



Memorandum

TO: NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

FROM: Jon Cicirelli
Director of PRNS

SUBJECT: RESILIENCE CORPS CLIMATE CHANGE PATHWAY STATUS REPORT

DATE: October 23, 2023

Approved *Angel Ruiz* Date 11/2/23

COUNCIL DISTRICT: ALL

RECOMMENDATION

Accept the status report on the Resilience Corps Climate Change Pathway including outcomes, success metrics and hiring updates.

BACKGROUND

The Mayor's March budget message for the 2021-2022 fiscal year, approved by the City Council, established the City of San José's Resilience Corps Program. Funded primarily by resources from the American Rescue Plan Act received by the City, this program was designed to meet the moment and address the concurrent crises of COVID-19, including economic and educational impacts, and climate change by offering a range of paid work experiences lasting from 25 to 30 weeks and providing a Living Wage. The program came at a crucial time when the Country was experiencing the COVID-19 Delta surge causing increased unemployment and economic disparities in communities hardest hit by the virus outbreak. For many, this program offered life-changing opportunities they would not have thought possible previously.

The program encompassed various employment pathways focusing on environmental stewardship, educational recovery, and support for small businesses. Priority for participation in the program was given to San José residents living in low-resource areas or facing very low-income levels. After the City Council's approval of the Resilience Corps employment pathways in environmental, educational recovery, and small business sectors and with the adoption of the 2021-2022 budget on June 23, 2021, an extensive outreach effort was undertaken. This effort aimed to identify program participants residing in San José's low-resource areas. The outreach methods employed included a multilingual approach incorporating social media, engagement through City Council offices, and collaboration with nonprofits, universities, community colleges, and community-based partners. Additionally, in-person outreach activities were conducted in various neighborhoods, community centers, libraries, and parks located in these low-resource areas.

On January 25, 2022, the City Council approved the allocation of \$13.7 million in funding from the State of California under the State's #CaliforniansForAll Youth Workforce Development Program. This funding made possible the continuation of the Environmental and Learning Pathways, known as Phase 2 or Resilience Corps 2.0. The Environmental Pathway was renamed the Climate Change Pathway at that time.

The Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) Department has taken the lead in overseeing the Climate Change Pathway and has contracted with the San José Conservation Corps (SJCC) as the lead operating partner for the mentioned services. PRNS has worked closely with the City Manager's Office of Economic Development and Cultural Affairs and the work2future program to guide workforce development elements. The San José Public Library oversees the Learning Pathway of the Resilience Corps.

ANALYSIS

Phase 1 – Resilience Corps 1.0

In August 2021, the City initiated the Environmental Pathway as part of the Resilience Corps program.¹ The SJCC was the City's primary program partner, and it worked alongside other community organizations sharing similar goals. This pathway, with a budget of \$5.16 million, was designed to provide support to young adults who were either unemployed or underemployed by offering them employment opportunities with a focus on natural resource management. Eligibility requirements were broken into three tiers:

- Tier 1 was for prospective participants between the ages of 18-27 and living in a low-resource census tract
- Tier 2 was for prospective participants between the ages of 18-27, living in San José and considered low-income
- Tier 3 was for prospective participants between the ages of 18-27 and needing additional assistance in obtaining employment such as, but not limited to, being unhoused, single parent, justice-involved, or disabled.

Of 106 participants in Phase 1, through June 2023, 89 percent met the Tier 1 eligibility, 9 percent met Tier 2 eligibility and 2 percent met Tier 3. Among the 106 participants who enrolled, 98 percent belonged to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

Each program participant underwent comprehensive training, not only to fulfill their duties within the Resilience Corps but also to equip them with skills transferable to a wide range of long-term employment opportunities. The training provided by SJCC and its partners covered a broad spectrum of skills and knowledge, including Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training, Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) certification, basic tool safety, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

¹ The Environmental Pathway also included the Guadalupe River Park & Trail and Coyote Creek Trail & Park Chain Pathway, which was operated within the structure of the Environmental Pathway.

management principles, CPR/first aid, environmental education (covering topics such as wildfires, water conservation, and climate change), bioretention area rehabilitation and maintenance, California Naturalist certification, financial literacy, entrepreneurship, leadership, and support for college and career navigation.



