

Big Sky Watershed Corps



Member Handbook

2020 Program Year

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WHAT IS AMERICORPS?

A. Brief History

In 1993, Congress enacted the National and Community Service Act, creating the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). President Bill Clinton signed the legislation soon after, and **AmeriCorps** was launched the following year.

The Corporation supports a wide range of national service programs and initiatives that improve lives strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement and volunteerism. **AmeriCorps** is one of three national service programs administered by CNCS.

B. Goals and Philosophy

AmeriCorps is the national service movement that engages Americans of all ages and backgrounds in service to address the most critical problems in our nation's communities in the areas of education, public safety, the environment, and other human needs. In exchange for a specified term of service, AmeriCorps members earn a modest living allowance and an education award to pay back **qualified** student loans or to finance college, graduate school, or vocational training.

The **mission** of AmeriCorps can be articulated in five parts -

1. **Getting Things Done** through direct and demonstrable service that helps solve community problems.
2. **Strengthening Communities** by bringing together Americans of all ages and backgrounds in the common effort to improve communities.
3. **Encouraging Responsibility** by enabling members to explore and exercise their responsibilities toward their communities, their families, and themselves.
4. **Expanding Opportunity** by enhancing members' educational opportunities, job experience, and life skills.
5. **Fostering Civic Engagement** through service and volunteering opportunities in non-profit organizations and community-based organizations.

BIG SKY WATERSHED CORPS (BSWC)

A. Introduction

The BSWC was crafted by three partnering organizations, the Montana Conservation Corps (MCC), Montana Watershed Coordination Council (MWCC) and Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana (SWCDM) following a careful review of successful models across the country. The experience and achievements of the Appalachian Coal Country Watershed Team in West Virginia, Western Hardrock Watershed Team in Colorado, and AmeriCorps Watershed Stewards Project (WSP) in California provided a relevant baseline of information from which appropriate tools were selected and applied to the culture and needs of Montana. Also incorporated into the BSWC are lessons learned from successful environmental stewardship programs operating in Montana.

B. Goals & Objectives

WATERSHED HEALTH AND PROTECTION

As a BSWC member you will develop community led environmentally beneficial projects that also enhance the socio-economic fabric of the area. These include projects that mitigate, remediate, and restore water resources such as stream restoration, buffer strip re-vegetation, riparian fencing, in-stream flow protection, local river clean-up efforts as well as abandoned mine reclamation and irrigation infrastructure improvement. Sound science supported by valuable local information and involvement are essential for informed decision making. Watershed

communities need accurate and comprehensive scientific data in order to identify solutions for local issues. Therefore, members will also develop data collection and monitoring systems, collect biological, chemical and physical water quality and water quantity data, and train and oversee community volunteers and youth to do the same. Sample activities include collecting, assessing and disseminating stream flow, pH, temperature, electrical conductivity, dissolved oxygen, and nutrient data, conducting inventories of vegetation and land use practices, and auditing and disseminating best management practices. Data will be used to enhance or develop strategies and plans including: Watershed and Wetland Restoration Plans, Quality Assurance Plans, Sampling Analysis Plans, Drought Response Plans and Water Management Plans.

WATERSHED EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Montana's state agencies note that it is more cost effective to prevent problems than to react after the fact. They support prevention, public education, and more effective and efficient coordination of efforts. Community members and students need to understand critical water issues and be empowered to positively impact these at-risk ecosystems. As an AmeriCorps member you will develop materials and educational activities for schools and youth groups that highlight current conditions and environmentally-conscious practices. Members may work with teachers to create activities with learning objectives that enhance the science curriculum and focus on local issues and local solutions. Members will help mentor local school science groups where appropriate. Members will also implement outreach campaigns for communities and organize public meetings and events for community stakeholders. They will conduct workshops and presentations to educate community groups about watershed issues and environmentally-conscious practices that might apply locally.

VOLUNTEER GENERATION & CAPACITY BUILDING

Building locally led, educated, volunteer groups is vital to developing, implementing and maintaining long term environmental stewardship throughout the state. As an AmeriCorps member you will be trained in volunteer recruitment and project management and will be asked to host multiple volunteer trainings and events throughout the service year. Recruiting a volunteer base that reflects local diversity is emphasized. Volunteer events will directly relate to watershed health and protection. When possible, members will collaborate with local schools, government agencies, community nonprofits, businesses and other AmeriCorps programs. AmeriCorps members will focus on episodic community volunteerism and the retention of long-term skilled and influential volunteers. In addition, members will design and lead youth-focused volunteer events to bring experiential, place-based activities to local science classes and develop a new generation of local landscape stewards.

C. BSWC Service Member Benefits

1. Service Term

BSWC members serve full, 1700 hour AmeriCorps terms. Members need to complete their 1700 hours of service in less than one program year, or ten months. Service terms are not confined to standard business hours or weekdays, hours may be accumulated during the evening and on weekends when appropriate.

2. Living Allowance

The member living allowance, or stipend, will be paid through the MCC. Members will receive biweekly payments of \$622 ideally through direct deposit. MCC will withhold all appropriate and required payroll taxes. AmeriCorps members are not eligible for unemployment insurance and therefore unemployment taxes will not be withheld. This living allowance is not a "wage" per AmeriCorps regulations.

