



**VERMONT  
YOUTH  
CONSERVATION  
CORPS**

# Participant Handbook



**AmeriCorps**

# Table of Contents

- What is the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps?.....3**
- VYCC Programs.....4**
  - Conservation Program .....4
  - Food and Farm Program.....5
  - Typical Daily Schedules.....6
  - Education .....6
  - Evenings, Weekends, Time Off .....7
  - Communication.....8
  - Visitors .....9
- VYCC Crew Expectations.....9**
  - Prohibitbited Activities ..... 10
- VYCC Organizational Policies..... 11**
- Compensation and Payroll..... 17**

# What is the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps?

## Mission

Teaching young people personal responsibility through meaningful work that connects us to the land, community, and one another

## Core Values

**Personal Responsibility** – When we own our actions and step up to serve, we make ourselves and our communities healthy and strong.

**Diversity & Teamwork** – Everyone’s contributions matter. We are strongest when VYCC represents all members of our community. Meaningful group work sparks enduring friendships.

**Leadership** – Every Corps Member has leadership potential. Hard work, high standards, reflection, and structure are catalysts for personal growth and a lasting sense of agency.

**Education & Training** – Learning is at the core of the Corps. Members develop technical skills, critical thinking, and self-awareness that ready them for a lifetime of learning, job success, and civic contributions.

**The Natural World** – The outdoor experience feeds our souls and brings us together. Be it a working landscape, wild spaces, or town centers, we inspire reverence and ensure access for all.

## History

Please see the VYCC history here: <https://www.vycc.org/about/history/>

## Staff Contact Information

If you need to communicate with our staff prior to your arrival, during or after your season please contact the following people:

### Conservation Program

Pilar Lopez-Gomez; Conservation Program Manager [pilar.lopez-gomez@vycc.org](mailto:pilar.lopez-gomez@vycc.org) 571-279-2662

Halle Harklau; Conservation Program Coordinator [halle.harklau@vycc.org](mailto:halle.harklau@vycc.org) 802-858-5631

### Farm Program

Kyle Weatherhogg; Food and Farm Program Coordinator [kyle.weatherhogg@vycc.org](mailto:kyle.weatherhogg@vycc.org) 802-558-3495

### Administrative Team

Laura Melhus; Administration Manager [laura.melhus@vycc.org](mailto:laura.melhus@vycc.org) 802-434-3969 x 200

Caitlin Perrier; Program Services Administrator [Caitlin.perrier@vycc.org](mailto:Caitlin.perrier@vycc.org) 802-434-3969 x130

## VYCC Staff Overview

### Definitions

#### *Corps Members*

Corps member is an inclusive term we use to describe all VYCC participants, whether they are leaders or members.

#### *Day Crews*

Day Crews work/serve set hours during the week. Corps Members on Day Crews are not with their crews evenings or weekends, and they do not camp at their project site.

#### *Camping Crews*

Camping Crews work/serve set hours during the week. In addition, Camping Crews spend their evenings and weekends

living together at a campsite near their work projects.

***Crew Member***

Crew Members are members on a crew. They engage in hands-on projects, working as a team, with support from Crew Leaders and VYCC staff.

***Youth Crew Members*** are 15 – 17years old.

***AmeriCorps Crew Members*** are at least 17 years old.

***Crew Leaders***

Crew Leaders are experienced leaders, facilitators, project managers, and community builders. They are responsible for creating a safe, inclusive, supportive, and productive crew.

***Peer Crews***

Peer Crews offer leadership development opportunities for young adults with previous Crew Member experience. Rather than having Leaders and Members, Peer Crews Leaders share leadership responsibilities at work and at camp. Peer Crew Leaders may be focused on developing the skills to lead a summer VYCC Crew or they could be excited to transfer the skills they learn to a different summer opportunity.

### *Pro Crews*

Pro Crews work alongside professionals within a specific field, such as forestry, carpentry, or trail assessment, tackling projects that require skill and commitment. Pro Crews are a great fit for someone who is ready to transition into a career in conservation.

### *Project Leads*

Project Leads are focused on food and nutrition, sustainable agriculture, and youth development as part of VYCC's Food and Farm Program.

### *Field Supervisors*

Field Supervisors mentor and support Crew Leaders and Members as their crews complete conservation projects. They train and guide crews in the skills they need, problem solve day to day challenges with the crew, and are a part of the crew's on-call support system.

## **Headquarters (HQ) Staff**

VYCC is fueled by an energetic team of talented individuals. With backgrounds in education, agriculture, conservation, and more, the staff at VYCC holds a skillset as diverse as the youth and young adults we work with. Visit our website to learn more about each staff member: <http://www.vycc.org/about/our-team/>

## **The VYCC Board of Directors**

The Board of Directors is the chief policy development and governing body of the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps. The Board coordinates, communicates, and sets up working and legal agreements, broadly oversees fiscal management of organization, assists staff in raising funds, and helps further VYCC's mission.

