



# Improving Outcomes for California Conservation Corpsmembers

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FEBRUARY 2018

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# Executive Summary

## Background

**California Conservation Corps (CCC) Provides Work and Educational Opportunities.** The CCC provides about 1,450 young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 (and veterans to age 29) work experience and educational opportunities. Program participants, referred to as corpsmembers, enroll in the CCC for one year to work on projects that conserve and improve the environment. They also provide assistance during natural disasters. Work projects are sponsored by various governmental and nongovernmental entities that reimburse CCC for the work performed by corpsmembers.

**CCC Has a Multifaceted Mission.** The CCC's mission consists of multiple facets. For example, part of CCC's mission is to instill basic skills and a healthy work ethic in youth by building their character, self-esteem, and self-discipline. It is also to establish within California's youth a strong sense of civic responsibility and an understanding of the value of paid work. State law tasks CCC with blending academic and job skills training with personal growth opportunities in order to develop productive youth who can make substantial contributions as workers and citizens. State law further directs CCC to increase awareness of California's natural resources and improve them. In order to fulfill its mission, the CCC provides its corpsmembers with a range of work experience, job training, educational opportunities, and opportunities for volunteer services.

## LAO Assessment

**Program Goals Are Not Clearly Prioritized.** In order to carry out its multifaceted mission, the CCC pursues several program goals. Based upon our review of state laws, the CCC's goals fall into five main areas: (1) promoting basic work skills, encouraging a healthy work ethic, and providing employment-related training; (2) providing corpsmembers with educational opportunities; (3) increasing corpsmembers' and the public's environmental awareness; (4) performing individual public service; and (5) building corpsmembers' character and a strong sense of civic responsibility. All of the program goals are intended to be achieved within the broad context of conserving or developing natural resources. The CCC's authorizing statute does not clearly prioritize the program's goals.

**Funding Model Incentivizes Completion of Reimbursable Projects.** Funding for the CCC comes primarily from the General Fund and the Collins-Dugan Reimbursement Account (CDRA)—both fund sources typically make up around 45 percent of the CCC's total annual operating budget. The CDRA was established to accept funds received by the CCC in payment for work projects. Due to this funding structure, CCC generally prioritizes the completion of reimbursable work projects over other activities the corpsmembers could be engaged in. These work projects often support the goals of promoting basic work skills, protecting natural resources, increasing environmental awareness, and developing character, but do not always support the program's other goals such as completing individual community service, or providing educational opportunities.

**CCC Tracks Only Few Program Outcomes and Does Not Establish Targets.** The CCC tracks some in-service metrics while corpsmembers are in the program, such as corpsmembers' progress towards fulfilling training modules. However, CCC has a very limited ability to track key post-service outcomes for corpsmembers after they separate from the program. In addition, CCC has not established

targets for in-service and post-service performance measures. The lack of specific measurable targets makes it difficult to assess the CCC's success in meeting its goals for corpsmembers.

**CCC Already Collects Data Needed to Establish Targets for Some Objectives.** Some of the in-service data the CCC already collects could be used to establish outcome targets for a few of its in-service measures. For example, CCC collects data on corpsmember retention and would like to improve in this area (currently, only about one-fourth of corpsmembers complete one year of service). However, CCC has not established retention targets. While CCC has data to establish targets for a few in-service objectives, it does not currently have data to establish targets for most post-service objectives, such as increasing the number and/or percentage of corpsmembers who transition into higher education or employment upon leaving the CCC.

**Lack of Outcome Data Makes it Difficult to Evaluate Programs.** Better outcome data would help inform CCC's decisions about what program areas to focus on improving. For example, the lack of outcome data on the percentage of corpsmembers who transition into higher education and employment upon leaving the CCC makes it difficult to assess what steps should be taken to improve in these areas.

## LAO Recommendations

**Prioritize Program Goals.** We recommend the Legislature clarify in statute its prioritization of the CCC's program goals. The CCC's mission and corresponding goals have evolved over time with the adoption of new legislation. Clearer legislative prioritization of the CCC's goals would (1) provide the CCC with clearer guidance on how it should allocate its resources and corpsmembers' time, (2) facilitate the implementation of outcome measures that could be used by the Legislature to guide policy and budget decisions, and (3) improve the Legislature's ability to hold the CCC accountable.

**Align Funding With Program Goals.** We recommend the Legislature align the CCC's funding model with its decisions regarding the prioritization of the CCC's program goals. A change in what goals the Legislature prioritized could result in a significant shift in the mix of fund sources—particularly General Fund and CDRA—that would be needed to cover department costs.

**Require CCC to Adopt Performance Measures.** We recommend the Legislature require CCC to measure in-service and post-service outcomes for corpsmembers. These measures should be tied to the Legislature's prioritization of the CCC's goals and focus on measuring progress towards realizing the objectives that support the Legislature's highest priorities for CCC. For example, to the extent the Legislature prioritizes training for corpsmembers, we recommend the Legislature require CCC to measure the outcomes of its training programs. In addition to requiring CCC to measure in-service and post-service outcomes for corpsmembers, we recommend the Legislature require CCC to establish targets related to key outcomes.

**Require CCC to Provide Regular Reports on Performance Measures.** We recommend the Legislature require the CCC to provide periodic reporting on its progress at meeting targets for different performance measures. This could take the form of an annual written report the CCC would prepare for the Legislature or an online performance dashboard.

**Require a Report on How to Improve Corpsmember Retention.** Corpsmember retention has a broad impact on CCC's ability to achieve its goals. Given its importance, we recommend the Legislature require CCC to prepare a report by 2020 on how corpsmember retention can be improved. This report should include an evaluation of the main reasons why corpsmembers leave CCC prior to completing one year of service, as well as an assessment of the key factors that positively and negatively affect retention.