3. The Education Award

Upon successful completion of a required term of service, BSWC members qualify for an education award in the amount of \$ 6,195. Prior to this award being granted, an End of Term/Exit form must be completed by the MCC State Office, which, among other things, certifies the hours served. This award may be used to repay existing qualified student loans and/or to pay the cost of attending a qualified institution of higher education or the expenses incurred in participating in an approved school-to-work program. Members can

divide their award to pay a combination of these loans and/or expenses, and have seven years from the end of their term of service to use the award. **The education award is considered taxable income in the years that a member utilizes any amount of the award.**

4. Loan Forbearance

AmeriCorps members may request forbearance on qualified student loans during their AmeriCorps term of service. Forbearance is not automatic; you must request it. During a period of forbearance, you do not have to make payments, although interest continues to accumulate on your loans. Upon successful completion of the term of service, AmeriCorps will pay the interest that accrued.

Interest paid by AmeriCorps counts as taxable income in the year it is paid.

To have AmeriCorps pay that interest, members must complete and submit an Interest Accrual Form which can be accessed in the My AmeriCorps Portal at the end of the term.

5. Health Insurance

BSWC members receive health insurance benefits once they have been enrolled in the program for 30 days. BSWC members are covered by Worker’s Compensation Insurance while engaged in BSWC activities.

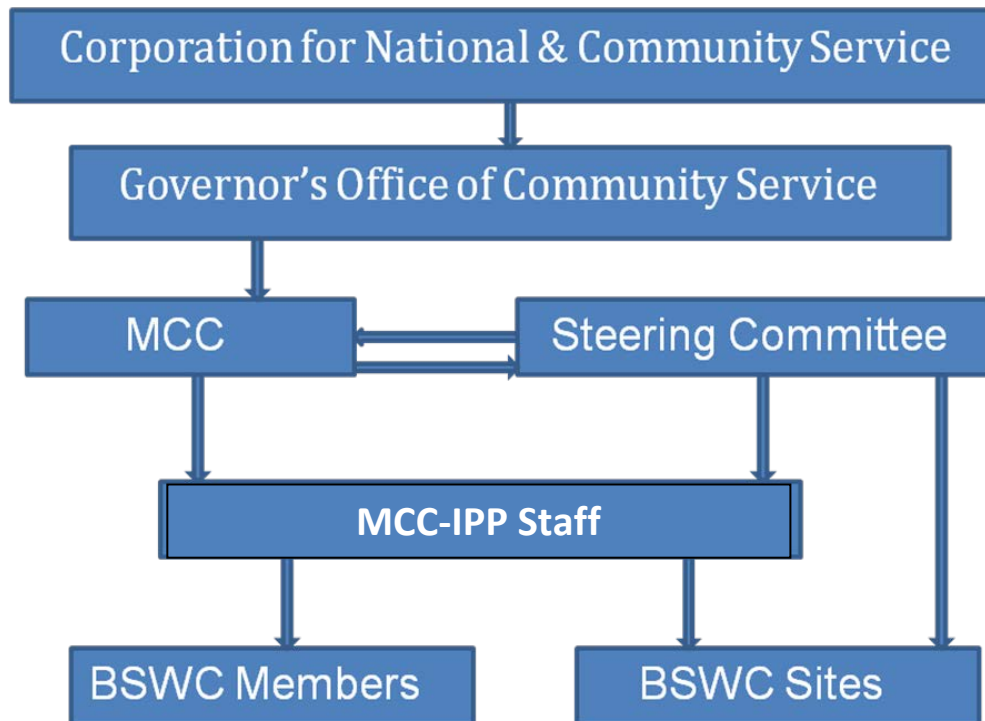
6. Training

During the course of members’ service term, BSWC members will be required to attend 4 mandatory training events; orientation, early service training, mid-service training, and end of service training. These events offer opportunities for professional development as well as personal growth. Absences from training are unacceptable and full participation is required. BSWC members will also be required to attend any OCS sponsored statewide events should they be scheduled during the program year.

7. Vacation Policy

1700-hour BSWC members may take no more than five days of time off during their term of service. All requests for time off must first be approved by Site Supervisors. Requests will then be provided to the BSWC Staff who will determine if the request for time off will be granted. BSWC members are required to give Site Supervisors and the BSWC Staff as much advance notice as possible, preferably one month, when requesting time off.