## **VYCC Programs**

The VYCC is composed of two programs, the **Conservation Program** and the **Food and Farm Program**. Regardless of the program or crew type, the recipe for a successful VYCC experience is the same: groups of young people, working together, on meaningful projects, in the outdoors.

### **Conservation Program**

The Conservation Program engages youth and young adults in work that allows Corps Members to gain valuable, real life experiences and job skills. Crews complete projects including trail building, forestry, habitat restoration, watershed enhancement, and park restoration. Crews work on projects throughout Vermont in settings ranging from town centers to Green Mountain alpine ridge tops.

VYCC's Conservation Program operates throughout Vermont and in adjacent states, tackling projects in the categories of trails, carpentry, water quality, invasive species, and forestry. We work on public and private land, with a wide range of partner organizations. This means that members in the Conservation Program have the opportunity to either focus their skills by joining a project-specific crew (technical trails crew, water quality crew, or parks carpentry crew, for example), or gain a broad based introduction to the different types of conservation work in the Northeast. Along the way, members get to explore new places in the state, and learn different perspectives about how individuals can create lasting positive impact on their communities, lands, and waterways, while gaining valuable transferable skills to take forwards into their next steps in life.

### **Conservation Program Primary Project Partners**

- *Vermont Department of Forest, Parks, and Recreation (FPR)*

- *Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC)*
- *US Forest Service (USFS)*
- *Individual Town Forests and Parks*

## **Food and Farm Program**

VYCC's Food and Farm Program is a dynamic youth development and food security initiative. It engages young people in sustainable farming to improve access to healthy foods in Vermont communities. The Food and Farm Program grows produce and poultry for the VYCC [Health Care Share](#), a public health project connecting Vermont families who experience barriers accessing fresh food and/or suffer from diet related diseases with a weekly Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share distributed at their health center. Additionally, Food and Farm Corps Members receive a share of the vegetables grown and engage in cooking projects on the farm that build their own skills in healthy food preparation.

Our main program site is on the VYCC campus in Richmond, Vermont, where we have 12 acres in annual crop production, and utilize our pastures and farm buildings to raise meat chickens, laying hens, and pigs. We also have a commercial kitchen where our Corps Members work together to transform the food grown on the farm into a daily lunch shared by all crews. We have an additional program site at Bluffside Farm in Newport, where a youth crew cultivates one acre in vegetables to support the Health Care Share program at North Country Hospital and contributes to other land-based projects on the property in partnership with the Vermont Land Trust. At all our program sites, young people are engaging in hands-on, meaningful projects where they help feed themselves and their community while working together as a team.

### **Food and Farm Program Primary Project Partners**

- *Health Care Share partnering hospitals*
- *Partnering Farms and organizations*
- *Vermont Land Trust and Bluffside Farm*

### **VYCC AmeriCorps Program**

AmeriCorps is a national service program, managed by the Corporation for National and Community Service, that involves more than 80,000 Americans each year who work to improve community needs. It is an opportunity for individuals of all ages and backgrounds to give their time and talent to strengthen communities. The AmeriCorps mission statement is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

VYCC works in partnership with AmeriCorps via grants with SerVermont, Vermont's State Service Commission, and The Corps Network (TCN). These collaborative efforts with VYCC are called the Community Impact: Conservation and Agriculture AmeriCorps and Opportunity Youth Service Initiative (OYSI).

### **Camping Crew Experience**

Camping crews live and work outdoors for the duration of their VYCC participation (as indicated by their onboarding paperwork) during the spring, summer and fall. During this time, crews live as a community and engage in the various tasks required for life in a field setting. Crews work on project sites during the day, and spend their nights and weekends at their camp location. Weekends may include a trip into town to resupply on groceries, do laundry, visit a museum, or go for a hike.

### **Day Crew Experience**

Conservation Day Crews work during the day, Monday through Thursday or Friday, on community-based projects and

return home in the evening. The crew meet in the mornings and travel together to project sites. Farm Day Crews work during the day, Monday through Thursday, on community-based projects and return home in the evening. The crews meet at the project sites in either Richmond or Newport, Vermont.

## Typical Daily Schedules

All VYCC crews work approximately eight hour days. Corps Members must take a half hour lunch break each work day. The following are standard daily schedules for each crew type; however, they are subject to change based on the nature of the project and crew needs.

For an accurate and up to date season schedule, please refer to the schedule available on the VYCC website “Start Your Season” page: <https://www.vycc.org/yourseason/>

### *Conservation Camping Crew (Monday-Friday)*

5:30 AM	Prepare breakfast
6:00	Eat breakfast, prepare personal gear
7:15	Prepare tools and equipment
7:30	Travel to project site
8:00	Work
12:00 PM	Lunch
12:30	Work
4:30	Leave project site
5:30	Cook dinner
6:30	Dinner and clean-up
8:00	Evening activities
9:30	All Crew Members in tents

### *Conservation Day Crew*

7:45 AM	Crew Leaders arrive at the project site
8:00	Crew Members arrive at the project site
8:30	Work
12:00 PM	Lunch
12:30	Work
4:30	End of day, Crew Members go home

### *Food and Farm AmeriCorps and Day Crew*

7:00 – 8:00 AM	Crew Leaders arrive at project site (Richmond or Newport, VT) Start times vary within the season
7:00 - 8:00	Work
12:00 PM	Lunch
12:30	Work
4:30	End of day, Crew Members go home

## Education

Personal and professional growth is an important part of the VYCC experience. Learning and growth happens through the work, in finding a creative solution to problem or figuring out how to work effectively as a team. We also provide time and space for learning that allows Corps Members to reflect on not just the work but the job, themselves, and their community.

