

Recovery Conservation Corps: Program Overview for Workforce Investment Act Youth Work Experience

On April 23, 2009, Governor Ted Strickland and Director Doug Lumpkin announced American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Workforce Development Programs.

The Recovery Conservation Corps (RCC) offers work experience sites to place youth ages 16 to 24 to improve Ohio's state parks and natural areas.

Focusing on both rural and urban One-Stops, particularly those in economic decline, RCC workers will assist with projects such as building recreation lands, boardwalks, observation areas, trails and curbing the spread of invasive species.

"These workers will gain critical experience and on-the-job training as they improve the state's parks, wetlands, forests and other natural areas" said ODNR Director Sean Logan.

This initiative will be a collaborative effort between the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), Workforce Investment Areas (Areas) and One-Stop Systems. The State of Ohio will also provide funds to Ohio Department Natural Resources (ODNR) to help implement the program.

Program Design

ODJFS will provide up to \$2 million in Statewide funds to Areas to pay for transportation and worksite crew leaders. If a One-Stop system or county wants to apply for these funds, the request must be sent to the Area for submission to the Office of Workforce Development.

The Areas/One-Stops can choose whether to pay for crew leaders from either their formula/stimulus or from Statewide funds. In making this choice, Areas are encouraged to carefully consider whether they expect to spend their formula/stimulus fund "expeditiously" before requesting statewide funds for crew leaders' costs.

These crew leaders may be program operations staff or work experience participants. Area and ODNR representatives need to discuss whether the work experience includes remote locations or complex activities (use of power tools). Such situations may merit an adult on-site crew leader. In other cases, particularly where ODNR staff can remain with the crew or are located in close proximity to where ODNR staffs are housed, an older youth participant may be able to lead the crew.

This program promotes both Area/One-Stop flexibility and candid feedback from ODNR representatives on what works best for each worksite. The primary goal is for youth to gain critical work experience and readiness skills in a safe, supervise environment. A secondary goal is to cultivate leadership skills in the youth participants who possess the capacity to lead crew members.

Public service employment as defined in Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Transmittal Letter # 16 Prohibition on Public Service Employment (PSE) in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Program is still prohibited. If the crew leaders are not youth work experience participants, then these crew leaders are performing a program operations function and not actually doing public works.

The statewide funds will be available on a first-come, first serve basis. Areas must submit the completed application (Attachment A) and the signed Certification and Assurances (Attachment B). It is critical that the Statewide funds be used to supplement and not supplant the use of Area stimulus and formula youth funds.

Once the application is complete, please email a copy to the Office of Workforce Development via the WIAQNA@jfs.ohio.gov. An original signature hard copy of the Application and the Certification and Assurances should be mailed to:

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
Office of Workforce Development
Technical Assistance Unit
4020 E. Fifth Ave, P.O. Box 1618
Columbus, Ohio 43219-1618

Attention: Teresa Applegarth

ODNR has identified over 240 worksites and created a matrix of the available worksites (attached under separate cover and also available at http://jfs.ohio.gov/workforce/workforceprof/Stimulus_Activities.stm).

The matrix includes:

- WIA Local Areas/One-Stops
- County
- Start & completion date
- Facility/Worksite name
- Facility coordinator & phone number
- Tasks
- Estimated days (labor)
- Estimated number of crews (average of 5/1 ratio of crew leader to crew member)
- Tools needed
- Worksite comments

For statewide consistency, youth will be expected to work full-time (40 hours) per week. Alternative working hours may be available based upon mutual consent from both the Area/One Stop representative and the Facility Coordinator. Local area and One-Stop staff are encouraged to work with the ODNR Facility Coordinators (also referred to as Coordinators) to determine the work hours and attendance standards for youth participants.

The standard wages for all worksites is \$7.39 per hour for crew members. For the crew leaders, the standard rate is \$10.00 per hour for new hires or the regular wage of existing staff.

ODNR will not be issuing work experience checks to youth participants. Each local area must determine the best approach, including adding work experience activities to existing youth provider agreements.

ODNR has identified the work experience activities and the minimum qualifications for crew leaders and crew members (refer to Attachment C for more detail). Specific activities have been selected to ensure that they do not displace or affect the hours of state employees. WIA Sec. 181(b) (2) and 20 CFR 667.270 establishes safeguards for workers and ensures that participants in WIA employment and training activities do not displace other employees.

State agencies involved in the RCC project are working with Ohio Civil Service Employees Association (OCSEA) and any other pertinent unions. For the purposes of this project, it is anticipated that a signed union concurrence form will be provided to the WIA local areas for their records to comply with WIA section 181(b)(2)(B).

The program may be offered to youth who are ages 16-24. Due to minor labor laws, placing youth ages 14-15 is complex and may impede program implementation.