## INTRODUCTION

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The California Conservation Corps (CCC) provides young adults 18 to 25 years old a year of paid service to work on environmental projects and respond to natural and man-made disasters. Corpsmembers receive job training that prepares them to work in these areas. In addition, corpsmembers can advance their education while serving in the CCC through high school and community college classes and by earning scholarships. While serving in the CCC, corpsmembers either live in a residential center that provides room and board, or make their own housing arrangements and report to a nonresidential center. The department has a state operations budget of \$101 million in 2017-18 and enrolls about 1,450 corpsmembers at any given time.

Over the years, the department has struggled to measure how effective its programs are in terms of enhancing corpsmembers' employment opportunities and assisting them to achieve their educational goals. This is mainly due to the department's reliance on an antiquated data management system and manual

processes that has not allowed them to capture key data and use it to assess program performance. The department has recently taken steps to begin addressing some of these issues. For example, the CCC is currently implementing a new data management system called C3 that should help modernize many aspects of its operations and management.

In this report, we begin by providing background material on the types of training and educational opportunities the CCC offers and how the CCC is funded. We also discuss the CCC's goals and objectives for improving its training and work program and the corpsmember outcomes it currently tracks. Next, we assess the lack of corpsmember outcome data and the feasibility of establishing meaningful corpsmember outcome measures. We conclude by recommending steps for the Legislature to improve outcome measurements for corpsmembers and improve the overall performance of the department.

## BACKGROUND

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### CCC Provides Young Adults With Job Training, Work Experience, and Education

**California Established the First State Conservation Corps.** CCC is the oldest and largest state conservation corps in the nation. Since the CCC's establishment in 1976, programs that provide youth and young adults with opportunities to work on resource conservation projects have been established in more than 40 other states. Common reasons corpsmembers give for joining the CCC include wanting to complete high school, learn job skills, and overall self-improvement. At the present time, there are roughly 1,450 corpsmembers—about 75 percent men and 25 percent women. (Please see the box on page 4 to learn more about the CCC's history.)

**Maintains Multifaceted Mission.** The department's mission, which has been modified in state law over

the years, consists of multiple facets. For example, part of the department's mission is to instill basic skills and a healthy work ethic in youth by building their character, self-esteem, and self-discipline. It is also to establish within California's youth a strong sense of civic responsibility and an understanding of the value of paid work. State law tasks CCC with blending academic and job skills training with personal growth opportunities in order to develop productive youth who can make substantial contributions as workers and citizens. State law further directs CCC to increase awareness of California's natural resources and improve them. After one year of service, corpsmembers are expected to graduate from CCC with good work habits, positive attitudes, and broadened horizons. In order to fulfill its mission, the CCC provides its corpsmembers with a range of work experience, job training, educational opportunities, and opportunities for volunteer service, which we discuss in more detail below.

**Enrolls Corpsmembers Ages 18 to 25 and Veterans to Age 29.** The department enrolls young adults between the ages of 18 and 25, and veterans to age 29. It currently is funded for slots for about 1,450 full-time equivalent (FTE) corpsmembers. (This amount includes about 20 veterans enrolled in CCC working mainly in the areas of forestry or fisheries restoration.) Initial enrollment in the CCC is for one year, but corpsmembers may serve up to three years under certain circumstances (for example, corpsmembers promoted to crew leader positions).

**Requires Corpsmembers to Have an Individual Development Plan (IDP).** Corpsmember IDPs set short-term and long-term goals in each of the following areas: (1) work skills and conservation practices, (2) education and training programs, (3) personal development, and (4) career development. The plans are intended to help corpsmembers measure their progress towards achieving their developmental goals while they are in the CCC. The department's staff review corpsmembers progress towards meeting

their IDP goals with them during monthly performance evaluations.

**Performs Various Types of Work Projects.** The CCC is an entrepreneurial organization that contracts with federal, state, and local government agencies and nongovernmental entities for conservation and emergency response work in both urban and rural areas. Statewide, CCC crews—usually consisting of 10 to 15 corpsmembers—typically, undertake more than 2,000 projects annually. These projects include:

- **Resource Conservation Projects.** Under state law, state agencies considering the use of contracted labor for resource conservation projects must give priority to the CCC if the mission of the CCC and the nature of the state agency's project are substantially consistent. Projects are generally selected by CCC on the basis of their (1) environmental and natural resource benefits; (2) opportunities for community support, participation and funding; and (3) corpsmember education and job-training

## Brief History of the California Conservation Corps (CCC)

**Modeled on Federal Civilian Conservation Corps.** CCC is modeled after the federal Civilian Conservation Corps established by President Franklin Roosevelt with an executive order in 1933. The Civilian Conservation Corps was part of his New Deal program to combat high unemployment during the great depression by putting hundreds of thousands of young men to work on environmental projects. Corpsmen fought forest fires, planted trees, cleared and maintained access roads, re-seeded grazing lands, implemented soil-erosion controls, and built infrastructure such as bridges and campground facilities. Some corpsmen received supplemental basic education and vocational training while they served in the corps. Congress discontinued funding for the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1942, at the onset of World War II. It is estimated that nearly 3 million men, mostly between the ages of 18 and 25, served in the Civilian Conservation Corps.

**Established in 1976.** Governor Jerry Brown signed today's CCC into law in 1976 saying he envisioned the program as "a combination Jesuit seminary, Israeli kibbutz and Marine Corps boot camp." By the end of 1979, the CCC had opened 18 centers throughout the state. B.T. Collins, the CCC's director from 1979 to 1981, coined the CCC's motto: "hard work, low pay, and miserable conditions." When Governor Deukmejian took office in 1983, he signed legislation to eliminate the CCC's sunset clause and made it a permanent state department under the California Natural Resources Agency.

**Expanded Over Time.** In 1984, the Legislature passed a new law directing the CCC to develop nonresidential programs in urban areas and communities that have high levels of youth unemployment and a need for conservation work. Between 1984 and 1991, the CCC consolidated various residential centers and expanded the number of nonresidential centers. Today the CCC operates 8 residential centers and 16 nonresidential centers. More than 120,000 young men and women have been a part of the CCC over the course of its history.

value. **Figure 1** summarizes the main types of resource conservation projects the CCC has undertaken in recent years.