As such, all crews participate in several hours of education and training per week. This can take on a variety of forms, including presentations from Project Sponsors or HQ staff, technical skill training, personal skill building, or other types of education opportunities that Crew Members and Leaders are interested in exploring. For AmeriCorps Members, these hours will count towards their service hours and their Education Award.

Daily Practice: All crews spend 10 minutes at the beginning of the day providing context and background for their projects. They also spend 10 minutes at the end of each day debriefing successes and challenges. This time is part of the work day.

Weekly Practice: Learning is center to the VYCC experience. As such, education and training can happen is a regular part of the work week and is largely determined by the project time, skill and interest of the crew, and project logistics. In addition to the learning that is built into the work, VYCC crews also have two hours per week devoted to education and training that enhances the work. This dedicated learning time is meant to give Corps Members an opportunity to grow professionally and personally, and this curriculum is based around six themes:

- Safety and Health
- Support
- Community
- Grit and Resiliency
- Food
- Land

Content for these themes can come from either the activity book or ideas and interests of Corps Members, or HQ staff.

### **Receiving School Credit**

Some Crew Members have received academic credit for their participation on a VYCC Crew. If interested in receiving credit for the crew experience, please speak with a school advisor and then contact us.

### **Evenings, Weekends, Session Break**

#### **Camping Crews**

Evenings are a time for recharging and getting ready for the next day. Dinners are cooked by the crew and every Corps Member is responsible for cooking dinner during the session. Coming together to share a meal is an important part of the VYCC culture, and crews are encouraged to use dinner as a way to care for and appreciate each other. Depending on weather, energy level, work demands, crews can do evening activities together or alone to recharge such as games, reading a book chatting by the fire, or getting extra sleep. While we encourage everyone to participate in community activities, we recognize that everyone charges their battery a different way. We try to provide space to grow as a community while also providing time to be alone, rest, and recharge.

On weekends, crews decide together what activities they are interested in. This might include: getting groceries, going to a farmer's market, hiking, visiting a museum, doing laundry, or tidying up camp. All VYCC policies and principles apply on weekends and evenings.

During session break, the period between sessions and hitches, all Crew Members can leave VYCC. Crew Members choose to leave VYCC for any number of reasons, visiting friends and family, traveling around Vermont, resting and recharging. For those that leave, VYCC policies do not apply as long as they are not staying on the VYCC campus.



Crew Members 18 years or older may choose to stay on the VYCC campus during session break – Crew Members under the age of 18 cannot stay on campus during break. Members may choose to stay because they don't have easy access to a car, prefer to stay somewhere familiar, or want to use VYCC as a home base for exploring the area around Richmond. We try to make living on campus as comfortable as possible. However, housing is limited to 3-sided lean-tos and the experience is more like camping than living indoors. If a Corps Member does choose to stay on the VYCC campus during session break, all VYCC policies and principles apply, and there may be times of limited access to the facilities due to other scheduled events.

Members will be expected to arrive back at the VYCC Campus promptly at the agreed upon time before the next session or hitch.

### **Day Crews**

Day Crew Members are responsible for arriving at the designated meetup location at 8:00 AM and end the day at 4:30 PM. Day Crew Members have evenings and weekends off. Exceptions to this schedule occur during the season and include the following events: Member Trainings/Orientations, Crew Engagement Events, and Closure Events.

### **Communication**

VYCC recognizes that screens have become a part of our everyday life. We also recognize that the VYCC experience is centered on face to face community building, hands-on work, and engaging with the natural world. Balancing the experience of modern life with the VYCC experience is challenging but we believe that limiting time spent on screens while in the field can enhance the VYCC experience. We are intentional about screen use and our practices reflect the time needed for Corps Members to engage with their screens, and the time needed for Corps Members to engage with their crew, the community, and the natural world.

#### **Cell Phone Practices – Day Crews**

Day Crew Members will keep their phones out of sight (preferably in backpacks) during the work day. If a Crew Member needs to use their phone during the work day, they must check with their Crew Leader regarding the best time/place for that use to occur. Crew Members and Leaders can decide if and how phones can be used during lunch break.

#### **Cell Phone Practices – Camping Crews**

Camping Crew Members will keep their phones out of sight (either at camp or in a backpack) during the work day as well as during evenings/nights/mornings during the work week. Crew Members and Leaders work together to determine how much screen time they want to allot on the weekends. Many camp or work locations may not have cell phone signal, and members should not plan on being able to reach friends or family while they are on crew. Additionally, VYCC cannot guarantee that your phone will stay safe or dry while in the field, and you will have the option to leave your phone in secure storage at our headquarters if preferred.