Worksite Specifications

The "Tools Needed" column in the ODNR facility/worksite matrix contains information regarding the necessary tools to perform the work experience activities.

Based upon WIA Law 101(46) and the Final Regulations under section 664.440, supportive services for youth may include:

- (a) Linkages to community services;
- (b) Assistance with transportation;
- (c) Assistance with child care and dependent care;
- (d) Assistance with housing;
- (e) Referrals to medical services, and
- (f) Assistance with uniforms or other appropriate work attire and work-related tools, including such items as eye glasses and protective eye gear. (WIA sec.129(c) (2) (G).)

Local areas and One-Stops are encouraged to review their current supportive services policies to determine whether the tools needed for these specific work experience activities are allowable. In addition, One-Stops are also encouraged to determine whether their current supportive services policies are inclusive enough to effectively and efficiently spend their youth funds.

If the One-Stops are unable to provide the necessary tools needed for the work experience, please contact the ODNR Coordinator to determine whether these tools are available through ODNR. If the tools are not available through supportive services or at an ODNR worksite, then the viability of the particular worksite should be evaluated and may not be appropriate for this program. Due to the scarcity of resources at both the state and local level, it is important to leverage funds for tools, transportation, etc.

Transportation (State, One-Stop, and ODNR Coordinator activity)

There are many questions surrounding transportation needs of the youth. There are several options to consider and discuss locally between the One-Stop and the Coordinator to answer these questions. Some options to consider may include:

1. For youth who have transportation (including their own vehicles), local One-Stops may provide gasoline, car repairs, etc. (and other supportive services) in order for the youth to get from home to the worksite and also for travel within the worksite (if needed).

For example, the youth participant may be working on a cabin in one of the state's parks. This youth may be best served by driving their own vehicle to the cabin and working their shift. This enables the youth flexibility to get lunch, etc.

2. For youth who do not have transportation, the One-Stop may lease vehicles or provide access via public transportation (bus, taxis, etc.) for transporting the youth from their homes or a central pick-up location to the ODNR worksite.

If the One-Stop leases vehicles and can make them available for worksite transportation needs, then this provides an opportunity to stock the dedicated vehicle with safety equipment, water dispensers, tools, etc. that the youth participants might need on the worksite. Some One-Stops are exploring leasing buses from their local school systems, from county transportation pools, or even businesses who offer this service within their community.

3. For youth who are able to get transportation from their home or a central pick-up location to the worksite, ODNR may be able to provide transportation for travel within the worksite.

4. For youth who are not able to get to the worksite and the One-Stop and/or the ODNR facility is unable to provide transportation to the worksite or within the worksite, and then using ODNR worksites for work experience may not be viable. Local level discussions will enable both the One-Stop and ODNR representatives to come to a mutual decision that a specific worksite is not viable.

Worksite Supervision

ODNR has designated a Coordinator for each worksite. These Coordinators serve as not only the primary contact person for the One-Stops but also as the supervisor for the crews.

Selection of a crew leader is vital to the success of this project. It is strongly recommended that the One-Stop and the Coordinator work together to identify the best candidate for the crew leader role. If the crew leader does not fulfill the expectations of the One-Stop and the ODNR representative, then move quickly to find a replacement that can fulfill this essential role. The crew leader may be a:

- Youth work experience participant (provided that both the One Stop and ODNR Coordinator are in mutual agreement that the youth is capable of and performs this role in a responsible, mature manner) This youth work experience participant may be funded by either the Areas formula or stimulus funds.

If the youth participant crew leader is paid from Statewide funds, then youth eligibility criteria does not apply but preference must be given to youth who have one parent who is a dislocated worker.

- Existing or new One-Stop or Youth Provider staff
- Adults and/or Dislocated Workers
- Entrepreneurs who are developing a business in a related industry.

If the One-Stop chooses to place youth participant as the crew leader at a worksite that requires the use of chainsaws or other complex activities, then an ODNR representative may need to remain with the crews.

If the crews are engaged in less complex activities, like painting or staining, then the crew leader may oversee the crew member activities absent an ODNR representative. The crew leader may be in contact with the Coordinator, but the ODNR representative may not remain with the crew during their work activity.

The One Stop and the ODNR Coordinator need to enter into discussions and document the locations/activities which will require full-time ODNR staff presence. This information may then be added to the worksite agreement to make sure both parties are clear. Advanced communication and mutual agreement is critical to ensure the youth remain safe during their work experience.

One alternative to selecting a youth participant as a crew leader is to hire adults and dislocated workers, including participants who may want to start their own business in a related industry. Some adults and dislocated workers may be interested in starting landscaping, removal of invasive species, or choosing other related businesses.

Under WIA Transmittal Letter No. 17, adults and dislocated workers may engage in entrepreneurship opportunities. While the adults and dislocated workers may not receive work experience wages while engaged in public service employment, the One-Stop may want to consider providing substantive supportive services including gasoline, car repairs, and even other forms of payments.