- **Emergency Response Work.** Corpsmembers respond to various kinds of disasters and emergencies. For example, the CCC assists state and federal agencies by supplying firefighting and fire camp support crews, and CCC assists the Department of Water Resources and local flood protection agencies by installing sand bags on river banks and levies. The amount of time corpsmembers spend on emergency response work varies from year to year depending on the number and intensity of emergencies in the state.

**Provides Mandatory Corpsmember Training.**

Throughout their service, corpsmembers are required to participate in training for at least three hours each week in addition to their normal work day. (High school classroom time and volunteer hours can be applied towards this requirement.) In addition, all corpsmembers are required to participate in the following training and service programs (which mostly apply towards the three-hour-per-week training requirement):

- **Corpsmember Orientation, Motivation, Education and Training (COMET).** During

their first two weeks in CCC, all trainees must complete the COMET curriculum, which includes modules on job safety, first aid, equal employment opportunity rights, sexual harassment prevention, violence prevention, life skills, effective communication techniques, and goal setting. In the second week of COMET, corpsmembers receive additional training that may include modules on emergency camp support (for fire camps) and flood fighting.

- **Conservation Awareness Program (CAP).** This program is a mandatory 12-hour course that includes modules on (1) the food chain, (2) the water cycle, (3) being an environmentally conscious consumer and citizen, and (4) debating environmental issues. In addition to coursework, corpsmembers must design and complete an eight-hour environmentally focused volunteer project.
- **Community and the Environment Competency (CEC).** All corpsmembers must (1) complete 48 hours of volunteer service (no more than 16 hours may be performed at a CCC facility) and (2) attend at least half of available CCC community meetings and/or serve on a Corpsmember Advisory Board.
- **Career Development Training (CDT).** This training is a mandatory 36-hour course that

**Figure 1**

**Major Resources Conservation Projects**

| Project Type                               | Corpsmember Work   | Center   |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Energy conservation</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building energy use surveys.</li> <li>• Install basic energy-efficiency improvement measures, such as lighting replacement.</li> </ul>  | Fresno, Norwalk, Sacramento, San Jose, Vista   |
| <b>Fisheries and watershed restoration</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watershed assessments.</li> <li>• Instream and watershed restoration activities.</li> </ul>   | Camarillo, Fortuna, San Luis Obispo, Ukiah   |
| <b>Forest health</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fuel load reduction.</li> <li>• Tree plantings.</li> <li>• Other work intended to improve forest health and reestablish natural conditions for native flora and fauna.</li> </ul> | Auburn, Chico, Fortuna, Greenwood, Redding, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Tahoe, Ukiah |
| <b>Trail work</b>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build and maintain trails in both state and national parks and forests.</li> </ul>  | All locations  |
| <b>Wildland fire</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial response to wildfires.</li> <li>• Cleanup activities after fires are contained.</li> <li>• Fire camp support crews.</li> </ul>  | Auburn, Butte, Camarillo, Fortuna Redding, San Diego, Tahoe, Ukiah                                   |

prepares corpsmembers for employment or continuing education following their CCC service. The curriculum is designed to teach corpsmembers how to assess their job skills, prepare resumes and cover letters, organize their job search, and succeed at interviews and at work.

**Provides Specialized Job-Related Training for Some Corpsmembers.** The department also provides specialized job-related training that can lead to professional certifications for certain industries. For example, CCC offers training for corpsmembers to earn a Firefighter I Certification that is typically needed to obtain employment with state and local firefighting agencies. In addition, corpsmembers serving in internships with state, local, and federal government agencies might receive specialized training from those agencies. The department’s training is usually linked

to preparing corpsmembers for the types of projects they are most likely to work on, such as energy conservation. When applicants submit their application to CCC, they are encouraged to identify the types of projects they would like to work on and specialized training they are interested in receiving. The department tries to accommodate applicants by assigning them to a center that offers the type of training that interests them. **Figure 2** summarizes the primary types of specialized training CCC offers.

**Educational Opportunities.** Corpsmembers may attend high school and community college classes, as well as earn scholarships. Specifically, they can pursue the following educational opportunities:

- **High School Diploma.** The department requires corpsmembers without a high school diploma to enroll in high school and attend a minimum of ten hours of classroom instruction each week. Two

**Figure 2**

**California Conservation Corps Primary Specialized Trainings**

| Training  | Certification | Description   |
|---|---------------|---|
| Basic chainsaw operation  | ✓             | Safe cutting techniques, saw maintenance, and identification of hazards. (Does not qualify participants to fall trees.)   |
| Culinary arts   | ✓             | Culinary techniques, culinary sanitation, and nutrition (taught at residential center kitchens).  |
| Energy Corps  | ✓             | How to survey a whole building to identify energy efficiency projects and how to perform simple retrofits, such as lighting replacement, lighting occupancy detectors, and “smart” power strips.    |
| Firefighting  | ✓             | Firefighter safety and survival, first responder medical training, introduction to Incident Command Systems, and other topics consistent with state and federal fire fighter training requirements. |
| First responder   | ✓             | Techniques to assess a medical emergency, ensure an injured party has sufficient airway to breathe, monitor vital signs, and prepare and move an injured party.                                     |
| Fisheries restoration worker                                    | —             | Advanced watershed assessment procedures and how to restore streams and upslope areas.  |
| Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response               | ✓             | Post emergency response activities and cleanups/remediation for various types of sites involving hazardous materials such as oil spills.  |
| Sawyer training   | ✓             | Safety procedures and best practices for falling trees. (Also referred to as faller training.)  |
| Specialized vehicle training and industrial truck certification | ✓             | Operation of industrial trucks, forklifts, tractors, bucket trucks, and certain other vehicles.   |
| Statewide trails program  | —             | Building and maintenance of trails.   |



charter schools provide the CCC's high school education program. Over the past five years, roughly three out of every ten corpsmembers did not have a high school diploma or equivalent when they enrolled in the CCC. Over that period, an average of about 200 corpsmembers earned a high school degree each year (not including General Educational Development [GED] tests, which CCC does not track).

