CITY OF LA CROSSE COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT GRANT APPLICATION

Please note that previous funding amounts are not a guarantee for continued support and any funding amount may be based on a number of factors including, but not limited to, performance, available City funds, and collaborating efforts by your organization with similar organizations.

Contact Information

Organization
Central Conservation, Inc. (DBA Wisconsin Conservation Corps)

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789 Myrick Park Drive

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Name of contact person
Eric Robertson

Proposal Summary

Project Name
WisCorps - City of La Crosse - Field Service Agreement 2025

Total amount of City funds your agency is requesting
$19,500.00

Will any new jobs be created as a result of the project?
(●) Yes ( ) No

If so, how many?
7

What benefit has your organization provided to the La Crosse community, and specifically to the City, in 2024?
I am completing this application for WisCorps and, therefore, am not capturing details regarding The Nature Place (or sibling Division) or our parent organization, Central Conservation.

In 2024, the WisCorps Crew Program received $19,500 from the City of La Crosse in exchange for three weeks of field services provided by a six-person AmeriCorps crew made up of young adults. WisCorps assigned six individuals aged 18 to 25 to serve and care for public lands in La Crosse while collaborating with three non-profit organizations: Friends of the Marsh, Friends of the Blufflands, and Outdoor Recreation Alliance (ORA).

This ongoing partnership, particularly the funds for 2024, enabled WisCorps to cover the crew's living allowances, training, food, tools, and vehicles and trailers.

After our crew members had completed their AmeriCorps terms of service, all participants earned an AmeriCorps Segal Education Award of approximately $9,500. This amount was processed and issued to our participants in mid-September 2024.

In May 2024, before the start of the summer field season, we honed in on Crew Leader and Crew Member training. Participants received Wilderness First Aid and CPR training, chainsaw training, herbicide and pesticide application and licensing, and more.

Our Individual Placement Program had one Individual Placement Member stationed from early September to the end of 2024. The City of La Crosse's Sustainability Coordinator helped the Environmental Planner and the CAP Steering Committee develop solutions, provide incentives, manage pilot projects, engage with the community, and participate in sustainability programs focused on data collection and reporting.

What does your organization have planned for the remainder of 2024 (that is of benefit to La Crosse, and specifically the City)?

In June 2024, WisCorps completed three service weeks funded by the City of La Crosse. In July and August, the crew completed eight additional service weeks with other agencies in Wisconsin. In mid-August 2024, we hosted an end-of-season send-off to celebrate the crew and their achievements.

In late August, WisCorps assigned five of its crew leaders to help set up and break down the City's Bluff Bash event. The WisCorps staff and crew leaders set up tents and tables, facilitated visitor parking, and assisted in promoting the event.

What does your organization plan to accomplish with the help of City funding in 2025?

City funding in 2025 will allow the WisCorps Crew Program to enhance the La Crosse community and its public lands, support local environmental-based non-profits, and train a select number of young adults to become the next generation of land stewards. Continued City funding will also allow WisCorps to host six AmeriCorps members ages 18-25. The continued field partnership with the City of La Crosse will allow WisCorps to retain a strong crew program presence in the city where our organization was founded and is headquartered.

WisCorps has already begun planning its 2025 partnership with the City of La Crosse's Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department. We hope to secure $19,500 in cost-share funding to conduct three weeks of summer field services in collaboration with the Friends of the Marsh, Friends of the Blufflands, and the Outdoor Recreation Alliance.

Our actual cost to field the WisCorps crew for three weeks is nearly $30,000. However, we utilize federal AmeriCorps funding along with private and non-profit grants to provide the City of La Crosse with a 75% cost-share. WisCorps has secured three weeks of lodging accommodations for the crew at the Perrot State Park campground by providing a few days of field services instead of payment.

WisCorps will again assign staff and leaders to assist with Bluff Bash. We expect to coordinate the setup and breakdown or assist with other needs.

If there are additional City needs that align with the WisCorps Crew Program, please let us know as we would be eager to discuss ways to enhance and expand our partnerships.

Organization Details

Legal status of organization

Private, Non-Profit

Federal Tax Identification Number

27-0774779

What was your organization's total operating budget for the past year?

$2,423,000.00

Has your organization received City funds in the past?

