



INDIAN YOUTH SERVICE CORPS GUIDELINES

THE INDIAN YOUTH SERVICE CORPS PROGRAM GUIDELINES

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BACKGROUND

In 2019, the John S. McCain III 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Act (21 CSC Act) section of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act (Public Law 116-9, Sec. 9003; 16 U.S.C. § 1727b) amended and expanded the Public Lands Corps Act, including establishing the Indian Youth Service Corps (IYSC) Program.

The intent of the IYSC Program is to expand opportunities for Tribes to participate in Public Land Corps activities and to provide a direct benefit to members of federally recognized Indian Tribes or Alaska Native corporations. The IYSC Program will provide meaningful educational, employment, and training opportunities to its participants through conservation projects on eligible service land - public lands and Indian lands.

The following guidelines are intended to be used by Tribes and Federal agencies to develop IYSC programs and to support the implementation of IYSC projects. IYSC programs themselves are crucial components in furthering the Departments' overall goal of helping to increase Tribal engagement in environmental stewardship activities, including the participation of individual members of Tribes. IYSC programs and projects are intended to work together and complement other programs that are authorized under the Public Lands Act. These programs include resource assistants (also referred to as individual placements) as well as apprenticeship and vocational training programs. Tribes, agencies, and partner organizations should also consider these programs and be aware that these additional programs can complement the corps projects developed as part of the IYSC program. These full range of programs are intended to support Tribal youth employment and career development opportunities.

THE IYSC PROGRAM

The IYSC Program is a statutory program that authorizes Tribes to enter into agreements with qualified youth or conservation corps to carry out appropriate conservation projects on eligible service land. It also allows the Secretary of the Interior, Agriculture, or Commerce to enter into cooperative agreements with Indian Tribes to provide funding and other support in the establishment and administration of the IYSC Program. The key components of the IYSC Program are set forth in the law and consist of:

- **Participant Criteria**
 - Aged between 16 and 30, inclusive.
 - Veterans may be aged up to 35.
 - A majority of participants must be Indians.

- **Establishment by Agreement**
 - The agreement is to be between a Tribe and a “Qualified Youth or Conservation Corps” (QYCC) and will describe the operation of the Tribe’s IYSC program.

- The Agreement is to be for the benefit of members of the Indian Tribe.
 - Examples of benefits may include work experience and training.
- A Tribe itself is authorized to establish a QYCC.
 - It is permissible for a Tribe to enter into an Agreement with its own QYCC.
- A Tribe may enter into an Agreement with established QYCCs.
- **Appropriate conservation projects**
 - IYSCs are to carry out projects on eligible service lands - public lands and Indian lands.
 - A Tribe may use its own IYSC to conduct projects on its land or projects on public lands.
 - Tribes may utilize an agreement with an outside QYCC to manage an IYSC on its behalf.
 - The QYCC can conduct projects on the Tribe's land or public lands.

The purpose of the IYSC is to:

- Perform, in a cost-effective manner, appropriate conservation projects on eligible service lands (public lands and Indian lands) where such projects will not be performed by existing employees.
- Expose Indian young men and women to public service while furthering their understanding and appreciation of our Nation's natural and cultural resources.
- Expand educational opportunities by rewarding individuals who participate in national service with an increased ability to pursue higher education or job training; and
- Stimulate interest among our Nation's Indian young men and women in conservation careers by exposing them to conservation professionals in land-managing agencies.

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDELINES

These guidelines are intended to provide a framework for agencies and Tribes to implement the IYSC Program in a manner that best meets the objectives of the program. These guidelines are also intended to provide Tribes and other partner organizations with information on participating in the IYSC Program.

DEFINITIONS

Appropriate Conservation Projects

- Any project for the conservation, restoration, construction, or rehabilitation of natural, cultural, historic, archaeological, recreational, or scenic resources.

Eligible Service Lands

- Public lands and Indian lands.