- **Community College Classes.** The department partners with community colleges to provide credit and noncredit classes to corpsmembers. In some cases, these community college courses are part of the training corpsmembers receive to prepare them for the work they will do in the CCC. For example, corpsmembers training to be firefighters in Butte enroll in an Emergency Medical Training course at Butte College. The department also introduces corpsmembers to academic and career technical education opportunities at local community colleges through tours and financial aid workshops.
- **Scholarships Based on Eligibility.** The department offers corpsmembers the opportunity to earn a \$2,000 state Brad Duncan Scholarship that can be used for enrollment in a post-CCC academic, vocational, or apprenticeship program. (Corpsmembers who remain in the CCC longer than one year may earn up to \$6,000.) As shown in **Figure 3**, CCC has provided over 1,900 scholarships worth about \$1.5 million over the past five years. Eligibility for the scholarship is based on (1) completion of one year in the CCC and a minimum of 1,700 paid hours; (2) completion of CAP, CDT, and CEC; and (3) receiving at least three satisfactory monthly performance evaluations. In addition, corpsmembers can earn federal AmeriCorps Education Award Program scholarships of up to \$5,900 per year.

## CCC Funding Primarily Comes From Two Main Sources

**Figure 4** (see next page) shows CCC state operating expenditures for the prior year, current year, and budget year. The 2018-19 budget proposal includes \$106 million for CCC operations. (In addition, the budget includes \$14.1 million for capital outlay projects.) Funding for CCC historically has come from two primary sources—the General Fund and the Collins-Dugan Reimbursement Account (CDRA)—as well as some funding from special funds and bond funds.

**General Fund.** The Legislature appropriates General Fund support to the CCC through the annual budget process. The General Fund supports almost half of the CCC's operations budget. (This excludes Proposition 98 funding for charter schools that provide high school classes to corpsmembers—these funds totaled about \$13 million in 2016-17.) The average General Fund cost per corpsmember slot (including administrative support costs) is estimated to be about \$36,000 in 2018-19.

**Collins-Dugan Reimbursement Account.** This account was established by legislation in 1994 to accept funds received by the CCC in payment for work projects. The money in the CDRA is continuously appropriated to the CCC and may be used for the following purposes: (1) program expansion to hire more corpsmembers, (2) enhancement of corpsmember education and educational support services, (3) enhancement of equipment used by corpsmembers in projects, and (4) program support.

**Special Funds.** The department also receives some special funds for completing certain types of projects. For example, in recent years, CCC has received funding from the State Responsibility Area Fund for completing forestry projects. (Recent legislation shifted these activities to be funded from cap-and-trade auction revenues.)

**Figure 3**

### Brad Duncan Scholarships Awarded and Disbursed

|                             | 2012-13   | 2013-14   | 2014-15   | 2015-16   | 2016-17   | Totals      |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| Scholarships awarded        | 375       | 327       | 387       | 439       | 405       | 1,933       |
| Scholarship funds disbursed | \$345,591 | \$324,011 | \$285,096 | \$257,299 | \$253,757 | \$1,465,754 |

**Figure 4**

**State Operations Expenditures<sup>a</sup>**

(Dollars in Millions)

|                                     | 2016-17<br>Actual | 2017-18<br>Estimated | 2018-19<br>Proposed |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Fund Source</b>                  |                   |                      |                     |
| General Fund                        | \$42.6            | \$45.1               | \$52.3              |
| Collins-Dugan Reimbursement Account | 40.1              | 44.8                 | 39.9                |
| Special and bond funds              | 10.4              | 11.4                 | 13.7                |
| <b>Totals</b>                       | <b>\$93.1</b>     | <b>\$101.2</b>       | <b>\$105.9</b>      |
| <b>Percent</b>                      |                   |                      |                     |
| General Fund                        | 46%               | 45%                  | 49%                 |
| Collins-Dugan Reimbursement Account | 43                | 44                   | 38                  |
| Special and bond funds              | 11                | 11                   | 13                  |

<sup>a</sup> Excludes capital outlay.

**Most Corpsmembers Assigned to Nonresidential Centers.**

About 56 percent of the roughly 1,450 corpsmembers report to nonresidential centers. The typical nonresidential center includes classroom space and administrative offices and normally serves between 30 to 60 corpsmembers. Corpsmembers are responsible for providing their own living arrangements in the surrounding communities and report to the nonresidential centers for work, classes, and other CCC activities.

About 44 percent of corpsmembers live in residential centers. The typical residential center includes a dormitory, dining

room and kitchen, administrative offices, recreational facilities, classroom space, and warehouse space. Each residential center normally houses between 80 to 100 corpsmembers. In addition, corpsmembers from nonresidential centers sometimes are brought to residential centers for training and other events because these centers are better equipped to support events attended by large numbers of corpsmembers.

**Governor Proposes Major Expansion of Residential Centers.** The Governor’s 2018-19 budget proposes a major expansion of the CCC residential center program. The administration proposes to spend \$185 million from the General Fund and lease revenue bond funds over five years to complete the construction of four new residential centers. Under this plan, the total number of corpsmembers is projected to increase by 350. This includes capacity for 35 additional corpsmembers at Ukiah when the existing facility is replaced. The department would shift from a primarily nonresidential center based-program to a primarily residential center based-program, with the share of corpsmembers in residential centers increasing from 44 percent to 58 percent.

**Bond Funds.** Some bonds allocate funds directly to CCC. For example, Proposition 84 (2006) provided \$45 million to the CCC and local conservation corps for resource conservation and restoration projects and for other specified purposes consistent with the CCC’s mission. Other bonds encourage the use of the CCC and local conservation corps to implement their provisions. For example, Proposition 1 (2014 water bond) specified that for restoration and ecosystem protection projects, the services of the CCC (or one of the several conservation corps licensed by CCC but established and administered by local nonprofits and agencies) had to be used whenever feasible by government agencies contracting for such work.

