



Building Pathways into Clean Energy Jobs: Leveraging Service Years in Department of Energy's New Workforce Programs Funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act

The Department of Energy will soon be standing up three new workforce programs outlined in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, including the Energy Auditor Training (EAT) program and Career Skills Training (CST) program, as well as a new similar program in the Inflation Reduction Act, the State-Based Home Energy Efficiency Contractor Training Program. Service Year Alliance believes these three new programs offer an opportunity for Dept. of Energy to leverage national service as a method to put young people on pathways into the energy sector, opening up opportunities for groups that may be currently underrepresented. These two major pieces of legislation offer resources and a window of opportunity to think intentionally about how to diversify and strengthen talent pipelines into the energy sector, and national service is well-positioned to be one tool in the toolbox to training the next generation, opening up job opportunities to diverse communities, and meeting talent needs today and into the future

Service Year Alliance's Vision for National Service Partnerships at the Department of Energy

Service Year Alliance's mission is to make a year of paid, full-time service — a service year — an opportunity and expectation for all young Americans. We are a national nonprofit organization that seeks to increase national service opportunities, in line with President Biden's goal to [expand national service partnerships](#) across federal agencies. Service years provide high-quality postsecondary pathways into apprenticeships and high-quality jobs, including in the climate resilience and clean energy space.

In addition to our efforts to expand and strengthen the service year ecosystem, we also provide supportive infrastructure and resources for service year programs on the ground — many of which could serve as models for the Department's new workforce programs. Our team leads a [learning cohort of climate-focused service year programs](#) that seek to provide on-ramps to clean energy and resilience jobs for their corps members. This cohort is publishing an energy efficiency blueprint in spring 2023 which could be useful for the Department to understand how existing service year programs offer workforce development opportunities in residential and public building weatherization spaces. This forthcoming blueprint can serve as a guide for organizations and other entities that may be looking to stand up new service year programs to support workforce development and enhance talent pipelines in the sector.

Workforce Training Strategies Unique to National Service

Energy efficiency service year programming mobilizes service year corps members in service activities that are intended to reduce energy consumption in either residential housing or public buildings. These service activities can be both *direct* (e.g. installing insulation, replacing inefficient lighting, providing education or energy audits to residents, etc.) or *indirect* (e.g. developing an energy reduction plan, coordinating partners, conducting community outreach, etc.). Programs may either be team-based or use a single member placement model, where either an entire team, or just an individual corps member are placed at a local nonprofit or public agency.

Energy efficiency service year programs have a multifaceted impact including: generating cost savings for residents and/or taxpayers through both weatherization and education; reducing local carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions; improving the health and safety of residents and the community; reducing the strain on energy production facilities; increasing the local demand for energy transition services; and meeting workforce development needs of local employers.

Service year corps members who participate in energy efficiency programming often gain valuable experience and certifications that equip them to enter into careers in energy conservation, green construction, education, renewable energy, HVAC, and even real estate, architecture, and engineering. These programs also can serve as pre-apprenticeships, building pipelines into registered apprenticeship programs.

Accessing Federal Funding: Identifying Barriers and Opportunities for Clean Energy National Service Programs

Small and medium-sized service year programs are often capacity-constrained local nonprofits that need additional support and engagement to access federal resources, as outlined in Service Year Alliance's [Equity Agenda for National Service](#). The Department of Energy could explicitly highlight service year programs (e.g. AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA, conservation corps, YouthBuild, etc.) as eligible to apply for these new programs, and also could encourage and incentivize state energy offices to coordinate with their [state service commission](#) as part of their application to [explore options](#) for partnering with local service year programs. Some states are already building bridges between their state energy agencies and local service year programs, most notably in [Minnesota](#) and [Colorado](#), but further guidance from the Department would encourage other states to engage with existing service year partners in preparation for these new funding opportunities. Service Year Alliance [co-hosted an event with the Brookings Institution](#) in December 2022 to highlight how state energy agencies could partner with state service commissions to utilize existing funding streams and develop a talent pipeline into these careers.

Additionally, Service Year Alliance would encourage the Department to allow the funding from these new workforce programs as well as other Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) resources to be used as matching funds for AmeriCorps programs. This would allow both new

and existing service year programs to more effectively braid together funding streams to stand up and expand energy efficiency workforce programs. Service Year Alliance recently submitted a joint letter to the Department about this topic, and it is our understanding that the Department is considering issuing a matching funds guidance letter to pursue this request. This guidance letter would put the Department of Energy in line with other federal partners that recognize their resources as allowable for AmeriCorps match funding, including the Department of Education, Department of Interior, Department of Transportation, and specific units of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Equity and Partnerships in Establishing Clean Energy Workforce Programs

Equity

The Department should strongly consider how these new workforce programs can help increase diversity, equity, and inclusion of people pursuing careers in the clean energy economy and the resilience sector generally. Climate service year programs are a great way to meet young people where they are, develop career on-ramps into the sector, and harness youth's energy and excitement to drive change in their communities, as confirmed by a [recent national poll of young Americans](#). As the Department considers how to implement the Administration's Justice40 commitments, it is important to be mindful that many service year programs specifically work to advance environmental justice efforts, recruit [diverse corps members](#) locally in the community, ensure that opportunities are specifically made available to opportunity youth and other underrepresented groups, and elevate local environmental priorities. Service year programs have a strong track record of offering career pathways for underserved populations, and could be a useful tool for centering equity in these new workforce programs, opening up opportunities for underrepresented populations in the energy sector.

Partnerships

Moreover, the Department should consider pursuing a formal interagency partnership with AmeriCorps to leverage national service programs like AmeriCorps State and National and AmeriCorps VISTA to meet growing workforce needs in the clean energy sector as a whole. This strategy has proven particularly successful for other federal agencies in the past, most notably the long-standing [FEMA Corps partnership](#) between the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and AmeriCorps, which has built an [impressive talent pipeline](#) for internal agency hires at FEMA as well as for community-based emergency management agencies and partner organizations across the country.

Service Year Alliance, as a founding member of the [Partnership for the Civilian Climate Corps](#), is [hopeful](#) that a bilateral interagency agreement between the Department and AmeriCorps could be part of a larger federal government effort to stand up climate resilience service year efforts, which could also include other partnerships with the Departments of Transportation, Agriculture, Interior, and other federal agencies. The Partnership for the Civilian Climate Corps

is a nonpartisan, multi-sector, national network of over 100 organizations that are seeking to mobilize the next generation through national service and build on-ramps to clean energy careers. The Partnership is grateful to the Department of Energy for the recent interest in exploring a more concrete partnership with AmeriCorps, and we would be glad to help facilitate greater collaboration across the federal government to leverage national service as a workforce development tool.

Access to High Quality Jobs

Service year programs can function as pre-apprenticeship opportunities to prepare new or transitioning workers for entry into more formal apprenticeship programs, introducing them to the sector, building soft skills and industry knowledge, and sometimes embedding credentialing opportunities into their programming. As labor unions seek to increase demand for their apprenticeship programs and membership, service year programs can serve as a helpful on-ramp into apprenticeships and high-quality jobs. In partnership with Jobs for the Future (JFF) and Next100, Service Year Alliance will be releasing a white paper on service years as pre-apprenticeships later this spring. It is our understanding that the Department is planning to offer technical assistance related to pre-apprenticeships, and we would appreciate the opportunity to continue a dialogue given our work in this area.

Service Year Alliance believes that national service can be a major driver for the Department of Energy's forthcoming energy efficiency workforce training programs authorized in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. We look forward to continuing to collaborate to build robust career pathways into the clean energy sector.