Indian

- A person who is a member of an Indian Tribe; or is a “Native”, as defined in section 3(b) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (43 U.S.C. 1602(b)).

Indian Lands

- Any Indian reservation;
- Any public domain Indian allotments;
- Any current or former Indian reservation in the State of Oklahoma;
- Any land held by incorporated Native groups, regional corporations, and village corporations under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act [43 U.S.C. 1601 et seq.]; and
- Any land held by dependent Indian communities within the borders of the United States whether within the original or subsequently acquired territory thereof, and whether within or without the limits of a State.

Indian Tribe

- An Indian Tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community, including any Native village, Regional Corporation, or Village Corporation, as defined in subsection (c)(g) or (j), respectively of section 3 of the Alaska Claims Settlement Act (43 U.S.C. 1602 (c), (g) or (j)), that is recognized as eligible for the special programs and services provided by the United States under Federal law to Indians because of their status as Indians.

Public Lands

- Any lands or waters (or interest therein) owned or administered by the United States, except that such term does not include any Indian lands.

Qualified Youth or Conservation Corps (QYCC)

- Any program established by a State or local government, by the governing body of any Indian Tribe, or by a nonprofit organization that:
 - Can offer meaningful, full-time, productive work for individuals between 16 and 30, inclusive, or veterans aged 35 or younger in a natural or cultural resource setting.
 - Gives participants a mix of work experience, basic and life skills, education, training, and support services.

- Provides participants with the opportunity to develop citizenship values and skills through service to their community and the United States.

Secretary

- Secretary of Agriculture, Commerce, and/or the Interior.

PROGRAM INTENT

The IYSC Program is intended to:

- Benefit the members of Indian Tribes.
- Advance the conservation and protection of natural and cultural resources on eligible service lands through construction, restoration, or rehabilitation of natural, cultural, historic, archaeological, recreational, or scenic resources.
- Promote Indian self-determination and economic development through the execution of projects on Indian lands.
 - All projects executed on Indian lands should be designed and managed in a collaborative fashion, including consultation with the Tribal government prior to the commencement of any project.
 - Projects executed on Federal lands through the IYSC should have an informal consultation process to determine how to maximize the participation of Indian youth and young adults on these projects and outline the benefits to the participants and Tribes prior to the commencement and execution of those projects.
- Provide non-Federal employment opportunities for youth and young adults with the goal of developing gainful careers for the program participants in the public and/or private sectors.
- Create a positive awareness in the program participants of their shared histories and cultures with the focus on conserving and protecting these stories and shared experiences for this and future generations.
- Create a deeper understanding of the relationship between the land and its original inhabitants.

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Primarily consists of QYCCs.
- It is recommended that a QYCC who participates in the IYSC have leadership from participating Tribes in coordinating and managing IYSC programs and projects.

IYSC PROGRAM MODELS

Traditional Service and Conservation Corps Model

- **Eligible Participants**
 - Indians and other individuals between the ages of 16 and 30 years.
 - Veterans aged 35 or younger.
- **Description**
 - Episodic conservation crew projects on eligible service lands. Typically, these projects are 4-12 weeks in duration.
 - A typical crew is comprised of 6-8 participants with 2 crew leaders. Size of crews can vary depending on the scope of the project.
 - At least 10 percent of all project activity contains a structured educational and training component.
- **Types of Projects**
 - Types of projects can include, but are not limited to:
 - Restoration and rehabilitation of facilities.
 - Trail building/restoration.
 - Climate mitigation and resilience.
 - Reforestation.
 - Landscape and seascape conservation that protects species and ecosystems.
 - Restoration of contaminated sites, disturbed land, and resources to build long-term adaptive capacity.
 - Invasive species removal.
 - Erosion control.
 - Fire fuels reduction/wildfire protection.
 - Wildlife surveys.
 - Watershed restoration.
 - Habitat restoration.
 - Farming/gardening.
 - Water/soil sampling.
 - Recreation enhancement.
 - Historic structures/artifacts preservation.
 - Natural disaster environmental restoration.