Every Camping Crew is equipped with a cell phone and pager, which is used when there is no cell service. HQ staff know the best way to get in touch with each crew and, in the event of an emergency, have multiple methods of communicating with a crew. Friends and family who would like to communicate with a Crew Member in the field are asked to contact VYCC and we can figure out the best way to contact the crew.

Friends and family are encouraged to send letters and mail to Corps Members on Camping Crews. Please consider that packages need to be transported to a project or camp site by hand so it may not be possible to transport a heavy, large package. Mail is delivered on average once a week to the crew. All mailed items must include the Crew Member's name.

Packages and letters can be sent to this address:

**Crew Member Name**

**Crew Name**

c/o VYCC

1949 East Main Street Richmond, VT

05477

**Visitors**

**Conservation Camping Crews**

Visitors are discouraged at all Conservation Camping Crew sites. All VYCC Staff visiting a VYCC crew undergo a rigorous background check to ensure they are legally able to work with young people. As we cannot provide the same background checks for visitors, even parents and guardians, we highly discourage anyone visiting a Conservation Camping Crew. If a parent/guardian does need to visit a crew, we require them to be accompanied by HQ staff. The best time to visit with friends and family is during session break.

**Day Crews**

Day Crews host community events. These typically happen once per crew, per season and they are the best way to share a VYCC experience with friends and family.

**VYCC Crew Expectations**

VYCC's Principles, Practices, and Immediate Dismissal Policies have been created to keep crews safe, happy, and healthy. They are the result of decades of feedback from Crew Members, Crew Leaders, project sponsors, community members, and HQ staff. They are also ever-evolving and reflect the successes and challenges we face today.

**Principles and Practices**

Principles

- Safety and Health: Foster a safe working, living, and learning environment

Practices

- Be respectful of other people's personal property and space
- Use tools, equipment, and vehicles properly
- Ensure that with all personal equipment (food, water, medication) is available when needed

- Support: Have care for self and others

Practices

- Practice self-care, including physical and mental health, and proper hygiene
- Access health services (physical and mental) when needed
- Check in with your supervisor frequently and consistently
- Take action to support others

- Community: Create a culture of belonging

Practices

- Encourage inclusive relationships that strengthen the VYCC community
- Check in with your crew regularly
- Create a safe space for constructive, specific, and objective feedback

- Engage in open and respectful communication
- Grit and Resiliency: Lean into challenge and learn from failure
  - Practices
    - Maintain a growth mindset
    - Strive for a positive mental attitude
    - Dig deep, step outside your comfort zone
    - Receive and use feedback to learn from challenges
    - Give feedback to help others grown and learn
- Accountability: Be accountable to yourself and your crew
  - Practices
    - Be a consistent member of your crew
    - Advocate for yourself and others
    - Own up to your mistakes and celebrate your successes
    - Create and uphold a crew contract
- Professionalism: Have pride in your work and model professionalism
  - Practices
    - Work to your fullest potential
    - Uphold VYCC project standards
    - Represent VYCC in ways that are positive and in keeping with our principles

Dismissal Policies: Behavior that results in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal

- Physical/emotional violence or threats of violence to others
- Harassing behavior based on protected status
- Physical intimacy with another Corps Member while engaged in VYCC programming
- Possession, use or suspicion of use of alcohol, nicotine, or federally illegal drugs on a VYCC job or program site

All policies and principles apply to all members of the VYCC community.

## **Prohibited Activities**

Due to the non-profit status and public support of the VYCC and VYCC programs, certain activities are prohibited as they could jeopardize our non-profit status or public funding sources.

Employees and Corps Members are restricted from certain political activities while performing any duties which are funded by AmeriCorps or other federal grants. For a list of activities, please visit

[https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/acprohibited\\_activities.pdf](https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/acprohibited_activities.pdf)

## **Assessment and Improvement Plan**

Dismissal Policies are any activities that severely jeopardize the health and safety of Corps Members and are, therefore, grounds for immediate dismissal. VYCC takes these policies seriously and will investigate any reports of Dismissal Policy violations.

Principles, and Practices serve as guidelines, helping crews establish a safe and healthy culture that reflects VYCC, crew, and

individual values. If a Crew Member is struggling with behavior that is detracting from general crew health, they have opportunities to correct their behavior by sitting down with their Leaders and co-creating an Assessment and Improvement Plan (AIP).

If an AIP is required, Corps Members will document the specific broken principle or practice, the behavior that needs to change, how the changes will be measured, when the changes need to occur, and what resources either the Crew Member or Leader need. A pattern of principle or practice violations can lead to a dismissal.

## **VYCC Organizational Policies**

These are policies and procedures taken from the "VYCC Employee Handbook." All employees of VYCC must receive these policies, read through them and abide by them. Please contact the VYCC Administrative Manager if you would like a copy of the VYCC Employee Handbook or if you have further questions.

