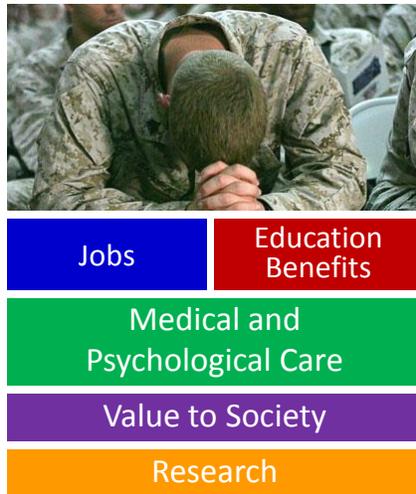




CONCEPT PAPER



MISSION

The mission of Civic Assets is to rehabilitate and reintegrate recovering service members prior to their separation from the military and post 9-11 veterans of the armed forces by placing them in a high-quality transition assistance program where they will continue to serve their country by doing projects that improve their communities. At the same time, Civic Assets corpsmembers will develop the foundation and the skills that will help them to improve their employability in preparation for a return to the civilian workforce. The program will primarily focus on those with traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) and/or Post Traumatic Stress (PTS). It integrates teamwork service experiences; internships; college or vocational courses; medical and mental health treatment under the auspices of the Department of Veterans Affairs; and cutting edge research that will work to examine the effects of supported service work experience integrated with brain rehabilitation. By utilizing the unique leadership talents of these men and women, program research will seek to demonstrate the healing and transformative power that results from structured experiences where individuals devote their time and energy for the greater good. At

the same time, our country will benefit from the completion of vital social service, environmental, and infrastructure projects.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Civic Assets will accomplish its mission by creating a comprehensive program model and research design that links together all of the components necessary to assist recovering service members and post 9-11 veterans to successfully reintegrate into civilian society. It is designed to counter the negative outcomes that so many are experiencing today once their military service is completed. The organization will promote this model in partnership with existing nonprofit agencies, educational institutions, and for profit companies that want to include recovering service members and post 9-11 veterans in their workforce.

The program includes:

- **Employment and Training Component:**

Teams of corpsmembers will be assigned to a Civic Assets conservation crew to perform environmental restoration projects and parks and public facilities landscape maintenance under contract to local, state, and federal governmental agencies. All work will be in the public interest, and corpsmembers can remain on a crew for up to 12 months. As all levels of government struggle to fund essential services, teams of Civic Assets corpsmembers could help to keep California state parks open; assist in the restoration and enhancement of wetlands overseen by the Department of Fish and Game; and work with cities, counties, land trusts, and special districts to maintain public park lands and facilities.

- **Internships Component:** Following initial employment and training, corpsmembers will be placed in real-world internships with both public and private organizations under the auspices of Civic Assets. These internships will last up to one year and will be based on the employing agency's existing job descriptions. The internships will prepare corpsmembers for full time jobs by giving them the training, guidance, and support to create a work history that will make them more employable and help to demonstrate their ability to adapt to a non-military career. We are actively meeting with a variety of organizations and businesses to look for appropriate placements that have the potential to become full-time, permanent jobs. As part of this effort, Civic Assets will work with the Department of Defense to help quantify the training and experience veterans receive in the military to understand what may be applicable to civilian work so that corpsmembers can document their military experiences for civilian employment.
- **Healthcare Component:** The program will provide expedited medical and mental health care to corpsmembers and support groups for families through the Department of

Veterans Affairs and other resources including non-profits. Civic Assets has forged a partnership with the medical and social work staff at the Department of Veterans Affairs hospital system who will work to enable our corpsmembers to get the support they need.