**CCC Operates Residential Centers and Nonresidential Centers**

As shown in **Figure 5**, CCC operates 8 residential centers and 16 nonresidential centers throughout the state. The residential and nonresidential centers are grouped into 14 districts for administrative purposes. When prospective corpsmembers apply to CCC they may express a preference for a residential center or nonresidential center. The department tries to accommodate the prospective corpsmember’s preference. In addition, CCC generally prioritizes applicants who are homeless or in unstable housing situations for placements in residential centers.

**Some Program Metrics Are Tracked**

The department tracks some in-service program metrics while corpsmembers are serving in CCC, but has a very limited ability to track key post-service outcomes for corpsmembers after they separate from

CCC. Notably, CCC is in the process of implementing a new data collection and information technology system, known as C3, that will facilitate the collection of program metrics in the future.

**Certain In-Service Metrics Tracked.** While corpsmembers are serving in the CCC, the department tracks their progress towards meeting program requirements and the corpsmembers' goals as outlined

**Figure 5**

**California Conservation Corps Residential and Nonresidential Facilities**



in their IDPs. For example, for each corpsmember the department tracks (1) the number of hours worked, (2) progress towards fulfilling mandatory training modules and specialized training courses, (3) participation in high school education, (4) progress towards earning scholarship benefits, and (5) progress towards successfully completing leadership training and promoting into leadership positions.

The department also maintains data on corpsmember retention. About one-fourth of corpsmembers complete one year of service. Many corpsmembers only stay in CCC for a few weeks or months. In 2015-16, CCC had about 3,500 corpsmembers that participated in the program—for various lengths of stay—and filled about 1,500 FTE corpsmember slots. As a result, the department has to recruit at least two new corpsmembers per year to keep each corpsmember slot filled over the course of the year. The department also maintains some data on why corpsmembers separate from the program. In 2015-16, CCC reports that (1) 20 percent of corpsmembers left for negative reasons, such as absence without leave or misconduct; (2) 15 percent left for personal reasons, such as a medical issue or family responsibilities; (3) 15 percent

left for positive reasons, such as accepting employment, returning to school, or joining the military; and (4) the remaining 50 percent left for programmatic reasons, such as completing a year of service.

**Most Post-Service Performance Measures Not Tracked.** The only post-service metric that the department tracks is corpsmember use of their Brad-Duncan Scholarship awards. This metric provides some insight into the number of corpsmembers that go on to pursue higher education, apprenticeships, and vocational education after separating from the CCC. However, CCC does not track key post-service data such as employment status or earnings that would provide a broader picture of outcomes for former corpsmembers.

**Strategies and Objectives to Guide Program Improvement.** Based on discussions with CCC, it is in the process of identifying areas where the program can be improved and of developing a strategic plan to guide program improvement over the next several years. **Figure 6** summarizes some of the program improvement strategies and selected objectives under consideration by CCC as part of its program improvement and strategic plan development process.

**Figure 6**

**CCC Draft Program Improvement Strategies and Selected Objectives**

| Strategies  | Selected Objectives  |
|---|--|
| Expand corpsmember enrollment and pathways to meaningful employment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximize opportunities for corpsmembers to receive education and training benefits from work projects.</li> <li>• Increase percentage of corpsmembers who make significant progress toward high school diplomas, certifications, and/or associate degrees.</li> <li>• Increase percentage of corpsmembers who successfully complete leadership training and promote into leadership positions.</li> <li>• Increase the number and/or percentage of corpsmembers who transition into higher education and/or employment upon leaving the CCC.</li> </ul> |
| Strengthen operations and infrastructure at energy hubs             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish and operate residential Energy Corps training facility.</li> <li>• Construct and manage warehouse space at northern and southern California hubs.</li> </ul>  |
| Expand and grow to 16 residential centers statewide                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish and maintain with Legislators the prioritization for funding of CCC residential centers.</li> <li>• Re-establish geographic parity of residential programs whereby there are residential centers within the most heavily populated areas of the state.</li> <li>• Demonstrate correlation of expansion of residential facilities with expanded enrollment and increased reimbursement opportunities.</li> </ul>   |
| Divest in non-residential centers                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Populate new residential centers in currently underserved areas and increase the number of corpsmembers at residential centers that are converted from non-residential center operations.</li> <li>• Expand corpsmember positions in specific work and training areas.</li> </ul>   |

## MULTIPLE PROGRAM GOALS AND LACK OF OUTCOME DATA MAKE PROGRAM ASSESSMENT DIFFICULT

In reviewing CCC's goals and operations, we find that the existence of multiple program goals presents programmatic challenges for CCC. We also find that CCC's funding model incentivizes the CCC to prioritize the basic work skills corpsmembers develop while working on projects over the program's other goals. In addition, the lack of measurable programmatic objectives or collection of outcome data on how the CCC performs in key areas makes it difficult to evaluate the program's performance. We discuss these findings in greater detail below.

### Program Goals Are Not Clearly Prioritized

#### *Statute Establishes Main Program Goals . . .*

In order to carry out the multifaceted mission established for CCC under state law, the department pursues several program goals. Based upon our review of the state laws governing the CCC, its goals fall into five main areas: (1) promoting basic work skills (such as being punctual and communicating effectively), encouraging a healthy work ethic, and providing employment-related training; (2) providing corpsmembers with educational opportunities; (3) increasing corpsmembers' and the public's environmental awareness; (4) performing individual public service; and (5) building corpsmembers' character and a strong sense of civic responsibility. All of the program goals are intended to be achieved within the broad context of conserving or developing natural resources.

*. . . But Does Not Clearly Prioritize Among Program Goals.* The department's authorizing statute does not clearly prioritize the program's five main goals. One section of the statute indicates the Legislature's intent for the CCC to place greater emphasis on teaching basic work skills and building corpsmember character than on increasing environmental awareness and improving natural resources. However, state law currently does not provide any further clarification about how these various goals should be prioritized. For example, it does not specify whether teaching basic work skills or building character should be the

highest priority. Nor does current law specify where providing educational opportunities should fall in the list of priorities.