FEDERAL AGENCY IYSC PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITIES

- Establish a process to enter into cooperative agreements with Indian Tribes to establish and administer the IYSC. These agreements may:
- Identify appropriate IYSC conservation projects on eligible service lands as part of the annual work plan process.
- Define the parameters for the work. This should include identifying the expected length, or term of service that IYSC members must perform to complete the project.
- Identify and provide funding for the project.

- Identify how the cooperative agreement’s requirement for substantial involvement by the awarding Federal agency will be satisfied. Typically, the Program Officer for the agreement or a designated Technical Advisor is responsible for ensuring substantial involvement in IYSC projects. Involvement by Federal agency staff will consist of, but is not limited to, the following:
 - Consulting with Tribes and the QYCCs prior to beginning an IYSC project.
 - Mentoring and training youth crews and individuals on conservation and stewardship of natural and cultural resources.
 - Collaborating with partner organization/Tribe(s) in carrying out management, development, implementation, and evaluation of the proposed work project.
 - Providing feedback to the partner organization in selecting individuals for projects.
 - Halting work, when necessary, because of failure to meet agreement objectives.
 - Establishing clear expected outcomes with a clear performance matrix to accomplish projects.
 - Closely monitoring and/or being operationally involved with IYSC projects.
 - Providing IYSC participants with project overviews, information on natural and/or cultural resource significance, and formal or informal sessions about potential Federal and private sector career opportunities.

TRIBE AND QYCC RESPONSIBILITIES

- Enter into an agreement regarding the roles, responsibilities, and operations of the IYSC, which covers how to:
 - Recruit, select, and hire IYSC participants.
 - Process participant stipends or payroll.
 - Provide trained and experienced crew leaders or staff, and directly supervise, where appropriate, the IYSC participants.
 - Coordinate and conduct work training and education for participants.
 - Monitor participant work hours, ensure they are meaningfully engaged in substantive work, and evaluate their performance.
 - Establish rigorous risk management plans including written infectious virus disease safety protocols prior to beginning IYSC projects.
 - Establish protocols for addressing sexual as well as other forms of harassment.
 - Provide appropriate project match funding when appropriate.

FUNDING

- The IYSC can be funded through federally appropriated funds via the cooperative agreement.

- Philanthropic funds can support IYSC through full funding and cost match funding.
- The 21 CSC Act requires a 25 percent project cost match from non-Federal sources in the form of cash and/or in-kind donated services and materials.
- No cost match is required for IYSC projects carried out on Indian lands.
- The IYSC is eligible to receive grants from the Corporation for National and Community Service AmeriCorps Program through participating partners.

FUNDING MECHANISMS

- **Financial Assistance/Cooperative Agreements/Participating Agreements**
 - Cooperative agreements and participating agreements require that Federal agencies be substantively involved in the design, planning, and execution of the program and/or project.
- **Grants**
 - IYSC programs and projects are eligible for Federal grant funding only through the AmeriCorps Tribal Grants Program.
 - Philanthropic grants are allowable.
- **Financial Management**
 - Establish a centralized funding source with funding criteria and evaluation metrics.
 - Implement a transparent competitive process that allows for units and program offices interested in participating in the IYSC to develop project proposals that are rated, ranked, and evaluated for merit.
 - Geographic and demographic considerations should be among the evaluation metrics along with agency mission priorities.
 - All appropriate agency funding can be leveraged to support the IYSC including those focused on cultural resources, education, recreation, tourism, facilities management, and natural resource stewardship and science.

RISK MANAGEMENT

- Partner organizations are required to have written infectious virus disease safety protocols prior to beginning IYSC projects.
- Agencies should require IYSC partner organizations/tribes to have written risk management and safety protocols that meet agency and Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards.
- Partner organization leadership, supervisory staff and participants should be trained appropriately to meet the risk management needs of their programmatic scope.
- Proper insurance coverage as required by Federal, State, and local law should be mandatory for participation in the IYSC.