D. Organizational Structure



- **Governor’s Office of Community Service & Montana Commission on Community Service:** “OCS” is the office which provides direction and oversight to Montana’s AmeriCorps programs. The Executive Director of OCS is appointed by the current Governor, as are all of the Montana Commission on Community Service Commissioners. AmeriCorps programs within in Montana serve at the discretion of these two entities.
- **MCC IPP Staff**– These people are employees of the MCC and serve as the main liaisons between your organization and the Big Sky Watershed Corps team. As frequently referenced throughout this handbook, the BSWC staff is one of your most valuable resources. At any time throughout your term of service, you should feel free to consult the BSWC Staff with questions, problems, or comments. He or she can expand on the issues highlighted in this handbook, and help make your affiliation with the BSWC rewarding for you.
- **BSWC Steering Committee** – The Steering Committee is made up of representatives from the three partner organizations that formed the BSWC. Those organizations are the Montana Conservation Corps (MCC), Montana Watershed Coordination Council (MWCC) and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana (SWCDM). The Steering Committee provides support and guidance to the program.
- **Site Supervisor** – The site supervisor provides direct guidance, support and supervision for BSWC members as they complete their service. This individual is responsible for guiding and directing daily work, conducting performance evaluations, and ensuring program compliance at the service site.
- **BSWC Service Member** – This is an eligible individual serving with the program and enrolled in AmeriCorps. Every member is bound by AmeriCorps policies and has rights and responsibilities which are outlined in the Member Handbook.

GENERAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A. BSWC Member Rights and Responsibilities

As with any group of individuals working together, BSWC members must follow certain rules and regulations in order to be effective. The rights and responsibilities listed below are policies that should guide your term of service.

- In order to earn an education award, each member must satisfactorily complete the term of service. The number of hours (1700) is only a minimum requirement. Members must complete their hours and their term. In many cases members will exceed the minimum hours
- There is a 60-day probationary period for all members.
- If a BSWC member is unable to return to work within a 3-week time period due to injury, illness or personal situation, the member may be subject to termination from the program. The member may, however, qualify for a ‘compelling personal circumstance’ which would allow them to receive a pro-rated AmeriCorps education award.

B. General Code of Conduct

As representatives of the BSWC and AmeriCorps, members serve as role models in the community. They are expected to maintain an exemplary standard of professional conduct and identify as members of AmeriCorps and the BSWC at all times. The BSWC General Code of Conduct includes:

- Mutual respect is the key to all relationships. BSWC members are expected to show respect when interacting with other members, staff, project sponsors and community members.
- BSWC members are expected and encouraged to participate fully in all aspects of the program at the level of their ability.
- BSWC members shall exhibit a high level of commitment and a positive attitude toward the organization, staff and their service work.

- BSWC members should display a strong work ethic and follow directions.
- The BSWC environment must be a safe place in which to work. Aggressive behavior, abusive language, intimidation and fighting are prohibited.
- Possession or use of firearms or other weapons when engaged in BSWC activities is prohibited.
- Stealing or vandalizing any property, project equipment, or materials is prohibited.
- No alcohol or illegal drugs are allowed at any time a member is representing the BSWC
- If you are sick or unable to participate in project activities, you must notify your Site Supervisor immediately. If a BSWC member misses more than three consecutive sick days or five sick days during their term, s/he may have to make up those service days missed or forfeit a percentage of their living allowance.
- BSWC maintains disciplinary action procedures to support our mission to our members, the community and the environment. Violation of the Code of Conduct will result in disciplinary action, including possible suspension or termination.
- Satisfactory completion also includes good attendance, being a law-abiding citizen, having a positive and cooperative attitude, performing quality service work, and showing respect toward others in the program and in the community.

C. BSWC Safety Policy

It is the policy of the Big Sky Watershed Corps to provide all participants with a safe and healthy workplace. Safety is of such importance that it will take precedence over productivity whenever necessary to protect participants. An effective health and safety program is an integral part of conducting our work; **safety awareness must be part of everything we do and it must be everyone's responsibility.**

The BSWC is committed to providing safe and healthy conditions for each of its employees and participants. In return, we expect each participant to recognize their obligations to conduct themselves in a way that supports both their own safety and the safety of their co-workers. To ensure a safe working environment is maintained, all participants shall actively promote safety and accident prevention as a primary part of their normal job functions.

Each participant is responsible for implementing this policy by continually observing safety practices, guidelines and standards in all program activities and locations including during transportation, while on the project site, and during educational and outreach activities. It is the goal of this policy to minimize accidents and incidents for everyone in every area of the program. Full cooperation of all participants at all levels is essential to achieve this goal successfully.

General safety requirements include, but are not limited to:

- Report any unsafe conditions to your supervisor immediately—all unsafe conditions must be corrected prior to commencing work. If it cannot be done safely, it should not be done at all.
- Attend all trainings and safety meetings.
- Report any accident, injury or illness to your supervisor immediately.
- Report the use of any medication that could cause physical or mental impairment or diminished concentration at work to your supervisor.
- Ensure that all hazards are defined for each scope of work prior to commencing.
- Wear all appropriate work clothing and personal protective equipment (PPE). If in doubt, wear the protective clothing and safety gear.
- If you are not sure how to perform your assigned task safely, stop and contact your immediate supervisor.
- Keep worksites hazard-free by storing tools and materials properly and by cleaning up garbage and spills immediately.
- Don't wear dangling jewelry and loose-fitting clothing that may become caught by tools and machinery.
- Operate only the equipment and/or tools that you have been trained and authorized to use.
- Absolutely No Horseplay is permitted.
- Be alert! Always be aware of what is happening around you.

- Fall protection is required when working over six feet high.
- Use powered equipment and all tools as designed.
- Think before you lift. Always use proper lifting technique.
- Use of hand-held, portable electronic devices while driving is prohibited.