*Unclear Priorities Makes Program Administration Challenging.* Without a clear prioritization of goals, CCC administrators must weigh competing priorities. In particular, the existence of multiple—seemingly coequal goals—sometimes makes it difficult to prioritize among the different activities corpsmembers engage in. For example, the CCC must prioritize between the amount of time corpsmembers spend working on projects that help them to develop basic job skills and the amount of time they spend attending high school or community college classes.

In addition, a lack of clear prioritization makes it difficult for CCC to know what outcomes are the most important for administrators to focus on. For example, if the primary goal of the program were clearly stated as providing corpsmembers with basic work skills, then assessments of the program's performance would first focus on outcomes such as how often corpsmembers (1) arrive punctually for work, (2) are appropriately dressed and outfitted for work, (3) communicate effectively with supervisors and coworkers, and (4) take responsibility for their actions. Alternatively, if the primary goal of the program were clearly stated as providing corpsmembers with educational opportunities, then assessments of the program's performance would first focus on outcomes such as (1) progress made towards achieving a high school diploma and (2) community college credits earned.

### Funding Model Incentivizes Certain Activities

*Funding Model Creates Focus on Completion of Reimbursable Projects.* As described above, reimbursements provide about half of CCC's funding. Due to this funding structure, CCC generally prioritizes the completion of reimbursable work projects over other activities the corpsmembers could be engaged in. These projects often support the goals of promoting basic work skills, protecting natural resources, increasing environmental awareness, and developing

character, but do not always support the other goals of completing individual community service, or providing educational opportunities.

As a general rule, the CCC needs to keep corpsmembers working on projects about 70 percent of the time in order to earn sufficient reimbursement revenues to keep the CCC from running a budgetary shortfall. Residential centers and nonresidential centers have annual targets for generating reimbursement revenues and are responsible for marketing the CCC's services to prospective clients. In some cases, CCC crews may be short-handed due to corpsmember illness or other reasons. When this occurs, corpsmembers may spend 80 percent or more of their time working on projects in order to meet reimbursement targets.

***Need for Reimbursements Limits Ability to Support Other Goals.*** The trade-off created by the CCC's reimbursement-dependent funding model is that it limits the amount of time corpsmembers have to spend on other program goals, such as performing community service and pursuing educational opportunities. Based on our conversations with the department, it would like to expand the training and educational opportunities it offers to all corpsmembers to help make them more competitive in the job market when they separate from the CCC. CCC staff at certain residential and nonresidential centers are qualified to provide some types of training to corpsmembers. However, CCC indicates that in order to expand the types of training it offers, and the availability of such training, it would need to contract with qualified trainers from outside the CCC resulting in additional program costs. The CCC would like to offer:

- ***Driver's License Training.*** The department would like to provide all corpsmembers an opportunity to participate in training to obtain their driver's license. According to the CCC, many corpsmembers lack a driver's license when they arrive, something that can be an impediment to obtaining employment upon leaving the CCC.
- ***Wilderness Emergency Medical Technician Training.*** The department would like to provide all corpsmembers who are training to be firefighters with Wilderness Emergency Medical Technician training.
- ***Advanced Tree-Faller Training.*** The department would like to provide advanced tree-faller training to corpsmembers at certain centers that focus on forestry work.
- ***Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) Training.*** The department would like to expand the availability of HAZWOPER training. Generally, it is only provided to corpsmembers who work on a project where it is a requirement, and the project sponsor agrees to pay for the corpsmembers' training.

According to CCC, providing more training to corpsmembers—at the expense of having them spend less time working on projects—generates two types of budgetary pressures. First, it reduces the amount of revenues generated by corpsmembers. Second, CCC would most likely have to pay for the training, which is an additional cost to the program.

## **CCC Lacks Specific Targets for Many Performance Measures**

***Metrics Do Not Include Targets.*** CCC has not established targets for in-service and post-service performance measures. As we discuss below, the lack of specific, measurable targets makes it very difficult to assess the CCC's success in meeting its goals for corpsmembers. (As previously indicated, the department is currently in the process of developing a strategic plan, which could contain such information.) For example, one of CCC's in-service objectives identified in its draft strategic plan is to increase the number of corpsmembers who successfully complete leadership training and promote into leadership positions. To effectively measure its progress towards achieving this objective, CCC would need to (1) determine the percentage of corpsmembers who currently complete leadership training and promote into leadership positions, (2) establish a specific target identifying what percentage of corpsmembers should be promoted, and (3) establish a timeframe for achieving the target. Moreover, these measurable targets should be accompanied by an identification of the steps the CCC will take to improve corpsmember outcomes. However, at this time the department has not established such targets and a plan for meeting them.

Similarly, CCC has not established target retention rates for its corpsmembers. This is problematic given the likely importance of retention for other program outcomes, including both in-service and post-service outcomes. For example, the less time corpsmembers spend in the program, the less likely they are to achieve academic and professional goals, such as earning high school diplomas, certifications, and scholarships. This, in turn, may affect their ability to continue their education and/or find employment when they separate from CCC. There are also operational costs associated with low retention, such as for (1) outreach to recruit new corpsmembers, (2) reviewing applications and interviewing candidates, and (3) providing COMET to new corpsmembers. Moreover, the more turnover of corpsmembers experienced by the department, the more difficult it is for the department to staff resource conservation projects (which can also impact the amount of reimbursements CCC is able to receive).

***CCC Already Collects Data Needed to Establish Targets for Some Metrics.*** Some of the in-service data the CCC already collects could be used to establish

outcome targets for a few of its in-service measures. For example, the CCC collects data on the number of corpsmembers who successfully complete leadership training and are promoted to leadership positions. The department could use this data to establish a baseline for the percentage of corpsmembers who historically have promoted to leadership positions. Based upon this information it could set a target for increasing the percentage of promotees and measure progress towards achieving the target.