(•) Yes ( ) No

If yes, how much has your organization received and how many years has your organization participated in the program?

Again, I am responding on behalf of the WisCorps Crew and Individual Placement Program. I am not capturing The Nature Place and the lease the organization has that allows the organization to reside with 789 Myrick Park Drive.

2025 - $19,500 (Crew Program)

2024 - $25,500 (Crew and Individual Placement Program)

2023 - $90,000 (Crew Program)

2022 - $90,000 (Crew Program)

2021 - $90,000 (Crew Program)

2020 - $90,000 (Crew Program)

2019 - $90,000 (Crew Program)

2018 - $45,000 (Crew Program)

2017 - $30,000 (Crew Program)

Several one-time projects were undertaken before 2017. If necessary, WisCorps will provide these details.

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Organization Structure

Attach the following documents (check off as you upload each file below)

- [x] Concise organization chart showing your agency's major administrative structure
- [x] Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws
- [x] List of Board of Directors
- [x] Current agency budget
- [x] Current project activity budget if currently funded
- [x] Other financial forms: Form 990, Income Statement, Balance Sheet, et al.

File Upload

1.1 - 501(c)(3) Letter, WisCorps.pdf	146.86KB
1.3 - Articles of Incorporation and Amendment, WisCorps.pdf	160.38KB
1.4 - Bylaws, Amended 4.19.22, WisCorps.pdf	187.27KB
1.6 - Annual Bylaw Amendment Process, WisCorps.pdf	111.97KB
3.3 - 2024 Budget Approved, WisCorps.pdf	105.95KB
3.4 - Organizational Chart, WisCorps.pdf	1.47MB
2025 WisCorps Budget, Approved, 1.22.25 - Public Inspection Copy.pdf	437.53KB
EXECUTED - WisCorps - City of La Crosse Parks & Rec - 2025 Service Agreement.pdf	327.61KB
Wiscorps Inc - 990 _ 2023.pdf	1.19MB

What is your agency's primary funding source(s)?

Project Partner Cost Shares (Fee For Service), AmeriCorps Grant, Private & Foundation Grants & Dontations

What percent of your anticipated total project budget does this City request represent?

WisCorps expects to host a 100 week field season in 2025. That said, the City's 3-week project is expected to be 3% of projects for the Crew Program.

What other source(s) of funds could your organization pursue? Does your organization receive similar funding from other municipalities?

The organization could continue to seek out additional private and charitable donations. We have also begun to pursue various corporate sponsorships. We expect to launch a capital campaign in the next couple of years that will be used to carryout major improvement projects at The Nature Place.

Proposal Details

Provide an overview of the program (this pertains only to the activity for which you are seeking funds).

WisCors crews build trails, manage habitats, and complete carpentry projects on public lands. Participants live, work, and travel together and have the opportunity to network with conservation professionals and serve local communities during their AmeriCorps service term. The program runs in the summer (May-August) and fall (September-November), and you can choose to participate in one or both terms.

Wisconsin Conservation Corps (WisCorps) hopes to partner with the City of La Crosse Parks, Recreation & Forestry to assist The City and local non-profit organizations in maintaining public trails and managing habitats through various restoration projects. WisCorps is expected to complete three weeks of crew field services during the 2025 season. WisCorps crew participants will get the chance to network with local non-profits, learn various land management techniques, and serve the La Crosse community as AmeriCorps members.

Specifically state how the requested funds will be used.

See the executed 2025 agreement (attached).

Project Description: WisCorps will recruit, hire, train, and supervise five-person young-adult conservation crews during the summer of 2025. The Three-Week Project Description: City of La Crosse Parks, Recreation, and Forestry will delegate one WisCorps crew to three local non-profits. Non-profits include Outdoor Recreation Alliance, Friends of the Blufflands, and Friends of the La Crosse River Marsh.

WisCorps staff will work with Parks and local non-profits to complete high-priority environmental projects throughout La Crosse.