In addition, under Workforce Investment Act Policy Letter No. 08-10.2, Waiver Authority: Use of Local WIA Funds for Capitalization of Business - Entrepreneurial Talent Development, eligible small businesses that have been approved by the local WIB may receive up to \$5,000 for capitalization. Once the ODNR worksite activity is completed, then the adult or dislocated worker entrepreneur can use ODNR as a business reference.

Steps to Implementation

Step One (1) – Choose to Participate in the Program (One-Stop and Coordinator Activity)

One-Stops/local areas are encouraged to review this document carefully and to make contact with their local ODNR Coordinator. One-Stops may choose to participate fully in this project and fill all of the worksites

available, partially participate in the project and offer limited crews to fill the available worksites or to not participate at all.

The key to implementing this program is communicating between state agencies at the state level and at the local level, Areas/One-Stops with the ODNR Coordinator. During these discussions, it is important to identify the best possible match of the crew leaders and members with the worksite requirements. If a One-Stop has program design limitations (example, youth operating chain saws), then please discuss this with your ODNR Coordinator. Likewise, the ODNR staff prefer that crew members work full time (40 hours) instead of two crew members working part time (20 hours).

Once the local One-Stop decides to participate, the One-Stops/local areas and ODNR will need to work together to find common ground and identify the best possible opportunity for the youth to complete their work experience and achieve work readiness.

The U.S. Department of Labor has stressed accessing green jobs through their official guidance on ARRA funded programs. This program offers a prime opportunity for the youth to engage in and participate in “green jobs” preserving nature and our lands.

Step Two (2) – Recruit Youth for ODNR Sites (One-Stop Activity)

Local One-Stops that opt to participate in this initiative will recruit youth from their communities. Local One-Stops will have the responsibility of determining eligibility for the WIA youth program.

Step Three (3) – Conduct Youth Assessments (One-Stop Activity)

One-Stops should assess the youth to determine their suitability for the ODNR project. One-Stops can provide meaningful work experiences by ensuring that youth are appropriately matched with worksites and occupations. Local One-Stops should develop a talent pool of eligible youth as well as suitable youth for this project using the results of the assessments.

Youth being considered for this project will also need to be pre-tested to determine their “work readiness” level and post-tested at the completion of their work experience to demonstrate improvement in work readiness skills (see attached “Work Readiness” definition for details).

Step Four (4) – Select crew leaders (One-Stop and Coordinator Activity)

In order to establish the optimal work experience, it is important for the local One-Stops and ODNR Coordinators to mutually screen and select the crew leader.

Local One-Stops and ODNR representatives may want to review the crew leader’s qualifications together, conduct job interviews, or find other ways to determine if the candidate possesses the necessary skill/maturity level and has the capacity to lead the crews. This selection process will enable both parties to get the program started on the right track.

Step Five (5) – Execute Worksite Agreements (One-Stop and Coordinator Activity)

As a reference tool for local One-Stops, a sample worksite agreement can be found in the “Elements of a WIA Youth Program” which is available on the website at:

http://jfs.ohio.gov/workforce/docs/workforceprof/Elements_WIA_Youth_Program.pdf.

This sample worksite agreement has been reviewed by the ODNR central office in Columbus. Local ODNR facility coordinators are authorized to sign the agreement.

The worksite agreements will need to contain language regarding minor labor laws to include occupations that are prohibited to minors. Also, One-Stops do not need to execute a contract or grant document with ODNR.

Step Six (6) – Provide Youth Placement, Training and Orientation (One-Stop and Coordinator Activity)

Youth placed at the various ODNR worksites will be provided with basic safety training. The training and orientation provided at each ODNR worksite will need to be a collaborative effort between the local One-Stop and ODNR staff.

In order to prepare crew leaders for their new role, it is suggested that crew leaders report to their ODNR worksite 2 weeks prior to crew workers reporting to worksites. The additional time will offer crew leaders an opportunity to gain knowledge regarding their particular worksite, to receive advanced safety training, to gain an understanding of worksite polices and practices (particularly around safety processes), to acclimate to their new role and responsibilities, and to develop a good foundation with their ODNR facility coordinator.

Step Seven (7) – Provide On-going Technical Assistance (One-Stop and Coordinator activity)

ODJFS and ODNR will host video conference sessions over the next few months to ensure on-going technical assistance is provided to the One-Stops and ODNR worksites. Additionally, the state level project managers from ODNR and ODJFS will conduct bi-weekly meetings to review the status of the project, discuss challenges and address technical assistance needs.

Local One-Stops may also be requested to provide monthly success stories to ODJFS and ODNR to highlight the exemplary youth participating in the project and highlight the positive outcomes being achieved by local One-Stops through this initiative.