D. Allowable & Prohibited Activities

All National Service participants are accountable to congressionally mandated allowable and prohibited activities. Maintaining adherence to these activities is of the utmost importance. As the BSWC member it is your responsibility to ensure that you engage only in allowable AmeriCorps activities.

Allowable Activities

Allowable service activities are activities appropriate to member's role as AmeriCorps participants and hours spent in those activities are credited towards the minimum hour requirement for their education award. Allowable service activities include: 1) direct service 2) training and enrichment 3) fundraising.

1) DIRECT SERVICE is activity that addresses education, health, public safety, the environment, or other human needs. Direct service means working directly with people (clients, beneficiaries, communities, etc.) to make change, or doing service that is involved in making that direct change. AmeriCorps members may also perform capacity-building activities as direct service that improve the organizational and financial capability of nonprofit organizations and communities to meet local needs by achieving greater organizational efficiency and effectiveness, greater impact and quality of impact, stronger likelihood of successful replicability, or expanded scale. At least 70% of your total hours should be direct service hours.

Examples of Capacity-Building Activities:

- Enlisting, training, or coordinating volunteers;
- Conducting outreach and securing resources in support of service activities that meet specific needs in the community;
- Conducting research, mapping community assets, or gathering other information that will strengthen the sponsoring organization's ability to meet community needs;
- Developing organizational systems to improve efficiency and effectiveness;

2) MEMBER DEVELOPMENT is only applicable when the activity reflects the AmeriCorps service or role. Any training that refers to members' direct service would be part of this category. All orientations can be included, as well as any state or regional trainings, seminars, or workshops pertaining to issues related to direct service. No more than 20% of members' total hours can be credited to member development.

3) FUNDRAISING

AmeriCorps Members may spend no more than 10% of their service term performing fundraising activities. Fundraising activities do not count towards direct service hours, even if a Member spends time on fundraising activities at a Service Site; these hours should be reported on the timesheet in the Fundraising category.

Members may raise funds directly in support of service activities that meet local, environmental, educational, public safety, human safety and homeland security needs.

Examples of Member fundraising activities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Writing a grant proposal to a foundation to secure resources to support volunteer training;
- Securing supplies & equipment from the community to increase an organizations ability to help low-income individuals;
- Securing financial resources from the community to assist in launching or expanding a program that provides social services to the community;
- Seeking donations from alumni of the program for the specific service projects being performed by current Members.

Examples of fundraising activities Members may not perform include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Raise funds for an organization’s general operating expenses or endowment; and
- Write a grant application for AmeriCorps funding to CNCS or any other Federal agency.
- Raising funds to directly support their service position.

Prohibited Activities

There are certain activities that AmeriCorps members may not perform in the course of their duties, while charging time to the AmeriCorps program, or at the request of program staff. Furthermore, members may not engage in any conduct in a manner that would associate the national service program or the Corporation with the prohibited activities. Please become familiar with the specific prohibitions to ensure compliance with these important guidelines.

Members may not engage in the following activities while functioning as an AmeriCorps member and may not count these hours towards their AmeriCorps service commitment.

While charging time to the AmeriCorps program, accumulating service or training hours, or otherwise performing activities supported by the AmeriCorps program or CNCS, staff and members may not engage in the following activities (see 45 CFR § 2520.65):

- Attempting to influence legislation;
- Organizing or engaging in protests, petitions, boycotts, or strikes;
- Assisting, promoting, or deterring union organizing;
- Impairing existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements;
- Engaging in partisan political activities, or other activities designed to influence the outcome of an election to any public office;
- Participating in, or endorsing, events or activities that are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political platforms, political candidates, proposed legislation, or elected officials;
- Engaging in religious instruction, conducting worship services, providing instruction as part of a program that includes mandatory religious instruction or worship, constructing or operating facilities devoted to religious instruction or worship, maintaining facilities primarily or inherently devoted to religious instruction or worship, or engaging in any form of religious proselytization;
- Providing a direct benefit to—
 - A business organized for profit;
 - A labor union;
 - A partisan political organization;
 - A nonprofit organization that fails to comply with the restrictions contained in section 501©(3) of the Internal Revenue code of 1986 related to engaging in political activities or substantial lobbying
 - An organization engaged in the religious activities described in B.7. above;

- Conducting a voter registration drive or using CNCS funds to conduct a voter registration drive;
- Providing abortion services or referrals for receipt of such services; and
- Such other activities as CNCS may prohibit.
- Use of hand-held, portable electronic devices while driving is prohibited

However, AmeriCorps members, like all private citizens, may participate in religious activities, fundraising, lobbying, political, or advocacy activities as long as it is done on their own time, at their own expense, and at their own initiative. Members may not wear AmeriCorps service gear in such instances.