Wisconsin Conservation Corps will provide:

- One 3-week WisCorps AmeriCorps crew with 3 to 4 Members and 1 to 2 Leaders. (At no point should the WisCorps crew feature less than 5 participants)
- A general trail tool cache: trail tools, restoration tools, fuel, hand tools, brush cutter and chainsaw
- Crew transportation, including a fleet vehicle and trailer
- Onsite or nearby housing with access to potable water, restrooms, and shower facilities
  - Summer Crew Accommodations – Sat. 5/31 Sat. 6/21/24
- Camp equipment and resources, first aid supplies, and a communication device
- Workers Compensation and General Liability insurance coverage for WisCorps employees and members
- Supervision and direct support of the WisCorps crew on crew management, discipline, and work project management

State the specific local needs and problems that your proposal intends to address.

WisCorps supports land managers, non-profit organizations, and volunteer groups by providing a dedicated workforce of young adults to carry out essential conservation projects on public lands. Their initiatives include trail maintenance, invasive species removal, habitat restoration, wildfire prevention, and general site stewardship. This work not only helps manage and maintain natural resources across various ecosystems but also offers valuable training and experience to the corps members.

The focus areas for 2025 will include, but are not limited to the following:

- Habitat restoration in the Hixon Forest and bluffland area.
- Trail improvements in the Upper Hixon multi-use trail network.
- Invasive species removal in the La Crosse marsh trail network, specifically targeting biomass removal and chemical treatment of buckthorn, honeysuckle, and other key invasive species.

Identify the project target population your proposed program or activity will serve. Include unique characteristics such as: ethnicity/race, age, disability, income level.

WisCorps Leaders (ages 21-30, up to 35 for veterans) guide and motivate Members while working together on conservation projects in the outdoors. Our crews travel across the Upper Midwest and typically collaborate with 3 to 6 project partners. A typical crew consists of 2 Leaders and 3 to 4 Members. Leaders undergo a five-week preseason training program that includes various field certifications.

Crew Members (ages 18 and 30) undertake high-priority restoration projects across Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest. WisCorps crews travel throughout the season and can anticipate working on conservation service projects with three to six different project partners during their season. Our members undergo a half week of onboarding before setting out on their first project.

WisCorps uses a variety of different methods to recruit its participants, including but not limited to:
- Online Job Boards: These include but are not limited to LinkedIn, Indeed, Conservation Job Board, UW Extension Job Board, The Corps Network, Job Center of Wisconsin, and various schools and universities.
- Local and regional in-person career fairs
- High school and college classes and clubs

WisCorps is continually expanding its gear loan library, which allows incoming participants to access a wide range of essential equipment. Program staff promote this benefit early in the application process to encourage participation from individuals across all economic backgrounds. In addition to the gear loan library, the organization provides housing, lodging, food, and other essentials throughout the duration of each participant's position, minimizing ongoing expenses to almost nothing.

Experience requirements to secure a position in our Crew and Individual Placement program are low, as we are a professional development workforce program intended to elevate someone's professional track potential.

Describe methods used to measure success in achieving objectives and specifically meeting needs of the target population.

We closely monitor our participants' growth throughout the program and continue to track them after they graduate from their AmeriCorps term of service.

For project outcomes and accomplishments, WisCorps requires all project partners—including Friends of the Marsh, Friends of the Blufflands, and ORA—to complete post-project surveys. These surveys assess their satisfaction, detail what was physically accomplished during the project, and identify areas for improvement if the project takes place again next year. WisCorps has provided these surveys to the City of La Crosse in previous years and is happy to continue making them available as we move forward.

If more than one agency within the La Crosse area deals with similar problems or clients that you have identified, describe how your agency coordinates tasks and responsibility with these other agencies and how duplication of services will be avoided.

Various agencies within the City of La Crosse address similar challenges and serve related clients. There is significant overlap among WisCorps, the City of La Crosse, ORA, Friends of the Marsh, and Friends of the Blufflands. This partnership aims to strengthen the environmental stewardship workforce necessary for trail improvements, habitat restoration, and invasive species management.

There are many additional field service projects that could be undertaken, which is why the City of La Crosse ultimately determines the initiatives that non-profits like ORA, Friends of the Marsh, and Friends of the Blufflands wish to pursue with the WisCorps crew when they are on site. This chain of command enables pre-approval before the agreement is finalized. Prior to implementing any project, WisCorps coordinates with all parties to ensure an efficient outcome.

If any non-profits wish to continue hosting a WisCorps crew outside of the City of La Crosse agreement, WisCorps will establish a separate agreement or pursue external grant opportunities to help fund this potential relationship.