Step Eight (8) – Determine Program Activities past September 30, 2009 (State and One-Stop Activity)

The Training and Guidance Letter 14-08 issued by the Department of Labor identifies the summer work experience as ending September 30, 2009. However, for youth ages 18-24 who are “out-of-school” work experience may continue beyond September 30, 2009.

ODJFS has submitted a waiver request to DOL to allow youth ages 18-24 to continue participating in work experience and only have the work readiness skill performance measure apply. This waiver request is available at http://jfs.ohio.gov/workforce/workforceprof/Stimulus_Activities.stm. Based on the language in 14-08, it is anticipated that this waiver will be approved. Once approved, the One-Stops and the ODNR representatives need to determine whether they would like to continue the work experience activities from October 1, 2009 to March 30, 2010.

Step Nine (9) – Assess post activity work readiness skills (State and One-Stop Activity)

Once youth have ended their work experience activities, both the One-Stops and the ODNR Facility coordinators are encouraged to maintain a dialogue to determine whether the youth gained work readiness skills. More information on work readiness skills is available at <http://jfs.ohio.gov/workforce/docs/Youth/infobrief20-WorkReadinessSkills.pdf>.

Attachment A

WIA Area Application for Statewide Funds for Recovery Conservation Corps (RCC) with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR)		
WIA Area Number:		
County or Project Operator (If applicable)		
Entity Name:		
Street Address 1:		
Street Address 2:		
City and Zip Code		
Contact Person - Name and Title:		
Alternate Contact Person - Name and Title:		
Telephone:		
Fax:		
Email:		
County(s) Served		
Participant Information		
Total Number of Planned Crews		
Total Number of Crew Leaders		
Total Number of Crew Members (Youth only)		
Financial Information		
Expense Type	Total Number Participating	Total Cost
Travel for Crew Leaders and Workers (to, from, and within the worksite)		\$0
Crew Leader (wages, fringes, and benefits)		\$0
Crew Leader background checks and drug testing		\$0
Total Request from Statewide Funds		\$0

Attachment B

**Recovery Conservation Corps
Application for Statewide Funds
Certification of Need and Assurances**

As the Administrative Entity for WIA Area No. _____ (or official designee), I certify that the Statewide funds will be used to supplement and not supplant formula and stimulus youth funds for the Recovery Conservation Corps program.

Additionally, I assure that this WIA Area shall:

1. Maximize expenses for the stimulus and formula youth funds
2. To the extent possible, youth stimulus and formula funds for supportive services including transportation have not been diminished for the purposes of this program.

CERTIFY and ASSURE:

(Signature of Administrative Entity)

Typed name and title

Date

Attachment C

Recovery Conservation Corps Youth Work Experience Activities and Qualifications

Crew Leader - \$10.00/hour for new hires or the regular wage for existing staff

- Qualifications: Limited experience and/or training (1-3 months) performing basic maintenance and/or construction type work that includes operating the types of equipment and/or tools listed below under duties; supervision (1-3 months) and a valid driver's license.
- Duties: Serve as lead for crew workers. Examples of duties and/or tasks to be performed include the following:
 - Supervision (assign tasks, provide work direction and follow-up, approve timesheets);
 - Project Management (planning, maintain logs and expense reports, inspection);
 - Operate a Motor Vehicle and Transport Staff, Materials and Equipment/Tools;
 - Provide Training on the Proper Use and Maintenance of Equipment and/or Tools.

Crew Worker - \$7.39/hour

- Qualifications: Limited experience and/or training (1-3 months) performing basic maintenance and/or construction type work that includes operating the types of equipment and/or tools listed below under duties.
- Duties: Performs variety skilled or semi-skilled duties based on project requirements. Examples of duties and/or projects include the following:
 - Perform Conservation Work - routine maintenance activities (painting, mowing, cleaning), trail maintenance (clearing new trails, removing brush, building fences, minor construction & repairs); walkway and/or small bridge construction;
 - Prescribed Fire Preparation & Burn Crew* (prescribed fire preparation (clearing new or existing lines of brush, leaves, and other flammable materials), burn crew (fire line monitoring during burns and mop-up duties following the completion of a burn);
 - Equipment Operation - hand tools (hammers, saws, shovels, picks, rakes, sanders), power tools (drills, saws, post hole diggers, sanders, chain saws, power sprayers), small tractors and/or mowers;
 - Perform Basic/Routine Equipment Maintenance and Repair (keeps assigned equipment and/or tools in a clean and working manner); and
 - Minor Construction and Repairs (walkways, small bridges, barns, storage sheds, small ponds, drainage basins).

*Note: To perform prescribed fire preparation and burn crew duties, individuals must meet National Wildfire Coordinating Group standards; including passing a physical conditioning test. Training will be provided.