The CCC also collects some data on retention of corpsmembers. For example, only about one-fourth of corpsmembers complete one year of service. The department could use data to establish a baseline for corpsmembers leaving CCC prior to one year of service and as a basis for measuring its progress towards improving retention. (For further discussion of the possible causes of low retention in the CCC, please see the nearby box.)

***But Lacks Baseline Data to Establish Targets for Other Objectives.*** While the CCC has data to establish targets for a few in-service objectives, it does

## Several Factors Might Cause Low Corpsmember Retention Rates

In discussions with California Conservation Corps (CCC) administrators, they indicated that there were several potential causes for the low retention of corpsmembers. Below, we highlight a few of the main factors that contribute to the high percentage of corpsmembers who separate from the CCC prior to completing a year of service.

***CCC Actively Recruits At-Risk Youth.*** Under state law, CCC is required to develop nonresidential programs in urban communities with high levels of youth unemployment. It is also required to adopt procedures for recruiting high school dropouts from the neighborhoods where these programs are located. CCC administrators indicated that corpsmembers living in an urban area and commuting to nonresidential centers are more likely to be sidetracked from their CCC responsibilities by events in their community than their counterparts living in residential centers. According to CCC staff, the extent to which actively recruiting at-risk youth affects CCC retention rates is unclear.

***High Staff-to-Corpsmember Ratios Might Affect Retention.*** Conservationist I positions are the staff who most directly supervise work crews and often act as mentors and counselors to corpsmembers. Some CCC administrators have argued that richer staffing levels might improve retention by allowing Conservationist I to spend more time working with corpsmembers. CCC tries to maintain a ratio of at least one Conservationist I position for every 15 corpsmembers.

***Corpsmembers Might Leave to Pursue Other Opportunities.*** According to CCC administrators, some corpsmembers separate from CCC service to pursue other opportunities that are consistent with the CCC's goals. For example, some corpsmembers separate from CCC before they complete a year of service in order to attend college. Others separate because they have been offered a job that pays higher wages than the CCC. In these cases, CCC does not necessarily view the corpsmember's early separation from the CCC as a bad outcome for the corpsmember or program.

not currently have data to establish targets for most post-service objectives, such as increasing the number and/or percentage of corpsmembers who transition into higher education or employment upon leaving the CCC. Historically, CCC has not attempted to systematically survey corpsmembers after their service to assess their subsequent employment or education status because it is difficult to stay in contact with corpsmembers after they end their service.

### **Lack of Outcome Data Makes It Difficult to Evaluate Programs**

**Data Would Inform Operational Decisions.** Better outcome data would help inform CCC's decisions about what program areas to focus on improving. For example, the lack of outcome data on the percentage of corpsmembers who transition into higher education and employment upon leaving the CCC makes it difficult to assess what steps, if any, the CCC should take to improve in these areas. If the CCC had data showing that it had a low success rate at transitioning corpsmembers into employment, this might suggest the CCC should focus more attention and resources on improving its job placement assistance and training.

**Better Data Would Inform Capital Outlay Decisions.** Better data would also help inform CCC's capital outlay decisions. There might be benefits to shifting from a primarily nonresidential center model

to a primarily residential center model. However, we do not know that such a shift would better achieve program goals because there is such limited data on how residential center corpsmember in-service and post-service outcomes compare to outcomes for their nonresidential center colleagues. Furthermore, any such benefits would have to be weighed against the significant additional capital outlay and operational costs of providing corpsmember slots in a residential center setting compared to nonresidential slots.

**New C3 Data Collection and Reporting System Will Help CCC Track Key Data.** In the spring of 2017, CCC implemented the first modules of its new C3 data system, which is designed to more systematically track a number of administrative and programmatic information. Specifically, certain core functions including administration of corpsmember pay and limited project management became operational. In discussions with CCC staff, they indicated that a corpsmember development module that will allow them to better track corpsmember's progress towards meeting the goals established in their IDPs is planned for launch in 2019-20, contingent on funding availability. However, none of the corpsmember modules that would allow CCC to track outcomes such as academic advancement or progress towards completing training have been implemented yet. Once the corpsmember development module is implemented it will make it easier for CCC to assess corpsmember outcomes.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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In order to address the above challenges, we recommend below steps the Legislature could take to improve outcomes for corpsmembers. Specifically, we recommend the Legislature clearly prioritize the program's goals and align its funding to support the Legislature's highest-priority goals. We further recommend the Legislature require the CCC to develop outcome measures for high-priority goals and report on these outcomes.

### **Prioritize Program Goals**

The department's existing core statute loosely prioritizes some goals but does not specify how others are to be prioritized. The lack of clear prioritization gives the CCC broad discretion over which of the program's

goals to emphasize. However, the current funding model that requires a high level of reimbursements effectively incentivizes work-related goals because it requires CCC to generate funding by completing work projects. In practice, this means corpsmembers spend the bulk of their time working on projects in order to generate revenue, as well as developing basic work skills within the overall context of conserving natural resources.

Accordingly, we recommend the Legislature clarify in statute its prioritization of the CCC's program goals. As noted earlier in this analysis, the CCC's mission, and corresponding goals, have evolved over time with the adoption of new legislation. Clearer legislative



prioritization of the CCC's goals would serve three main purposes.

- First, it would provide the CCC with clearer guidance on how it should allocate its resources and corpsmembers' time. (CCC should incorporate the Legislature's priorities into its strategic plan.)
- Second, it would facilitate the implementation of outcome measures that could be used by the Legislature to guide policy and budget decisions.
- Third, it would improve the Legislature's ability to hold the CCC accountable for achieving results in the areas that are of the greatest importance to the Legislature.

As the Legislature weighs prioritization of CCC's goals, there are several factors it might wish to consider. For example, the Legislature might want to consider how CCC fits into the broader continuum of government programs that provide similar opportunities for young adults to earn high school degrees and receive job training. Community college districts receive ongoing Proposition 98 funds for credit and noncredit courses in career and technical education (CTE). Community colleges also receive Proposition 98 funding to provide regionally focused CTE and workforce programs leading to certificates, degrees, and other credentials. Looking at the CCC within the broader context of all of the major job training and educational programs throughout the state would help the Legislature to identify areas where CCC is best positioned to provide training and educational opportunities. The Legislature might also want to consider factors that make CCC unique and different from other work training and educational programs. One factor that sets the CCC apart is that it allows corpsmembers to pursue multiple goals—including work training and education—all under the auspices of a single program. Another factor that sets the CCC apart from other state programs is its focus on conservation and the environmental issues.