Figure 1 Resilience Corps Members Participating in Training

The collaboration with the SJCC ensured that the program provided comprehensive support in the form of wrap-around services to participants. This support was crucial as the Resilience Corps was designed to assist individuals who faced life challenges that hindered their ability to secure and maintain employment. In addition to meeting eligibility requirements to enter the program, many participants also experienced challenges with transportation, childcare, limited education, and mental health concerns. The SJCC worked closely with each participant on a personalized basis, to assist in overcoming these challenges, ultimately increasing their chances of success within the program and as they enter the long-term workforce.

Phase 1 of the program provided participants 900 hours of comprehensive job training and experience designed to develop the skill set necessary for employment with the City of San José and opportunities with other City partners like CAL FIRE and Caltrans. Successful projects included creating fire breaks to reduce fire hazards in and around Alum Rock Park, rehabilitating bioretention swales in parks, removing invasive species, planting drought-tolerant native gardens, reducing fire hazards, and planting trees at Family Camp at Yosemite to promote a healthier forest. Based on direction in the 2021-2022 budget messages, a special focus was placed on the Guadalupe River Park and Coyote Creek Park Chain and their adjacent trails. Resilience Corps participants helped manage vegetation along the Guadalupe River Trail and Coyote Creek Trail, provided docent services to trail users and referred issues to appropriate City programs for follow-up. Additionally, SJCC collaborated with various community organizations to host program participants and support efforts to clean up watersheds, trails, parks, and

surrounding areas. These partner agencies included Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful, South Bay Clean Creeks Coalition, The Trash Punx, Our City Forest, Veggielution, San Jose Downtown Association, and Guadalupe River Park Conservancy.



Figure 2 Resilience Corps Members Working at Alum Rock Park

Phase 2 – Resilience Corps 2.0

In the program's second phase, Resilience Corps 2.0, the funding source has shifted to the State's #CaliforniansForAll Youth Workforce Development Program, leading to a change in eligibility requirements. For this phase, a minimum of 75 percent of all participants must face two or more barriers to employment. These barriers include being considered low-income, being unemployed, not currently enrolled in school, being justice-involved, being in or transitioning from foster care, or having connections with the mental health or substance abuse systems, among other factors. Additionally, the City requested and received State approval to expand the eligibility criteria to include individuals residing in low-resource census tracts who are also first-generation residents or the first in their family to attend college.

The City renamed the Environmental Pathway as the Climate Change Pathway and made further program improvements based on the experiences and lessons learned from Phase 1. PRNS and the SJCC initially planned for Phase 2 of the program to have three separate cohorts consisting of approximately 60 participants each. This was later modified to include more cohorts with each one being smaller due to recruitment challenges and to better manage the program's scale. Wages were set to 80 percent of Living Wage to align more closely with other SJCC programs and allow for more participants. As of this writing, a total of 161 participants have already begun their work experience in the program. It is anticipated that Phase 2 for this pathway will finish in summer 2024. Among the 161 participants who have enrolled thus far, 90 percent belong to

BIPOC communities and 87 percent face two or more barriers to employment. As of writing, 46 percent of participants were unemployed before the program, 66 percent reside in a low resource census tract and 18 percent are considered low-income.

The host sites and partners for these activities include the Guadalupe River Park Conservancy, Veggelution, Our City Forest, and creek partners.