### **Equal Employment Opportunity**

VYCC has a deep commitment to excellence. We believe we are strongest when our team includes members with a broad range of life experiences. We strive to achieve this at all levels of our organization, and actively encourage and recruit, develop, and retain the most talented people from a diverse applicant pool. VYCC is proud to be an equal opportunity employer.

VYCC strives to cultivate a work environment that encourages fairness, teamwork, and respect among all staff members. It is firmly committed to maintaining a work atmosphere in which people of diverse backgrounds and lifestyles may grow personally and professionally.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

VYCC welcomes applications from people with disabilities and fully supports the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. If a reasonable accommodation is needed in order to perform the essential functions of a job because of a disability, please contact the Administration Manager and/or the Chief Financial Officer.

### **Workplace Harassment**

VYCC is firmly committed to prohibiting unlawful discrimination throughout the employment process against individuals because of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, religion, national origin, ancestry, place of birth, disability, health coverage status, genetic information, including traits for sickle cell or hemoglobin C, HIV status, veteran or military status or any other legally protected status. All employees are entitled to a workplace free of discrimination, including harassment based on any of the above factors. We will not tolerate such conduct at the workplace. If an employee believes that they have been subjected to unlawful discrimination or harassment, the reporting procedure outlined below for complaints of sexual harassment should be followed. Harassment is generally defined as any behavior that is: **offensive, threatening, demeaning, belittling, hurtful, or embarrassing.**

### **Sexual Harassment**

VYCC prohibits sexual harassment of its employees. Sexual harassment is unlawful under state and federal statute. We are committed to providing workplaces free from this unlawful conduct.

### **Definition of "Sexual Harassment"**

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination and means unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

1. submission to that conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment; or
2. submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as a component of the basis for employment decisions affecting that individual; or
3. the conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Examples of sexual harassment may include, but are not limited to the following, when such acts or behavior come within one of the above definitions:

- either explicitly or implicitly conditioning any term of employment (e.g. continued employment, wages, evaluation, advancement, assigned duties or shifts) on the provision of sexual favors;
- touching or grabbing a sexual part of a person's body;
- touching or grabbing any part of a person's body after that person has indicated, or it is known, that such physical contact was unwelcome;
- continuing to ask a person to socialize on or off-duty when that person has indicated they are not interested;
- displaying or transmitting sexually suggestive pictures, objects, cartoons, or posters if it is known or should be known that the behavior is unwelcome;
- continuing to write sexually suggestive notes or letters if it is known or should be known that the person does not welcome such behavior;
- regularly telling sexual jokes or using sexually vulgar or explicit language in the presence of a person if it is known or should be known that the person does not welcome such behavior;
- referring to or calling a person a sexualized name if it is known or should be known that the person does not welcome such behavior;
- retaliating for complaining about sexual harassment;
- retaliation of any kind for having filed or supported a complaint of sexual harassment (e.g. ostracizing the person, pressuring the person to drop or not support the complaint, adversely altering that person's duties or work environment, etc.);
- derogatory or provoking remarks about or relating to a person's sex or sexual orientation;
- harassing acts or behavior directed against a person on the basis of their sex or sexual orientation; or
- off-duty conduct which falls within the above definition and affects the work environment.

Retaliation against an employee for reporting sexual harassment or for cooperating in an investigation of a complaint of sexual harassment is unlawful and will not be tolerated. It shall be a violation of this policy for any employee who learns of the investigation or complaint to take any retaliatory action which affects the working environment of any person involved in the complaint or investigation. Employees who believe they are being retaliated against should follow the complaint procedure outlined below.

### **Harassment Complaint Procedure**

VYCC is committed to taking action, and is required by law to take action, when it learns of potential sexual harassment or workplace harassment. VYCC is required by law to take action if it learns of potential sexual harassment, even if the aggrieved person does not wish to formally file a complaint.

Any employee who feels that they have been the victim of, or have been made privy to knowledge of sexual harassment or workplace harassment, should communicate with a Supervisor immediately. Any VYCC employee who has been made aware of a sexual or workplace harassment situation should report it to the Executive Director, who has been designated to receive complaints. If a Supervisor does not feel comfortable reporting to the Executive Director, or if the Executive Director is not reachable, then all Supervisors should report to one of the members of the Board listed below. Failure by a Supervisor to appropriately report or address such sexual harassment complaints or suspected acts shall be considered to be in violation of this policy.

Care will be taken to protect the identity of the person with the complaint, as well as the accused party or parties, except as may be reasonably necessary to successfully complete an investigation. It shall be a violation of this policy for any person who learns of an investigation or complaint to take any retaliatory action which affects the working environment of any person involved in this investigation. If the allegation of sexual harassment is found to be credible, VYCC will take appropriate corrective action.

VYCC will inform the complaining person and the accused person of the results of the investigation and what actions will be taken to ensure that the harassment will cease and that no retaliation will occur. Any employee, supervisor, or outside party found by the employer to have committed harassment will be subject to sanctions appropriate to the circumstances, ranging from a verbal warning up to and including dismissal. If the allegation is not found to be credible, the person with the complaint and the accused person shall be so informed, with appropriate instruction provided to each, including the right of the complainant to contact any of the state or federal agencies identified in this policy.