### **Align Funding Model Based on Prioritization of Program Goals**

We recommend the Legislature align the CCC's funding model with its decisions regarding the prioritization of CCC's program goals. A change in

what goals the Legislature prioritized could result in a significant shift in the mix of fund sources—particularly General Fund and reimbursements—that would be needed to cover department costs. For example, if the Legislature wanted to increase the amount of community college classes provided to corpsmembers, there would likely be additional costs (and a corresponding reduction in reimbursements) as corpsmembers spent more time in the classroom, and less time working on projects that generated reimbursement revenue. Similarly, if the Legislature wanted to increase the amount of training corpsmembers receive by expanding access to existing training programs and/or adding new ones, there would likely be additional General Fund costs to pay for the training (and reduction in reimbursements). Thus, any shift away from the CCC's current practice of prioritizing work towards a greater emphasis on education, training, or some other goal such as performing individual public service is likely to require a funding increase.

### **Adopt Performance Measures and Outcome Reporting**

***Assess Outcomes During and After Participation in CCC.*** We recommend the Legislature require CCC to measure in-service and post-service outcomes for corpsmembers. These outcome measures should be tied to the Legislature's prioritization of the CCC's goals and focus on measuring progress towards realizing the objectives that support the Legislature's highest priorities for CCC.

For example, to the extent the Legislature prioritizes professional training for corpsmembers, we recommend the Legislature require CCC to measure the outcomes of its training programs. For each professional training program, the department could measure the number of corpsmembers who (1) successfully complete the training and earn the relevant certification, (2) find post-service employment in the areas of their CCC training, and (3) earn post-service income. The department could also track the reasons why corpsmembers fail to complete each training, which could provide insights into barriers to success.

Alternatively, to the extent the Legislature prioritizes educational programs, we would recommend the Legislature require CCC to emphasize measuring the performance of its educational programs. Such

a prioritization could be accomplished by expanding corpsmembers options to attend community college classes and/or placing greater emphasis on corpsmembers completing their high school diploma during their CCC service. Education outcome measures could include (1) gains in math and reading levels, (2) percentage of corpsmembers who earn a high school diploma or GED during or after CCC service, or (3) percentage of corpsmembers who earn college credits and post-secondary credentials after CCC. These in-service performance measures would allow the Legislature to monitor CCC's progress towards improving corpsmember high school graduation rates.

To the extent possible, post-service outcome measures should be consistent with common measures used to assess the state's other workforce education and training programs. These measures include (1) percentage of program participants who receive a recognized postsecondary credential or high school diploma or its recognized equivalent after separating from the program, (2) percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second and fourth quarters after separating, and (3) median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after separating. (For more information on how such information is reported, see our 2016 report *Improving Workforce Education and Training Data in California*.) Ideally, data on post-service outcomes could also be used to evaluate in-service programs, such as professional training, by assessing post-service success rates for corpsmembers who participate in and complete specific in-service programs.

**Establish Targets.** In addition to requiring CCC to measure in-service and post-service outcomes for corpsmembers, we recommend the Legislature require CCC to establish targets related to key outcomes. For example, if a desired outcome is improving the percentage of corpsmembers who are in unsubsidized employment after leaving the program, the Legislature would want to set a desired target level. That is, it might want to have at least 50 percent of corpsmembers in such jobs within one year of leaving the CCC. If CCC was currently at 20 percent, then it could also set tentative timelines for reaching the target, along with intermediate target goals.

**Require Regular Reports on Performance Measures.** We recommend the Legislature require the CCC to provide periodic reporting on its progress at meeting targets for different performance measures for its programs. This could take the form of an annual written report the CCC would prepare for the Legislature or an online performance dashboard. The data provided would help policy makers hold CCC accountable for achieving programmatic goals that reflect the Legislature's priorities. Moreover, reporting would provide young adults with information they can use to make decisions about whether the CCC or other workforce development programs and educational opportunities would best meet their needs. Since the department is currently in process of implementing C3, reports including thorough outcome information might not be available until after 2019-20. CCC should be developing C3 with these reporting requirements in mind.

**Require Report on How to Improve Retention.** Corpsmember retention has a broad impact on CCC's ability to achieve its goals. Given its importance, we recommend the Legislature require CCC to prepare a report by 2020 on how corpsmember retention can be improved. This report should include an evaluation of the main reasons why corpsmembers leave CCC prior to completing one year of service, as well as an assessment of the key factors that positively and negatively affect retention. For example, this could include evaluation of retention outcomes for recruits with different socioeconomic or educational backgrounds. The department could also assess how placement in a residential center versus a nonresidential center affects retention. The department could also evaluate how retention is affected by other factors, such as staffing ratios, specific location, and work assignment. The report should also identify options to improve corpsmember retention and determine whether these options could be implemented within the CCC's existing resources or whether the CCC would require additional resources to implement them.

## CONCLUSION

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The state has both an interest and a responsibility to monitor the performance of the CCC to ensure it is effectively serving corpsmembers. Our recommendations to prioritize the CCC's goals and implement outcome measures would increase the state's ability to monitor the program's performance and hold the CCC accountable for achieving results.

It would also provide useful information to help guide state policy and funding decisions and ultimately result in better outcomes for corpsmembers and the state. Given that C3 will expand the department's data capabilities, we think now is an opportune time for the Legislature to act to require CCC to develop targets and performance measures.

## **LAO PUBLICATIONS**

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This report was prepared by Shawn Martin and reviewed by Brian Brown. The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) is a nonpartisan office that provides fiscal and policy information and advice to the Legislature.

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