E. Verifying and Recording Hours

BSWC members are responsible for maintaining a record of service hours utilizing BSWC timesheets. This is an extremely important function because eligibility for the education award and interest payments is contingent upon proof of completion of service hours. **BSWC members may not exceed a cumulative of 14 service hours in one day.** BSWC members should regularly work a standard 40 hour week based on the normal hours of operation for your organization; however when the situation warrants due to field days, service projects, travel, etc, additional hours and days are acceptable. **Members may also take all holidays observed by your organization; however they may not count hours for those days! ONLY record hours for time actually served!**

The service hours should be recorded by the member on their timesheet and the site supervisor should approve service hours on a **biweekly basis**. When monitoring your hours, keep in mind the following restrictions:

- **Direct Service:** Time spent during which the member provides or plans service activities as described in your Service Site Position Description. Direct service can be up to 100% of members' total hours and at least 70% of total hours must be direct service.
- **Member Development:** Activities including BSWC statewide trainings, site specific professional development, conferences, etc. Member Development hours are limited to 20% of the member's overall term (***it's your responsibility to keep track of hours accrued!***) For example, if a member logs 2000 total hours, indirect service hours should comprise no more than 20% of 2000 (no more than 400 hours). For member development hours outside of what is sponsored by the BSWC program, BSWC Staff approval is required.
- **Fundraising:** Time spent on fundraising activities, including raising grant writing, etc. members may spend no more than 10% of their total service term on fundraising efforts. These hours may occur over the course of the service year, or in condensed periods, depending on the site's needs.

Timesheet Requirements:

- All timesheets must be completed in pen (blue/black).
- Timesheets may not contain whiteout! All errors/changes must be crossed out with a single line and initialed.
- All timesheets must include dates of service and indicate when lunch was taken.
- All timesheets must include original signatures from both the member and designated site supervisor. **Signature dates must be *after* the last day hours were recorded on the timesheet.**
- Hours must be entered in a decimal format and rounded to the nearest half (.50)

- Keep copies of timesheets in your office and also send them into the BSWC State Office.

F. Reporting Requirements

It is essential that members fulfill all reporting requirements in a timely and professional manner. These requirements may be in the form of organizational documents such as work-plans, surveys, evaluation forms, etc. It is also required that all members participate in all conference calls and site visits as determined by the BSWC Staff.

G. Performance Evaluations

A mid-term and an end-of-term performance evaluation are required for all members. **It is important that you are aware of any performance evaluations at the beginning of your term.** Be sure to ask your Site Supervisor in advance what performance standards you will be evaluated on.

H. National Service Days

Throughout the year, the Corporation organizes several national days of service for AmeriCorps members, other national service participants, and community volunteers to join together to meet a community need. You should allow your member to participate in these programs as part of their normal service hours. The BSWC Staff will be informed well in advance of these programs, and will share this information with you.

These programs remind the members that they are part of a national network of programs, celebrate their accomplishments, and allow them to work with AmeriCorps members and national service participants from other programs.

The names and dates of these events are as follows:

- Make A Difference Day-October
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service – January
- Global Youth Service Day-April
- AmeriCorps Week - March

I. Voting

Members are encouraged to register to vote during their term of service, and should allow them time to register during their service hours. Members who are unable to vote before or after service hours should be allowed to do so during their service hours without incurring any penalties. You should determine an appropriate length of absence needed to vote, and clearly communicate this to your Site Supervisor.

J. Jury Duty

Serving on a jury is an important responsibility of citizenship. Members are encouraged to serve jury duty and must not be penalized for doing so. When AmeriCorps members serve as jurors, they should continue to receive credit for their normal service hours. Also, they may keep any reimbursements for incidental expenses received from the court.

K. Disciplinary Action Procedures

Following policies and procedures is an essential quality of any successful MCC member. In order to emphasize the importance of these policies, MCC encourages utilizing the Disciplinary Action Procedures as a way to enforce and educate Corpsmembers on MCC policy. Disciplinary action does not indicate that one has failed or is bad. It is simply a tool to manage behavior and foster a healthy, safe environment. MCC strives to create a culture where people can be given a chance to correct their actions and succeed.

The disciplinary action procedures are intended to be used as a progressive process. However, at any time Program staff may elect to accelerate the process and skip levels based on the severity of the behavior or on repeated infractions. It is important to note that if a Corpsmember is released for Cause they will not receive an education award or any interest paid by the Corporation on loan forbearance. Disciplinary action procedures may be initiated by Regional staff, senior crew leader, crew leader or MCC Program staff. However, the only MCC employee with the authority to fully terminate a Corpsmember is the President/CEO.

When using a Disciplinary Action Form (DAF), keep a copy, provide a copy to the Corpsmember, and send a copy of the DAF to the state office to be filed in the Corpsmembers personnel file. Regional staff may also levy a fine as part of the disciplinary procedure. The Regional Supervisor must approve any fines levied. In the event that disciplinary action needs to be taken, the general procedure to follow is:

- **Level One: Verbal Warning:** Although it is a verbal warning, it needs to be documented on the biweekly journal or utilizing the BCC form.
- **Level Two: Written Reprimand:** Fill out a DAF with a copy given to the Corpsmember. Include changes or corrections that need to be made in the Corpsmembers behavior or performance, as well as the consequences that will be taken if the behavior is not modified within the given time frame. A fine may be issued along with a BCF, but must be approved by the Regional Supervisor.
- **Level Three: Suspension:** A Corpsmember is subject to suspension where there is reason to suspect a violation of MCC policy, illegal activity, or other inappropriate behavior. A Corpsmember on suspension will be provided notification in writing that they are to leave work and not to report to work until instructed to do so in writing. All suspensions are without pay and result in either full reinstatement with back pay or termination. Regional Staff will fill out a DAF and a payroll change form, and fax both to the main office. All suspensions must be approved by the Program Director and/or the President/CEO.
- **Level Four: Termination:** If termination is recommended, a DAF should be sent or faxed to the President/CEO for approval. Only the Program Director and/or President/CEO can approve termination.