**What you should do if you believe you have been harassed**

Any person who believes that they have been the target of sexual harassment, or who believes they have been subjected to retaliation for having brought or supported a complaint of harassment, is encouraged to directly inform the offending person or persons that such conduct is offensive and must stop. If the person subjected to the harassment does not wish to communicate directly with the alleged harasser or harassers, or if direct communication has been ineffective, then the person with the complaint is encouraged to report the situation as soon as possible to their Supervisor, or to the following people.

Breck Knauft, Executive Director (He/Him)  
802-598-6386  
breck.knauft@vycc.org

Anne Adler, Vice-Chair, VYCC Board of Directors (She/Her)  
203-561-8304  
Anneadler11.11@gmail.com

Although employees are encouraged to file their complaint of sexual harassment through the aforementioned complaint procedure, the following agencies also process complaints of sexual harassment:

Vermont Attorney General's Office, Civil Rights Unit, 109 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05602, tel: (802) 828-3171 (voice/TDD).

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, John F. Kennedy Federal Building, 475 Government Center, Boston, MA 02203, tel: (800) 669-4000 (voice), (800) 669-6820 (TDD).

Vermont Human Rights Commission, 14-16 Baldwin Street Montpelier, VT 05633-6301, email: human.rights@vermont.gov, tel: 1-800-416-2010 (Toll-Free VT) or 1-802-828-1625 (voice), (Only if you are employed by the State of Vermont). Complaints must be filed within 360 days of the adverse action.

### ***Harassment by Non-Employees***

Any harassing or otherwise discriminatory behavior by customers, vendors, or any other third parties should be reported to the VYCC Administrative Manager as soon as possible so that appropriate corrective action may be taken.

## **Confidentiality**

All staff must maintain the strictest levels of confidentiality concerning sensitive or confidential information learned via any participant's application, medical form, or private conversations. Only a valid concern for the health and safety of an individual or group would be considered an acceptable reason for sharing such confidential information.

## **Mandatory Reporting**

All VYCC Employees who are over the age of eighteen (18) are Mandated Reporters. If any VYCC employee or member is over eighteen (18), they are required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the Vermont Department of Children & Families (DCF) within twenty-four (24) hours. Mandated Reporter obligations cannot be delegated to another VYCC employee or member. Any VYCC employee or member who qualifies as a mandated reporter is required to make the report. Supervisors must be notified immediately of any and all reports made to DCF. It is VYCC's policy to cooperate with investigative bodies during any investigation regarding suspected abuse or neglect within the limits of the law, VYCC policy, and according to VYCC's legal counsel. VYCC also reserves the right to conduct an internal investigation in conjunction with investigative agencies.

### **Reports of Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect**

Reports of suspected child abuse or neglect must be made within twenty-four (24) hours to the Child Protection Line at 1-800-649-5285. If the child is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1 or the local police first; then call DCF to make a report.

### ***Definitions – Child Abuse & Neglect***

Vermont's child protection law defines an abused or neglected child as one whose physical health, psychological growth and development, or welfare is harmed or is at substantial risk of harm by the acts or omissions of their parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare. It also means a child who is sexually abused or at substantial risk of sexual abuse by any person (including another child). Harm can occur when there is:

1. Abandonment of the child.
  - a. ***Child*** means an individual under age eighteen (18).
2. Emotional maltreatment, physical injury, or sexual abuse.
  - a. ***Emotional maltreatment*** means a pattern of malicious behavior resulting in impaired psychological growth and development.
  - b. ***Physical injury*** means death, permanent or temporary disfigurement, or impairment of any bodily organ or function other than by accidental means.
  - c. ***Sexual abuse*** consists of any act or acts by any person involving sexual molestation or exploitation of a child including, but not limited to, incest, rape, prostitution, sodomy, child pornography, or any lewd and lascivious conduct involving a child.

3. Failure to supply a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, or health care.
  - a. *Risk of harm* means a significant danger that a child will suffer serious harm other than by accidental means.

### **Open-Door Policy**

VYCC believes that staff concerns are best addressed through informal and open communication among all levels of management. Our open-door policy encourages productive and positive relationships within the organization. All employees are encouraged to express their opinions, concerns, and suggestions regarding the workplace directly to their supervisor or any member of the VYCC Staff whom they feel can help them. VYCC is eager to assist in the resolution of employee concerns, and to consider ideas for making our organization even better.

VYCC will attempt to keep all such expressions of concern, any required investigation, and the terms of resolution confidential. In the course of investigating and resolving concerns, however, some dissemination of information to others may be appropriate. No staff member will be disciplined or otherwise penalized for raising a concern in good faith.

### **Whistleblower Policy**

VYCC requires directors, officers and employees to observe high standards of business and personal ethics in the conduct of their duties and responsibilities. Employees and representatives of VYCC must practice honesty and integrity in fulfilling their responsibilities and comply with all applicable laws and regulations.

