prospective schools, employers, etc.
2. Hundreds of vacant parcels cleaned up, with eroding areas stabilized.
3. A complete listing of ownership of vacant land, and development of several models for funding long-term maintenance of public lands.
4. Establishment of a maintenance endowment fund for public parcels through local non-profit corporations, such as the Environmental Diversity Forum and the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative.
5. Lead and other soil contaminant testing to set priorities for rehabilitating parcels that have the most potential for public use. Establishment of long-term agreements with the City of Boston and private landowners for use of appropriate parcels for community gardens, recreational open space, etc.
6. Water testing and information on water quality problems, point and estimated nonpoint sources, and development of remedial plans for specific watersheds where behavioral or land management changes could improve water quality.
7. A ranked list of hazardous waste sites, their potential toxicity to humans or the environment, and a plan for working with landowners and regulatory agencies to clean up sites where possible, cover the wastes to minimize human contact, or otherwise isolate them (with fencing, for instance) to prevent human or environmental impacts.
8. A coordinated training program (one day per week for Americorps participants and, where room exists, community volunteers) to expose them to career opportunities, communication and mobilization skills, specific environmental and natural resource issues, methods of resource management, business development, and other skills enabling participants and volunteer residents to improve their economic, educational and political opportunities.
9. Development of a cadre of citizens who will volunteer their time, labor and talents to help direct and supplement the efforts of the Americorps participants.

The only way to achieve lasting environmental change is by educating and involving those who are directly affected - residents, business owners and others who live in a given watershed or whose activities are influenced by environmental degradation - in setting goals for behavioral change, and then making those changes happen. All populations, whether or not they speak or read English, must be included. This approach serves both USDA and EPA approaches to ecosystem-based resource management, and promotes greater local responsibility for environmental improvement.

Training available for the participants:

Participants would be expected to switch projects periodically, to gain the widest possible exposure to training, educational and work opportunities. Projects carried out through Americorps would provide training in many areas. (NOTE: The next paragraphs follow the listing of measurable results provided above.)

For translating and publishing environmental information, use of computers and desktop publishing programs, basic training in photography, design and layout, training in English grammar and writing as needed, proposal writing (to pay for publications). Assistance in developing community outreach programs and coordinating volunteers to do such things as stenciling storm drains, putting up posters, etc.

For cleaning up and controlling erosion on vacant land, training in landscaping techniques, arboriculture and soil conservation.

For land ownership and establishment of endowment funds and other mechanisms for long-term maintenance, training in title searches, legal, technical and financial research for information on land maintenance models.

For soil and water testing, training in testing methods and interpretation of results. They will use this information to help watershed interest groups set goals for watershed improvement, and may gain experience in construction of structural works of improvement.

For ranking hazardous waste sites, training in parcel identification, resource assessment, and development of local capacity to reach and involve technical and regulatory agencies in environmental improvement.

For development of the training program and development of a corps of citizen volunteers, training in coordination and community development, and development of the considerable organizational skills needed to develop training curricula, find instructors and carry out educational programs.

Supervision and Other Support:

Available from the staff of the SCS Community Assistance Unit, other SCS offices, and all partners. Marc MacQueen, GS-12 Co Leader, Mass. Community Assistance Unit, will provide overall oversight for SCS. The Mass. Bays Program, for instance, has an education and outreach staff that would be willing to provide fairly close supervision. In addition, Mass. Bays sponsors several grant programs that fund environmental and educational initiatives. They will support applications to fund Americorps activities. Federal and state environmental agencies have mandates for community outreach, and are anxious to demonstrate that they are willing both to support local initiatives, and to help clean up degraded inner-city sites.

The Environmental Diversity Forum and the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative are strongly involved in community betterment and environmental justice programs. They are established non-profit corporations, with permanent administrative staff, and have agreed to be the primary day-to-day supervisors of Americorps work teams. In addition, they will serve as a forum to insure that regulatory agencies, citizen groups, and others consulted and communicated with the broad range of interests involved to insure that improvement projects were based on community needs and had widespread community support.

Other partners, such as the Boston Parks Department and the Boston Public Works Department, will loan tools and equipment, such as dump trucks, for land cleanup, and supervise site cleanup work. The Mass. Riverways Program and Mass. Department of Environmental Protection will train people in soil and water testing, and interpretation of results.

YouthBuild Boston helps youth who have not graduated from High School to get their Graduate Equivalency Degree and gain work experience in construction. They can recruit individuals who have construction experience, and who are looking for ways to fund their college education.

The Environmental Careers Organization (ECO) has established minority training and internship programs to help students in college, and those pursuing graduate degrees, get paid work experience while carrying out internships of various terms.

The Massachusetts Water Watch Partnership is organized, under the auspices of the Mass. Water Resources Research Center, to help citizens' groups establish citizen water quality monitoring programs. They will provide training.

Local Involvement and Technology Transfer:

Once coalitions have been built to address environmental issues, they must be sustained. Given economic and other stresses in inner cities, residents spend a lot of their time concerned about survival. It is therefore difficult to translate programs from one watershed or neighborhood to another without local preparation and initial education. Neighborhood residents must understand

why it is in their interest to be involved in resource management and environmental issues before they will expend their energy. This project builds capacity for citizens to evaluate and address their own environmental issues. Although it is based on development of a cadre of volunteers, these volunteers focus on local and neighborhood environmental improvement.

This project builds a distinct identity for the President's AmeriCorps program because it is directed at local empowerment and involvement. It avoids duplication of effort, because local and neighborhood coalitions or nonprofit groups, such as the Environmental Diversity Forum and the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative will direct the types of projects that will be done. They will insure that AmeriCorps participants work on currently unmet needs.