- Protocols for reporting sexual harassment and other forms of harassment incidents must be established and in writing prior to the start of any IYSC project.
- Partner organizations are required to have written infectious virus disease safety protocols prior to beginning IYSC projects.

COMPENSATION

- The Secretary (Agriculture, Commerce, or Interior, as applicable) establishes the compensation rates for IYSC participants.
- IYSC is exempt from Davis Bacon Act wage guidelines.
- It is recommended that wages, stipends and/or living allowances meet appropriate geographic living wage standards.

HIRING AUTHORITIES

The work of the IYSC will occur on and directly benefit public lands, Indian lands, Alaska Native lands, and the communities that are on or near these lands and whose economic well-being is dependent on the viability and sustainability of these lands. Expanding access to flexible hiring authorities for IYSC members will enhance and improve self-determination and self-governance capabilities in Indian communities and promote greater self-sufficiency by creating more pathways to Federal government career opportunities.

The inclusion of the Public Lands Corps (PLC) Non-Competitive Hiring Authority in the IYSC will:

- Incentivize individuals seeking natural and/or cultural resource career opportunities to fully participate on IYSC projects that will improve their communities and promote sustainable land and cultural management practices.
- Increase participating Federal agencies' capacity to achieve human capital priorities to fill occupational and talent gaps that are specific to these agencies and to advance justice, equity, inclusion, and diversity workforce developmental goals.

Public Lands Corps (PLC) Non-Competitive Hiring Authority

- Following completion of all service requirements, a participating agency may provide non-competitive hiring status to a former member of the IYSC. This means that after all requirements have been met, former IYSC members may apply for a job without having to compete with the public or applicants with veteran's preference. There must be documentation of the participant's hours to ensure their eligibility. The Certificate of Eligibility for Non-competitive Hiring Status must be signed by the designated agency PLC/IYSC Coordinator.

- PLC/IYSC hiring status is not a guarantee of a Federal job. Hiring decisions are based on the selection of the best-qualified candidates for the limited vacancies that may be available at any given time.
- Eligibility: To be eligible for PLC/IYSC non-competitive status, a former participant, in addition to completing their outlined term of service, must have:
 - Completed a minimum of 640 hours of satisfactory service on a PLC/IYSC project or projects that included at least 120 hours on Federal public lands to receive PLC/IYSC hiring status.
 - Completed their most recent corps term of service within the last 2 years.
 - Applied to a vacancy announcement for which applications are being accepted from individuals with non-competitive status.
 - Met the Office of Personnel Management minimum qualification standards and any other qualification requirement(s) stated in the vacancy announcement for the position for which they are applying.
 - Been appointed within the 2-year requirement (the 2-year time frame cannot be extended.)
- This authority may be used for General Schedule and Federal Wage System positions.
- Age restrictions: A former member of the PLC/IYSC must begin their final term of service, as outlined in the financial assistance agreement or other instrument established between the corps and the agency, prior to turning age 31 (or a veteran up to age 36).
- Types of positions a former participant may apply to: A former member of the PLC/IYSC who meets eligibility and qualification requirements may apply, and be selected, for positions advertised under merit promotion procedures (merit promotion is a process by which a current or former Federal employee may apply for a job without having to compete with the public or people with veterans' preference. Instead, they compete with other competitive service employees and individuals with non-competitive status, such as former participants).
- Announcement, Application, and Competition: Job vacancy announcements for merit promotion positions must be listed on www.usajobs.gov, and must clearly state that non-competitive status applicants may apply and explain how to be considered using non-competitive status. Servicing human resource officers and hiring officials are encouraged to use language within job opportunity announcements that solicits former PLC/IYSC participants to apply.
- Appointment: Under the PLC/IYSC authority, appointments must be effective within 2 years of the candidate's completion of PLC/IYSC service. Such appointment will be in accordance with requirements governing appointment to the competitive service.