Externship Pilot – A Pipeline for City Employment

As Phase 1 of the Resilience Corps wound down in late 2022, PRNS and the SJCC collaboratively developed and piloted an "externship" approach that allowed participants to continue their involvement in the program after completing their initial hours by joining City teams. This offered participants the opportunity to step out of the SJCC's familiar crew structure and work directly in Park Districts and teams, performing the same duties as a Maintenance Assistant. This approach enabled them to gain valuable experience within the City's service framework while helping PRNS complete more park maintenance work in the short term and address the challenges posed by park maintenance vacancies by establishing a pool of prospective City employees.

Initially, many participants harbored concerns and uncertainties about this transition, but with the guidance and mentorship provided by PRNS park supervisors and the SJCC, participants found success and felt like members of the City team. These externs have gained invaluable experience working in Park Districts and at destination facilities such as Emma Prusch Farm Park, Happy Hollow Park & Zoo, and Arcadia Ballpark. They have seamlessly integrated into City teams with minimal training, thanks to their foundational knowledge of park maintenance acquired in the Resilience Corps. With that initial success, PRNS scaled up the Externship. To date, park maintenance teams have welcomed over 44 externs into the program. These externs have been instrumental in supporting park maintenance teams during times when vacancy rates have remained high. In June 2023, the Externship was further expanded to include opportunities in BeautifySJ and the City's Department of Transportation.

In the summer of 2023, the City conducted a recruitment for the Maintenance Assistant position in PRNS and witnessed the benefits of the externship model. PRNS staff held multiple City job application and interview training sessions to support potential applicants from the Resilience Corps. Of a total of 135 applications, 35 were from Resilience Corps members and externs. Among these applicants, eight have been hired for full-time positions as of September 2023, and 17 were offered part-time roles. PRNS looks forward to welcoming future cohorts of externs over the next year of the Resilience Corps 2.0 program, building a pipeline and pool of trained candidates that can fill future vacancies.

Resilience Corps Outcomes

Measuring progress, outputs and outcomes is crucial to continual improvement of the Resilience Corps. The program's initial goals were to provide economic relief and improve employability in unemployed and underemployed individuals during the pandemic, so post-program employment outcomes have been tracked. Additionally, the work undertaken in the Climate Change Pathway

of the Resilience Corps supports the City’s environmental and climate resilience, and staff has tracked quantifiable contributions to this endeavor. Staff monitors progress and works closely with the SJCC to make sure the program achieves its potential, including making any needed adaptations.

Participant Outcomes

As mentioned earlier, at its start, the Resilience Corps targeted young adults who were unemployed or under-employed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide economic relief and assist them in getting back on their feet. Then and now, participants are the core of the program and supporting them through their completion of the program is extremely important. As such, the City instituted a 70 percent retention target in Phase 1 to prioritize participants completing the program. The retention rate measures the percentage of participants who complete the program or leave the program early to pursue higher education or employment. The 70 percent target takes into consideration the program’s service population. City staff tracked this measure closely over time in coordination with the SJCC to ensure that all participants were provided with the necessary resources to be successful.

Of 106 participants who enrolled in the initial phase, 86 completed the program, resulting in an 81 percent retention rate. Of those 86 participants who completed the program, 78 (91 percent) of them either secured employment or pursued higher education within three months of the completion of the program. This exceeded the program target of 70 percent of participants having a positive outcome. As of September 2023, there were 161 participants total in Phase 2. The Phase 2 retention rate so far has been 83 percent. To date, 60 percent of Phase 2 participants have had a positive outcome and this rate is trending to meet the Phase 1 rate as more participants exit the program.

Phase	Retention Rate	Positive Outcomes	No Outcomes
Phase 1	81%	91%	9%
Phase 2 (to date)*	83%	60%	40%

* With 106 participants still in the program, the positive outcome rate is anticipated to increase and the no outcome rate decrease as more participants complete their experience.

These statistics comprise truly profound individual stories that show how the Resilience Corps has changed the lives of the participants involved. One participant secured her citizenship and driver’s license during the program and was honored by the national Corps Network organization as a 2023 Corpsmember of the Year. Another participant recently hired by PRNS has shared that she is the first person in her family to have a position with benefits. Another spoke about how he felt he was bound for a life of gang involvement because he saw no other options.