- **Education Component:** Program participants will enroll in college or a vocational training program via the GI Bill and will be mentored by Civic Assets.
- **Research Component:** Civic Assets has forged a partnership with a team of top neurologists, psychiatrists, neuropsychologists, and others who have designed a cognitive retraining module that combines neuroscience-driven cognitive training with job service to maximize the successful reintegration of injured service members into new occupations. The team will also study the effectiveness of the entire Civic Assets program and hopes to show a correlation between community-focused work in a supported team environment and the regeneration of brain tissue and greater brain resiliency among individuals with TBIs and the improved emotional health of those suffering from PTS. By utilizing the unique leadership talents of these men and women, program research will demonstrate the healing and transformative power that results from structured experiences where individuals devote their time and energy for the greater good.

This fee-for-service program model was successfully developed by Civic Assets' co-founder Joanna Lennon for Civicorps, formerly known as the East Bay Conservation Corps, in Oakland, California. At its height of operations, Civicorps reached an annual budget of \$22 million, most of it from fee-for-service contracts. According to a business plan funded by the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, Civic Assets could be self sustaining from these contracts after two years of operation.

Given the challenging economic climate combined with the eroding infrastructure in our cities and towns, Civic Assets will look at sharing its model nationally through viable partnering opportunities with nonprofits and city, county, and state governments along with federal land management agencies. The United States can benefit from a corps of dedicated members motivated by serving their communities while overcoming the more damaging effects of their military experiences.

BACKGROUND

Joanna Lennon has interviewed more than 2000 veterans, injured active duty and Reserves personnel, directors of local and national veterans programs, doctors, neurologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and veteran's advocacy organizations, and personnel from both the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense in the Pentagon to better understand the individual and systemic problems that veterans face as they attempt to re-integrate into American society. The findings from the first 400 interviews are contained in the paper she authored, "*Engaging the Disabled in National Service: Understanding the Barriers*

and Successful Strategies to Enlisting Disabled Veterans, Older Adults, and Students in Service” published in November 2011 by Education Northwest through a grant from the Washington Commission for National and Community Service using disability money from the Corporation for National and Community Service. The Civic Assets program was designed in response to the need for a comprehensive approach based on the research findings and through extensive input from hundreds of veterans.

Growing evidence on the neuroplasticity of the brain—the brain’s ability to change and heal as a result of input from the environment—lends credence to early brain research that has demonstrated the curative effects of positive reinforcement, cognitive engagement, and meaningful responsibility on those with PTS and TBIs. In February 2012, the results of a study by researchers at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs found that “veterans with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who participated in an evidence-based supported employment program called individual placement and support (IPS)—where they were placed in real-life competitive jobs, not in sheltered or set-aside jobs—were nearly three times more likely to gain competitive employment than those who received a standard vocational rehabilitation program.” During the 12 month study, 76% of the participants gained competitive employment compared with 28% of the participants in the standard vocational rehabilitation program. This is significant at a time when a high percentage of veterans are unemployed; experience severe depression; are prone to high rates of homelessness, suicide; alcohol and drug addiction; and have struggled unsuccessfully to reintegrate into civilian life.

The founders of Civic Assets have spent their careers running urban and rural conservation corps programs serving young adults, many of whom are at risk for low educational achievement and joblessness and who suffer from PTS due to the violent circumstances of their lives. Program results include tangible educational achievement, lower crime rates among participants, successful job placements, and low recidivism. This type of supportive educational and employment program will also benefit today’s veterans.

For those recovering from PTS and TBIs, neurologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and educators from major research universities believe that a specially-designed program that includes:

- A team-oriented work environment with discipline and structure
- An affiliation with a group of peers working towards clearly defined goals
- Job-related and more general training including cognitive and emotional functioning in the context of work goals and
- Focused medical, psychological, educational, and other support services

has the potential to be both emotionally and physically therapeutic, providing a sense of pride in accomplishment and competence, the ability to shoulder meaningful responsibility, and an entree to full-time employment and mastery over physical and emotional scars from combat experiences.