### **Reporting Responsibility**

This Whistleblower Policy is intended to encourage and enable employees and others to raise serious concerns internally so that VYCC can address and correct inappropriate conduct and actions. It is the responsibility of all board members, officers, employees and volunteers to report concerns about violations of VYCC's code of ethics or suspected violations of law or regulations that govern VYCC's operations.

### **No Retaliation**

It is contrary to the values of VYCC for anyone to retaliate against any board member, officer, employee, or volunteer who in good faith reports an ethics violation, or a suspected violation of law, such as a complaint of discrimination, or suspected fraud, or suspected violation of any regulation governing the operations of VYCC. An employee who retaliates against someone who has reported a violation in good faith is subject to discipline up to and including termination of employment.

### **Reporting Procedure**

VYCC has an open door policy and suggests that employees share their questions, concerns, suggestions or complaints with their supervisor. If they are not comfortable speaking with their supervisor or are not satisfied with their supervisor's response, they are encouraged to speak with the Executive Director or the President of the Board. Supervisors and managers are required to report complaints or concerns about suspected ethical and legal violations in writing to the Executive Director, who has the responsibility to investigate all reported complaints. Employees with concerns or complaints may also submit their concerns in writing directly to their supervisor or the President of the Board.

### **Compliance**

The Executive Director is responsible for ensuring that all complaints about unethical or illegal conduct are investigated and resolved. The Executive Director will advise the Board of Directors of all complaints and their resolution and will report at



least annually to the Finance Committee on compliance activity relating to accounting or alleged financial improprieties.

### **Accounting and Auditing Matters**

The Executive Director shall immediately notify the Finance Committee of any concerns or complaint regarding corporate accounting practices, internal controls or auditing and work with the committee until the matter is resolved.

### **Acting in Good Faith**

Anyone filing a written complaint concerning a violation or suspected violation must be acting in good faith and have reasonable grounds for believing the information disclosed indicates a violation. Any allegations that prove not to be substantiated and which prove to have been made maliciously or knowingly to be false will be viewed as a serious disciplinary offense.

### **Confidentiality**

Violations or suspected violations may be submitted on a confidential basis by the complainant. Reports of violations or suspected violations will be kept confidential to the extent possible, consistent with the need to conduct an adequate investigation. Whenever possible the anonymity of the complainant will be maintained.

### **Handling of Reported Violations**

The Executive Director will notify the person who submitted a complaint and acknowledge receipt of the reported violation or suspected violation. All reports will be promptly investigated and appropriate corrective action will be taken if warranted by the investigation. If the person filing the complaint is not notified that the complaint was received by the Executive Director, that complaint should be filed a second time directly with the President of the Board.

### **Worker's Compensation Insurance**

All staff members are protected by our worker's compensation insurance policy while employed at the VYCC. The policy is available at no cost to the employee and covers injury or illness arising or resulting from legitimate work activities. By law, VYCC is required to report injuries covered under worker's compensation within forty-eight (48) hours. An on-the-job injury must be reported to a supervisor or the Administration Manager immediately. The supervisor is responsible for ensuring the proper completion, submission, and reporting of an Incident Report.

A leave of absence due to a disabling work-related illness or injury will run concurrently with leave to which the employee may be entitled under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the Vermont Parental and Family Leave Act (VPFLA). VYCC will follow the provisions of all applicable laws governing leave.

Complete information about worker's compensation and on-the-job illnesses or injuries is available from the Administration Manager and/or the Chief Financial Officer.

### **Ownership, Confidentiality and Access of Electronic Mail, Voice Mail, and Computer Files**

VYCC owns the rights to all data and files in any computer, network, or other information system used in the organization. VYCC reserves the right to monitor computer and e-mail usage, both as it occurs and in the form of account histories and their content. VYCC has the right to inspect any and all files stored in any areas of the network or on any types of computer storage media in order to assure compliance with this policy and state and federal laws. The organization will comply with reasonable requests from law enforcement and regulatory agencies for logs, diaries, archives, or files on individual computer and e-mail activities. VYCC also reserves the right to monitor electronic mail messages and their content. Be aware that the electronic mail messages sent and received using organizational equipment are not private and are subject to viewing,

downloading, inspection, release, and archiving.

It is a violation of VYCC policy for any employee, including system administrators and supervisors, to access electronic mail and computer systems files to satisfy curiosity about the affairs of others. Violators will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including immediate termination.

### ***Social Media***

This policy governs the publication of and commentary on social media by employees of the VYCC. For the purposes of this policy, social media means any facility for online publication and commentary, including without limitation blogs, wiki's, social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube. This policy is in addition to and complements any existing or future policies regarding the use of technology, computers, e-mail and the internet.

VYCC employees are free to publish or comment via social media in accordance with this policy. VYCC employees are subject to this policy to the extent they identify themselves as a VYCC employee (other than as an incidental mention of place of employment in a personal blog on topics unrelated to VYCC). Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary.

All uses of social media must follow the same ethical standards that VYCC employees must otherwise follow.