Phase 2 also has incredible testimonials. After being in the program for two months, one participant shared that he was looking to pursue a career as an Arborist or in Natural Resource Management that would allow him to spend more time outdoors. Another participant took part in a “spike” event at the City’s Family Camp at Yosemite, which motivated him to apply for the Maintenance Assistant position with the City to be able to continue doing the work. This

participant shared that being outdoors in nature and bonding with a team is a motivating factor to pursue a career in this industry.

Climate Outcomes

The Resilience Corps program contributes to worthwhile projects that align with the City's climate objectives while also supporting the maintenance of the City's parks and open spaces. Every month, the Resilience Corps sets out to complete projects that further these Climate Change initiatives, and select results and examples are presented here.

Phase	Square Feet of Fire Fuel Reduction	Number of Trees Maintained	Bags of Trash Collected	Cubic Feet of Vegetation Removed
Phase 1	1,867,402	2,268	528	1,511,643
Phase 2 (to date)	792,391	1,164	478	247,927

During Phase 1, a special emphasis was placed on Alum Rock Park as it approached its 150th anniversary. Alum Rock Park sits in a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone in the wildland-urban interface along the Diablo Range. Participants in the Resilience Corps, along with hand crews from the California National Guard under the direction of CAL FIRE, worked to reduce ladder fuels, thin highly flammable vegetation, remove exotic invasive species and remove flashy fine fuels in high-risk areas along the park boundary to reduce the risk to nearby properties. Additionally, participants supported Park Rangers and park maintenance staff who cleared and restored historic mineral spring grottos that, over time, experience a natural buildup of dirt and mineral deposits that result in still water and pond scum. Through their efforts, participants made Alum Rock Park safer and brought back to life natural and cultural resources that make the park one-of-a-kind.

Another project with a significant impact took place at Lake Cunningham Park. Resilience Corps crews closely collaborated with volunteers from the California Native Plant Society to expand the native garden area and undertake pruning and tree removal around the park's perimeter and along the lake's trails. This work resulted in an improved aesthetic appearance and enhanced safety with better sightlines.

In deciding which projects to prioritize, staff has also focused the efforts of the Resilience Corps on parks with lower Park Condition Assessment (PCA) scores. For instance, in September 2022, the Resilience Corps worked on the rehabilitation of the Alviso Community Garden to install garden plots. Alviso Park and Youth Center had one of the lowest PCA scores city-wide, 54.5 percent. By concentrating on parks with lower PCA scores, the Resilience Corps contributes to staff efforts to focus on parks that require more improvements and maintenance.

Phase 3 – Resilience Corps 3.0 and Beyond

The City created the Resilience Corps to tackle concurrent crises of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic and heightened economic disparities. Through Phase 1 and into Phase 2, the program has achieved its target for positive outcomes and delivered important contributions to environmental resilience. Especially with the development of the Externship Program, it has also alleviated the strain on the park maintenance teams who were experiencing a high vacancy rate.

In the State of California’s recently approved budget, ongoing funding was provided to continue the #CaliforniansForAll Youth Workforce Development Program. City staff is coordinating with the State of California to determine the application process to access these funds and build on the past successes and momentum of the Resilience Corps. PRNS is also coordinating with the San José Public Library on implementing the City Council approved College and Career Readiness Quality Standards.

To continue building the City employment pipeline, PRNS is coordinating with the Human Resources Department to streamline the hiring process for Resilience Corps participants into part-time Maintenance Assistant positions. The Maintenance Assistant classification has historically had a high turnover rate and this pipeline will greatly impact the services provided in parks. This will also give participants a better start with the City system and open them up to other opportunities such as interim placements and greater resources for advancement.

COORDINATION

This memorandum was coordinated with the City Attorney’s Office, the City Manager’s Budget Office and Office of Economic Development and Cultural Affairs.

/s/
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