It is the MCC practice to deal promptly and fairly with Corpsmember complaints and the staff takes this practice very seriously. The MCC has developed a conflict resolution procedure to help Corpsmembers resolve concerns about unfair treatment, discrimination, or dissatisfaction with factors related to work. Concerns may include, but are not limited to: job assignments, performance evaluations, supervision, disciplinary actions, suspensions, and terminations.

Part of the MCC experience is learning how to resolve conflict that arises. In fact the nature of the MCC experience promotes conflict and its resolution. Conflict resolution skills learned during your term of service with MCC will help you succeed in life. Conflict is inevitable; learning how to confront and resolve issues is an important life skill.

L. Grievance Procedures

In the event that informal efforts and conflict resolution to resolve disputes are unsuccessful, AmeriCorps members and other interested individuals, such as Project Sponsors or Host Site Supervisors, may seek resolution through the following grievance procedures. These procedures are intended to apply to service-related issues, such as job assignments, performance evaluations, disciplinary actions, suspension, or release for cause. In addition, individuals who are not selected as AmeriCorps members or labor unions alleging displacement of employees or duplication of activities by AmeriCorps may utilize these procedures.

1. Alternative Dispute Resolution

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is available, but must be selected within 45 days of the underlying dispute. If a member or interested party chooses ADR as a first option, a neutral party designated by the MCC will attempt to facilitate a mutually agreeable resolution. The neutral party must not have participated in any previous decisions concerning the issue in dispute. ADR is confidential, non-binding, and informal. No communications or proceedings of ADR may be referred to at the grievance hearing or arbitration stages. The neutral party may not participate in subsequent proceedings.

If ADR is chosen by the member or interested party, the deadlines for convening a hearing and for a hearing decision are 30 and 60 days respectively. They are held in abeyance until the conclusion of ADR. At the initial session of ADR, the neutral party must provide written notice to the aggrieved party of his or her right to request a hearing. If ADR does not resolve the matter within 30 calendar days, the neutral party must again notify the aggrieved party of his or her right to request a hearing. At any time, the aggrieved party may decline ADR and proceed directly to the hearing process.

2. Grievance Hearing

A member or interested party may request a grievance hearing without participating in ADR, or if ADR is selected and it fails to facilitate a mutually agreeable resolution. The member should make a written request for a hearing to the MCC President/CEO. A request for a hearing must be made within one year after the date of the alleged occurrence. At the time a request for a hearing is made, MCC shall make available to the member or interested party information that it relied upon in its disciplinary decision.

Montana Conservation Corps will arrange for one or more pre-hearing conferences at a time mutually convenient to the parties. Pre-hearing conferences are not a substitute for a hearing. They are intended to facilitate a mutually agreeable resolution of the matter to make a hearing unnecessary or to narrow the issues to be decided at the hearing. The format of the pre-hearing conference may be flexible, involving meetings with one party at a time and/or with both parties together. Pre-hearing conferences may be conducted by the Program Director, Director of Operations, or the President/CEO.

The hearing will be conducted by the Program Director, Director of Operations, or the President/CEO. The person conducting the hearing may not have participated in any previous decisions concerning the issue in dispute. A hearing must be held no later than 30 calendar days after the filing of the grievance, and a written decision must be made no later than 60 calendar days after filing.

3. Binding Arbitration

An aggrieved party may request binding arbitration if a grievance hearing decision is adverse or if no decision is made within 60 days of the filing of the grievance. The arbitrator must be independent and selected by an agreement of the parties. If the parties cannot agree on an arbitrator, the Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation for National will appoint one within 15 calendar days after receiving a request from one of the parties.

An arbitration proceeding will be held no later than 45 calendar days after the request for arbitration, or no later than 30 calendar days after the appointment of an arbitrator by the Corporation's CEO. An arbitration decision will be made no later than 30 calendar days after the commencement of the arbitration proceeding.

The cost of arbitration will be divided evenly between the parties, unless the aggrieved party prevails, in which case the Montana Conservation Corps will pay the total cost of the proceeding as well as the prevailing party's attorneys' fees.

4. Remedies

Remedies for grievances include, but are not limited to, reinstatement in good standing of a Member wrongfully suspended or dismissed, and prohibition of a placement of a Member. If reinstatement of the member results in the member not being able to fully complete their hours within the term of service, arrangements may be made to allow the member to complete the hours.