### ***Respect the audience, VYCC, and co-workers***

The public in general, and VYCC's employees and customers, reflect a diverse set of customs, values and points of view. We encourage everyone to be themselves, but only if done so respectfully. This includes not only the obvious (no ethnic slurs, offensive comments, defamatory comments, personal insults, obscenity, etc.) but also proper consideration of privacy and of topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory. Corps Members should use their best judgment and be sure to make it clear that the views and opinions expressed by them are that individual's alone and do not represent VYCC.

### ***Speaking to the Media***

Please refer all inquiries from reporters for the media (newspapers, magazines, radio, television, news agencies, and other news services) to the supervisor. It is the VYCC's goal to give the press clear, consistent, and up-to-date information about the organization and its programs. Because information about activities changes often, it is especially important not to give the press information that is inaccurate or misleading.

## **Compensation and Payroll**

### **Workweek**

The VYCC work week is Saturday through Friday.

### **Pay Periods**

VYCC payroll is bi-weekly, paid every other Friday. Employees are paid for work completed through the previous Friday.

### **Salary Deductions and Withholding**

#### ***Taxes***

VYCC will withhold federal, state, and local taxes, as required by law, as well as the required FICA (Social Security) and Medicare payments from a paycheck.

If any employee has a question about their paycheck, the employee should report the concern to payroll immediately so that compliance with the law can be assured. VYCC will investigate the problem within two (2) weeks and will promptly make any appropriate corrections.

### **Direct Deposit**

VYCC is committed to paperless transactions whenever possible. Employee paychecks are issued most often through electronic direct deposit.

Payments will be electronically deposited directly into one or more checking or savings accounts designated by each employee. Accounts must be established with financial institutions; such as banks or credit unions that support direct deposit. Pay stubs will be issued electronically to all employees with direct deposit, seasonal members, and staff.

Temporary exceptions to this policy may be made for new hires, to provide adequate time to set up a direct deposit account. Exceptions may also be made for employees who provide evidence that they cannot obtain an account at a financial institution offering direct deposit.

NOTE: It is each employee's responsibility to review their payroll stub for accuracy of personal information and payment information. Employees must immediately notify the Finance Department if there has been an overpayment of wages. Employees are not entitled to keep wage overpayments and VYCC may recoup overpaid amounts from future payments.

NOTE: Employees must notify the Finance Department when there is any change to bank accounts that affect direct deposit.

### **Seasonal Member Compensation**

#### *Living Allowance*

AmeriCorps Members receive a taxable weekly living allowance as outlined in their Offer Letter. The living allowance is paid on the same bi-weekly basis as stated above.

#### *Stipend*

Youth crew members are paid a weekly stipend, an amount that depends on their crew type and days/week worked. All details of the stipend and bonuses will be outlined in their offer letter given at the time of hire.

#### *Completion Bonus*

At the end of a completed season Conservation Crew Leaders will also receive a "completion bonus" paid in their last pay check.

#### *AmeriCorps Education Award and Reaching Service Hours*

Please reference the Member Service Agreement.

### **Pre-Approved Time Off**

Aside from scheduled days off, other situations may arise that require a member to seek approval for temporarily leaving the crew. Some of these situations include:

#### *Medical/Emergency Leave Time*

For each session, youth are expected to have full attendance. If youth are unable to attend, we expect them to communicate with their crew leader in advance. There will be up to eight hours of paid time for illness or doctor's appointments. These

hours can be one full day, or be used in smaller increments for appointments. After these eight hours are used, and for any time off that is not medical, any time missed in a day will result in a day's pay being docked from the youth's paycheck.

AmeriCorps participants are responsible for fulfilling their AmeriCorps hour commitment by the end of the program year in order to successfully complete their term of service. For more information about organizing a plan to make-up lost hours due to medical or emergency leave, AmeriCorps members may contact the Program Services Administrator.

***Holidays***

Conservation Crew Members are expected to work their normal weekly schedule for all holidays including Independence Day and Labor Day.

***Jury, Military, Citizen Duties***

Leave time for jury, military, and other civil duties (such as voting) will be considered on a case by case basis in accordance with VYCC and AmeriCorps policy. If there are any questions pertaining to any of these situations, consult with the Crew Leaders or supervisor.

***AmeriCorps Voluntary Resignation or Termination***

Any AmeriCorps Member who resigns or is terminated from the program before the completion of their service term without obtaining a release for 'compelling personal circumstances,' is considered released for cause or quit and will not be eligible for any portion of their education award or interest accrual payments. Loan forbearance and health insurance will be discontinued. Members are not eligible for unemployment benefits.

**Statement of Participation**

Participation with the VYCC is temporary and, is expected to last a specified amount of time stated on the Program Calendar. Participation in the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps depends on timely and continued funding of VYCC, as well as compliance with the reasonable and valid policies, and conditions of participation as described in this manual. Corps Members are responsible for keeping VYCC informed of changes in their enrollment status, address, or any other conditions that affect their ability to participate in the VYCC.

**Recognition of Receipt of the Participant Handbook**

By signing this document you are recognizing you have received this manual and read all the policies therein.

---

Printed Name

---

Date

---

Signature