

The American Climate Corps

March 19, 2024

On September 20, 2023, the Biden Administration [announced](#) the launch of a new American Climate Corps (ACC) initiative. The ACC is described as a “workforce training and service initiative” to provide individuals with access to training necessary to enter careers in the clean energy, conservation, and climate resilience economy. Specifically, the initiative seeks to engage “more than 20,000 young people” through paid training programs that will focus on a wide range of projects including conservation and restoration efforts, clean energy deployment, forest management, and implementation of energy efficient technologies. Additionally, the Corporation for National and Community Service (AmeriCorps) is to stand up a new American Climate Corps Hub to coordinate the efforts of involved federal agencies. In conjunction with the announcement, the White House launched a [website](#) for individuals looking to learn more about the ACC, support its work, or host a project site.

The ACC proposal initiative is distinct from a prior Biden Administration proposal from January 2021, to establish a Civilian Climate Corps. To learn more about that proposal, see CRS Insight IN11654, [Biden Administration Proposes New Civilian Climate Corps](#), by Mark K. DeSantis.

Memorandum of Understanding

In December 2023, seven federal agencies signed a [memorandum of understanding](#) (MOU) to implement the ACC: AmeriCorps, the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of the Interior (DOI), the Department of Agriculture (USDA), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Department of Energy (DOE), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The MOU lays out various principles for the initiative, including a comprehensive approach to tackling climate change, sufficient compensation and benefits for ACC members, and a pathway to high-quality employment. The MOU also specifies that the ACC will operate “under existing authorities and in coordination with existing programs” to advance climate resilience and further the goals of the MOU.

The specific programs that will participate in the ACC are not enumerated. Each of the seven signatory agencies administer, to varying degrees, service or training programs pursuant to existing authorities. These programs address issues that broadly relate to the environment and climate change. Roughly 50 of these different statutory and administrative authorities are listed in the MOU. For example, AmeriCorps supports a wide range of national service programs and projects, including [conservation and climate-related work](#). DOL administers the [Job Corps](#) program pursuant to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (29 U.S.C. §§3101 et seq.), which includes a partnership with the U.S. Forest Service

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(FS) within the USDA to administer residential [Civilian Conservation Centers](#) where students receive training focusing on conserving, developing, or managing FS lands. Other authorized federal corps programs related to the conservation and restoration of public lands and waters include the Youth Conservation Corps ([16 U.S.C. §§1701-1706](#)), the Public Lands Corps ([16 U.S.C. §§1721 et seq.](#)), and the Indian Youth Service Corps ([16 U.S.C. §1727b](#)).

The MOU specifies that nothing within the agreement “obligate[s] ... any current or future expenditure of resources in advance of the availability of appropriations from Congress.” It further specifies that the agencies are not required “to spend funds on any project or purpose, even if funds are available.”

FY2025 Budget Request

In March 2024, the Biden Administration released its [FY2025 budget](#), which proposed \$38 million in additional discretionary funding for AmeriCorps. Specifically, the budget requested \$15 million to assist in the staffing and creation of the ACC Hub and \$23 million for grantmaking to “support over 1,700 additional ACC members.” According to the [FY2025 AmeriCorps budget justification](#), the Administration’s requested funding would go towards hiring additional full-time staff, executing recruitment and marketing campaigns, developing a one-stop ACC website, and “ensuring a common member experience.” The AmeriCorps budget also includes a request of \$8 billion in mandatory funding over the next decade “to support an additional 50,000 ACC members annually by 2031.”

The Administration did not explicitly reference funding for the ACC as part of the FY2025 budget requests for the six other signatory agencies, although funding was requested for certain programs and authorities identified in the MOU under which agencies may carry out activities for those purposes. For example, the [FY2025 DOI budget](#) includes an increase in funding to support a Youth Coordinator to “facilitate the Department’s participation in youth corps programs, the Indian Youth Corps Program ... and other youth-focused engagements offered throughout the Department.”

Issues for Congress

It remains to be seen whether discretionary or mandatory appropriations will be used to prioritize climate corps projects for the purposes of the ACC. Congress may choose to appropriate funding to support the ACC or place restrictions on funding for the program’s implementation. For example, H.R. 6215 in the 118th Congress would explicitly prevent federal funding from being used for the purposes of establishing the ACC. Similarly, although the FY2024 budget request did not include funding for the ACC, the House included provisions in two FY2024 appropriations bills—H.R. 4821 (Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies) and H.R. 4394 (Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies)—specifying that “none of the funds made available ... may be used for the American Climate Corps” (§525 and §629, respectively). These legislative provisions were not included in full-year FY2024 appropriations for these agencies enacted as part of [P.L. 118-42](#).

Congress may also consider providing new authorities or expanding existing authorities to implement the ACC or similar federal conservation or climate corps programs. For example, [versions of the Build Back Better Act](#) in the 117th Congress included funding for a Civilian Climate Corps, but such provisions were ultimately not enacted. In the 118th Congress, the Civilian Climate Corps for Justice Act ([H.R. 5572/S. 2838](#)) envisions serving up to 1.5 million corps members over the course of five fiscal years with an increased appropriation for AmeriCorps of more than \$100 billion to implement the creation of a Civilian Climate Corps.

Author Information

Adam K. Edgerton
Analyst in Education Policy

Mark K. DeSantis
Analyst in Natural Resources Policy

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