M. Termination

1. Leaving for Compelling Personal Circumstances

AmeriCorps recognizes that due to unforeseen circumstances, some members may not be able to complete their required hours of service within the program period. The following guidelines should be applied to these members. If a member elects to leave the program, the BSWC Staff and MCC Senior Staff have the authority to determine whether or not their reason for dropping out is a "compelling personal circumstance." If a decision is made that the member's reason does indeed constitute compelling circumstances, the member may receive a pro-rated educational award or temporarily be suspended from service for up to two years.

While this is ultimately the decision of the BSWC Staff and the MCC, you should be aware of the general guidelines in this situation. Some examples of reasons that may justify release from service include a member's critical illness, a serious family matter, or death or critical illness in the member's immediate family. It may also include premature termination of the program or other programmatic problems beyond the member's control.

If a member chooses to terminate their participation to return to school, take a job, or because they are dissatisfied with their assignment, these reasons would not justify a release for compelling circumstances. Determinations will be made on a case-by-case basis. If a member leaves due to a compelling and personal circumstance, they are still required to fill out the AmeriCorps exit paperwork.

2. Termination for Cause

Only the MCC Program Director or President/CEO may terminate a member from their service position.

AmeriCorps programs are required to release a member for cause if he or she, among other things, drops out without obtaining a release for compelling personal circumstances or is convicted of a violent felony or the sale or distribution of a controlled substance during the term of service.

A service site must promptly communicate any performance, behavior, or service related concerns to the BSWC Staff. In the event that an issue arises, the Site Supervisor, BSWC Staff, and if necessary MCC Senior Staff; will decide upon the appropriate course of action when dealing with disciplinary issues. All performance issues must be **well-documented** by the site and the MCC State Office.

If a member is released for cause, s/he will not receive any part of an education award and may be disqualified from future service through AmeriCorps.

N. Information on Criminal Background Checks for grant covered individuals

BSWC members are considered "grant covered" individuals and as such must pass checks from the National Sexual Offender Public Registry (NSOPR), Montana State Repository, and a fingerprint based FBI check. *On April 21, 2011, the two-part National Service Criminal History check became a three-part check requirement for individuals serving in, or working for, a program or project that allows for recurring access to a vulnerable population. Once new regulations are established, newly enrolled or hired individuals in*

predictable contact with children (17 and younger), senior citizens (60 and older), and individuals with disabilities must undergo:

1. A National Sex Offender Public Registry check (NSOPR);
2. A statewide criminal history repository check of the state of residency and the state where the individual will work/serve (FBI checks do not substitute for state checks); and,
3. A fingerprint-based FBI criminal history repository check.

In order for BSWC to be compliant with these laws, all grant covered individuals engaged after April 21, 2011 who have recurring access to vulnerable populations **must** consent to and pass criminal background checks on the NSOPR, the Montana State Repository *and* a fingerprint based FBI check. For BSWC this includes site supervisors and members. *An individual's ability to serve as a BSWC member is subject to review of criminal history and fingerprint based FBI checks.*

BSWC can facilitate checks in the National Sexual Offender Public Registry (NSOPR) and in the Montana State Repository. BSWC will complete those two checks at no cost to the applicant or site supervisor. The results of the checks will be housed in the BSWC state office.

INITIATING THE FBI CHECK

Applicants will need to:

- ☐ Obtain their own fingerprints- prints must be less than a year old on original cards
- ☐ Keep a copy of the fingerprinting receipt
- ☐ Sign and date the Non Criminal Justice Applicant Rights signature page (Attached)
- ☐ **Submit original copies** of prints, signature page, and receipts to MCC.

Aimee Severson
Montana Conservation Corps
206 N. Grand Ave
Bozeman, MT 59715

MCC will submit the check to the FBI.

FINGERPRINTING

- FBI background checks require fingerprints. Everyone will need to contact their local police department for specific details on fingerprinting in their county. Here is a link to help locate your local police department: <http://www.usacops.com/>
- Most places only do fingerprinting on specific days/times, and often require appointments. Make sure to plan ahead!

REIMBURSEMENT

MCC will reimburse the fingerprinting cost within 30 days of the start date.

- Send MCC a copy of detailed receipt for fingerprinting

O. Equal Employment Opportunity Policy

Equal Employment Opportunity has been, and will continue to be, a fundamental principle at MCC, where employment is based upon personal capabilities and qualifications without discrimination because of race, color, national origin, religion, creed, age, sex, physical or mental disability, marital status, genetic information, political beliefs, or any other protected characteristic as established by law.

This policy of Equal Employment Opportunity applies to all policies and procedures relating to recruitment and hiring, compensation, benefits, layoff, discharge, training, and all other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment.

If you require specialized accommodations (due to a disability, religious belief/practice, etc.) either for your current job or for jobs to which you would like to apply, contact your supervisor. It is important that you notify us of your need for an accommodation. Once that is done, we will work with you through an interactive process to evaluate and if possible, arrange for a reasonable accommodation.

Employees with access to information about reasonable accommodations shall maintain the confidentiality of the information to the extent reasonably possible and shall not release the information to anyone who does not have the right or need to know.

P. Reasonable Accommodation

MCC and BSWC do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, sex, national origin, age, marital status, creed, physical or mental disabilities, color, or any other individuality protected by the law.

