



VYCC Q&A Session - April 29, 2020

Breck Knauft, Executive Director, shared three objectives for the call:

- To share our best thinking on what this summer **might** look like and steps we're taking to ensure safety. We are starting to see the easing of some restrictions of the Stay at Home order, which gives us more flexibility. However, there remain more unknowns than knowns.
- To share how we are making decisions and the best way for you to stay informed and connected. Safety is our primary concern. Every decision has to pass a safety test.
- To share that we feel disappointed, and acknowledge that you must be feeling that as well. There are elements of a VYCC experience that are just plain awesome. While we would love to start the season we all envisioned before the COVID-19 pandemic, prioritizing the health and safety of our members, staff, and community requires a different approach.

The continued presence of COVID-19 means that we have to live with uncertainty, which is tough. Rather than achieve certainty by cancelling all programming, we have decided to continue exploring how we provide food for those in need, build trails that allow people to access the outdoors, and engage young people in this work. Doing so requires us to live with some uncertainty right now, in the hopes of creating opportunities for as many people as possible in the future.

Daniel Schmidt, Chief Program Officer, provided an overview of what we know about 2020 programming:

Like Vermont, VYCC is looking at a slow reopening. We are slowly starting to put some folks in the field and do some projects, and figure out how we can increase that capacity this summer and fall.

Food & Farm Program

Early on in the pandemic we recognized that access to food, especially fresh, healthy food, would become increasingly important. We are committed to continue growing food for the Health Care Share. We don't know what the distribution will look like yet.

We are on track to grow food for all our Health Care Shares. We have a small crew of five AmeriCorps Members, which is allowable under current restrictions. They are following state and federal safety guidelines.

Conservation Program

A shelter in place order put into effect March 24 forced us to cancel all spring conservation projects.

Building and maintaining trails, park and backcountry infrastructure remain important, especially as we see more people access recreation areas as the weather gets warmer. Getting outside is good for our physical and mental health and VYCC will play a role in continuing to make it possible for people to use public lands.



We are talking with our amazing project partners. We currently are working with towns, non-profits, state and federal agencies to identify projects possibilities for this summer/fall. We are starting to build a new schedule.

Some of our partners will have funding for projects while others won't. Some projects have been confirmed. Some will projects will be reserved for next year.

Corps Members

We are committed to engaging young people in meaningful projects. We are figuring out how we do that while adhering to state and federal guidelines for social distancing

In the Food & Farm Program, we are looking into the possibility of bringing on two or three new Members in the coming month.

On March 24th, all non-essential work, including conservation projects, was prohibited in Vermont. Shortly after, we made the decision to not field any conservation crews in the spring and did not bring on any Members yet.

As of April 24th, the state is allowing non-essential outdoor work in groups of 5 or less that can adhere to social distancing. This is good news! Yet, before we can put crews on the ground, we must design and test new systems and safety protocols to ensure we can keep our Members, Leaders, staff, and partners safe.

We will start with headquarters staff working in the field. They will design and test hygiene and safety protocols, work plans, and daily schedules. This will likely happen through May.

While our team does this, we will also determine how we might hire Members and/or Leaders to join us in the field this summer and fall. This will likely start with small groups with a very limited number of people working at any given time.

Right now, we cannot run camping crews, as we cannot adhere to current social distancing guidelines in that setting. We are monitoring state guidelines and, if camping crews become allowable and safe, we will explore how to add these.

Once we've determined how we can safely work with a small number of Corps Members in the field, we'll try to increase our capacity. How many people we can have in the field at once is still unknown and will largely be guided by state and federal guidelines.

Crew Leader training

Given the current state guidelines, we cannot hold a traditional Crew Leader training where all the Crew Leaders gather on campus for four weeks. We are reimagining training, which might include remote learning and/or groups of five.



Hiring

Q: If you've been offered a position, will the position be available?

A: In early April, hiring managers directly reached out to all hired applicants to update them that, because we do not know what positions we will offer this year, we cannot guarantee any positions that had been previously offered. When we are able to offer positions, we are looking to fill positions with the applicant who is the best fit. We will look at all applicants meaning you do not need to reapply to be considered for a different type of crew.

Q: How many applicants vs positions are there? How will we prioritize?

A: Every year, we have more applications than positions. There are more people applying for fewer positions this year. When we do have positions available, they may be very specific – day crews in certain towns, or crews that require certain skills. As we do every year, our job is to figure out who is the best fit for those positions. That's what we do in a normal season.

Health and Safety

Q: Will we work 6' apart?

A: We will follow the guidelines. This could include masks, maintaining distance, and adding hygiene protocols.

Q: How will camping crews work?

A: We are exploring ways to use or modify camping and day crews to offer as many experiences – safely – as possible. There are a number of safety considerations that we would need to address before running camping crews. Social distancing, quarantining sick members, and interactions with the public are some of the many risk factors that we are looking into.

Q: Would members be screened before going on hitch?

A: Vermont does not have capacity to do large-scale COVID-19 testing of asymptomatic people prior to work. One option would be to ask if members going to work are either symptomatic or have been exposed to someone who is. Though this would only partly reduce risk of infection, it is the most available form of screening at this time.

Q: If a CM were to develop symptoms, what would happen?

A: We've developed an extensive response plan for our farm, which has five members. This scale is manageable. However, we do not have the capacity to quarantine or support an entire crew, or multiple crews, on the VYCC campus. We are still exploring how we can bring in members who might not be able to travel home quickly if they get sick.

Q: What about Farm Members cooking together in the kitchen – will that still happen?

A: This is a great example of how many things we have to redesign. This is a communal space and we'll have to figure out how to use it safely, and test that, before bringing people in.

AmeriCorps Positions

Eligibility for AmeriCorps positions includes being at least 17 years of age. These are service positions - Members receive a stipend and can earn an education award upon completion.



Q: Will AmeriCorps Members have housing on the Farm?

A: The farm has provided housing in the past. There still is a potential for that this year.

Q: Will people still get an AmeriCorps Education Award? Will 300 minimum requirement be possible?

A: We are working with our AmeriCorps partners to get maximum flexibility on this. Pro-rated education awards are possible for Members who complete a partial term – we are working with our partners on that as well.

Q: Are AmeriCorps position less likely to run?

A: We don't know yet. We are trying to create as many AmeriCorps positions as possible.

Breck closed the Q&A with this reminder:

We think of the first day of work at VYCC, when we are gathered for the first time, like ripples on a pond. You, your crew, other crews, and 35 years of VYCC alumni are part of a national movement dedicated to service. By taking the first step towards joining VYCC, you are taking part in something larger than any one person. Even though this is an uncertain moment, you can still be part of the service movement and you can find ways to make the world a better place.