IYSC PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND OVERSIGHT

Each agency should establish an IYSC coordinator to:

- Oversee the development and execution of IYSC projects.
- Establish agency-wide performance measures.
- Coordinate inter-agency and inter-bureau communications, agreements, and projects.
- Facilitate inter-bureau IYSC disputes and issues.
- Serve as the primary point of contact to the agency tribal/regional liaisons, tribal schools, and IYSC partner organizations.
- Formulate and assemble the agency end of year reports.
- Lead the IYSC agency advisory council.

Establish an IYSC Agency Advisory Council

- This advisory group should be composed of tribal liaisons, youth, and youth adult program coordinators and managers and select subject matter experts in certain fields (facilities management, cultural resources, science, recreation, and education).

Establish Regular IYSC Stakeholder Meetings

- Communication regarding the IYSC is essential for its development and sustainability.
 - The IYSC coordinator should promote the IYSC program and take input on the success of the program at national tribal conferences, Federal tribal liaisons meetings, Corp Network national conferences, and Indian-focused cultural conferences.

Establish evaluation surveys and annual performance metrics

- The IYSC coordinator should establish performance metrics at the beginning of each fiscal year, use surveys as a tool to measure progress against the performance metrics, and publish the results in the IYSC agency annual reports.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the difference between the Indian Youth Service Corps Program (IYSC) and the Federal Pathways Program?

The IYSC is a partnership-based program designed to provide employment and training opportunities to Indian youth. The employment and training opportunities are for non-Federal positions and through conservation projects on eligible service land. In contrast, the Federal Pathways Program offers internships and two-year development programs within Federal agencies for students and recent graduates. IYSC has an age restriction for general participants 16-30 years of age for non-veterans and 35 years and younger for veterans. There is a two-fold

objective with the IYSC to provide training for its participants for careers in both the public and private sector. The IYSC has special hiring authority via the Public Lands Corps (PLC) Non-Competitive Hiring Authority.

Does an IYSC participant have to be enrolled in school to participate in the program?

No. IYSC participants who have not received their high school diploma are encouraged to attain their diploma or their high school equivalency diploma, but this is not a requirement for participation in the program.

Do service hours obtained in the IYSC count toward Federal service?

No. Service hours obtained in the IYSC do not count toward time in Federal service. However, those service hours can be used as qualifying experience if the IYSC participant seeks a Federal position.

What are the direct benefits to Indian youth and Tribes who participate in this program?

Youth participants are afforded an opportunity to receive hands-on training opportunities in a variety of career fields while earning a stipend, living allowance and/or wage. The goal of this program is developing a generation of Indian youth who have the necessary skills to compete in the public and private sector job markets. Tribes can benefit from IYSC projects that support various initiatives such as cultural resource preservation, tourism, outdoor recreation, and natural resource protection and conservation. The IYSC is designed to be a collaborative program that provides shared benefits to the program participants, tribes, and the public.

Do Federal agencies and Tribes have flexibility in how they design their IYSC Programs?

Yes. This guidance is designed to serve as a framework for how Federal agencies and Tribes develop and operate their IYSC programs. Each agency/bureau should consider their mission and strategic priorities and develop IYSC projects that assist with achieving those priorities. In some cases, work projects developed through the IYSC can be more cost effective than projects developed with commercial contract firms. There is a real benefit to providing hands-on training opportunities to Indian youth because successful graduates of this program likely will go on to become productive contributors to our nation's economy and provide valuable contributions to Indian country and the United States of America.

Is there a direct appropriation from Congress to support this program?

No. Agencies are encouraged to redirect existing appropriated funds to support this program.

What is the role of Tribal schools, colleges, and universities?

Tribal educational institutions can have a very important role in the IYSC. Schools can develop entities that support the recruitment and training of IYSC participants and can serve as partner organizations on IYSC projects.

Can non-Indian youth participate in this program?

Yes. The IYSC is specifically designed and developed to serve Indian youth who are socially and economically disadvantaged. However, non-Indian youth are not prohibited from participating.