Reasonable accommodations will be provided to qualified individuals with known disabilities unless doing so would result in an undue hardship. Materials may be provided in alternate formats. The accommodation must be essential for the Member to perform his/her service successfully. Funds for reasonable accommodations are available for use by Member with disabilities, which have been offered a position with AmeriCorps, and require an accommodation to fulfill the essential functions of their service. In the event you encounter the need to request a reasonable accommodation, please communicate with your site supervisor and the BSWC Staff. Further, the Montana Office of Community Service (OCS) employs a Disability Coordinator, who can maximize your service experience and guide you through the possibilities of volunteerism.

Q. Drug-free Workplace Policy

MCC is committed to providing a safe, healthy, and efficient work environment and to protect the health, safety, and well being of all members and other individuals in our workplace. This commitment is jeopardized when any MCC participant engages in use, possession, trade and/or sale of illegal drugs, controlled substances, or abuses prescription drugs or alcohol. Medical marijuana is considered a controlled substance by MCC.

MCC recognizes that alcohol abuse and drug use pose a significant threat to our goals. We have established a drug-free workplace program that balances our respect for individuals with the need to maintain an alcohol and drug-free environment. The unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensation, possession or use of a controlled substance is prohibited in the workplace. Violations of this policy are subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

MCC's drug free workplace policy is intended to comply with all federal and state laws and is designed to safeguard member privacy rights to the fullest extent of the law. In accordance with the federal Drug-Free Work-place Act of 1988, you are obligated to notify MCC of any criminal drug statute conviction for a violation occurring in the workplace no later than five (5) days after such conviction.

MCC offers an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that is totally confidential and available to all employees and their immediate families. The EAP provides professional services to members whose performance is, or may be, adversely affected by emotional difficulties, alcoholism, drug dependence, family discord, or other personal problems.

R. SEXUAL HARASSMENT PARTICIPANT POLICY

- Sexual harassment in any form is inappropriate and unacceptable conduct and will be dealt with through MCC's Disciplinary Action Procedures
- Sexual harassment will not be tolerated by anyone involved, working, or volunteering with MCC, whether it is directed at a co-worker or at anyone in the public at large.
- Any participant or employee engaged in sexual harassment is subject to disciplinary action including demotion or termination.
- Staff and participants are subject to disciplinary action if they tolerate sexual harassment, or retaliate against participants or employees who report or file complaints of sexual harassment.

REPORTING PROCEDURE AND OPTIONS

MCC encourages anyone who has been a victim of harassment or sexual misconduct at the work place or during MCC sponsored events (e.g. – training, projects, and professional development opportunities) to immediately report the harassment to their supervisor. Reports may be made in writing or orally.

- Directly contact your supervisor, if you feel comfortable
- Directly contact the Associate Director of Personnel Development, Training and Safety; Greg Ross
- Directly contact Director of Programs; Kate O'Neill
- Submit a complaint through MCC's anonymous reporting option via www.mtcorps.org/contact-us

Additional resources for reporting or receiving direct, confidential services are located in the final pages of this manual.

MCC will investigate all complaints of harassment thoroughly, to the fullest extent practicable. MCC will keep complaints and the terms of their resolution confidential. However, MCC cannot guarantee complete confidentiality in the process of completing a thorough investigation. Relevant information to provide will include the day(s)/date(s) of occurrence(s), location(s) of occurrence(s), names of individuals involved and names of witnesses, if any.

If a participant utilizes any of the first four reporting options above and still feels that their report has not been addressed, they should then contact the Montana Human Rights Bureau at 1-800-542-0887. www.erd.dli.mt.gov/human-rights

S. MCC COMMITMENT TO INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

A work environment that is truly diverse draws upon and respects the unique characteristics, skills and experiences of all employees, members, and youth who participate in MCC's programs. Diversity encompasses individual attributes such as:

- Gender
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Ancestry
- Language
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Gender Identity
- Religion
- Socio-economic status
- Disability
- Thinking styles
- Opinions
- Life experiences

MCC believes that by embracing a wide array of perspectives, the organization becomes more creative, flexible and productive. MCC values diversity at all levels in the organization as it enriches the decisions and programs by providing a broad spectrum of knowledge, skills and abilities. Diversity is the lifeblood of an MCC experience; it increases the capacity to dream and serve.

Diversity benefits individuals within the agency and MCC as a whole. It is recognized that each employee, member and youth brings unique capabilities, experiences and characteristics to the workplace. MCC strives to provide a supportive and inclusive work environment in which everyone is treated fairly and respectfully, has equal access to opportunities and resources and can contribute to the organization's success. MCC is committed to fostering understanding, communication and respect among all people within the organization.

MCC's commitment to diversity extends beyond the organization to its communities and environment. An increasingly diverse society requires an increasingly diverse workforce of corps graduates with skills and values to be leaders and community builders in this changing world. A lack of varied voices is particularly acute in the areas of land management and conservation where many of the jobs and practices reflect the values and traditions of a single culture. The cultivation and inclusion of diverse perspectives will be essential in developing responses and solutions in the future. Similarly, engaging citizens from diverse backgrounds will be vital in developing the next generation of environmental workers.