Civic Assets was launched following the success of the first Veterans Corps program, first piloted in 2009 by the Washington Commission for National and Community Service, with the support of the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs. The Veterans Corps program was inspired by the Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009 which allowed for a dramatic expansion of service for Americans of all ages and set a goal of increasing the number of AmeriCorps members to 250,000 by 2017. It also expanded the participation of veterans in national service and authorized a national Service Reserve Corps which would consist of both former national service participants and veterans who would undergo annual training and be deployed to major disasters to provide disaster preparedness, relief, or recovery. In addition, the Act also increased the funds allowed for disability outreach and placement,

The Washington Veterans Corps enrolled 46 veterans as AmeriCorps members who were trained to assist new veterans to navigate their way through post secondary education creating campus and community service projects; providing follow up and support to members of the Warrior Transition Battalion at Joint Base Lewis-McChord; and providing outreach services to homeless veterans. Initial reports from this program indicate that not only did program participants assist thousands of veterans in need, but participants also significantly benefited from having the opportunity to serve other veterans. For some of these veterans, the opportunity to serve again helped them to address and to more fully recover from PTS and/or TBI, ailments that in the past limited their ability to fully function in the community.

Civic Assets will expand on these efforts by combining a comprehensive program model with a research and evaluation component to look at what needs to be further addressed such as the need to collect specific outcome data which can help us to recommend specific interventions that would form the basis of a national model program design. Civic Assets will be based at Fort Scott in the Presidio of San Francisco and also near the Martinez Veterans Administration Center for Integrated Brain Health and Wellness and eventually expand throughout California and then nationally. Civic Assets will partner with the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center; the University of California at Berkeley; the San Francisco VA Medical Center; the Palo Alto VA Medical Center; and the new Center for Integrated Brain Health and Wellness at the Martinez VA Medical Center; and with the Department of Defense to build the scaffolding to support research that demonstrates the link between personal growth and development of individuals including those with PTS and/or TBIs as a result of their involvement in service and volunteer activities.

SERVING AN UNDER-SERVED VETERAN POPULATION

The unprecedented length of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have impacted the United States in significant ways—from the loss of life of armed forces, contractors, and humanitarian aid personnel to the physical and emotional injuries countless others have sustained. While the challenges of re-entry into American society faced by recovering service members and by returning veterans are not new, those returning from deployments now face intensified hurdles

due to the difficult economic climate and the lack of sufficient resources that span recovery, counseling, re-integration, training, and job placement.

Stories of the fallout from recovering service members and post 9-11 veterans unable to re-adjust to family life, college, or a new career are increasingly common. Ironically, although they have been the beneficiaries of extensive and sometimes highly specialized training, a large percentage of returning veterans find themselves out of work and feeling isolated, aimless, and hopeless.

INTRODUCING THE SERVICE PARADIGM

Beyond the millions who have served in our wars since the founding of the United States, others have discovered alternative forms of service that have demonstrated tremendous value to both the country and to those who serve. This was dramatically evident in the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression when several hundred thousand jobless young people and veterans worked for modest wages planting trees, building roads, fighting fires, and many other activities to strengthen and preserve our environment and infrastructure. This tradition of service continued in the Peace Corps and more recently in the growth of both state and urban conservation and service corps programs coast to coast. These programs often serve “at risk” young people who have suffered their own variant of PTS in crime-ridden and violence-prone neighborhoods. Other service programs, such as AmeriCorps, have welcomed a broader representation of Americans into service jobs, while tackling some of the biggest societal challenges before us.

Quantitative evidence (including higher educational achievement and success in the workforce) and qualitative evidence (including lowered rates of violence, crime, incarceration, family conflict, drug abuse, illness, and depression) have been noted among those who serve their communities. Whether tutoring children; repairing the homes of the poor; serving food in homeless shelters; planting community gardens; doing environmental restoration on public lands; or building roads or bridges; service has major restorative benefits for all of us as we look beyond ourselves and our problems and limitations while contributing to the greater good.

SERVICE AND REHABILITATION FOR REINTEGRATION OF U.S. VETERANS

The 2009 report “*All Volunteer Force: From Military to Civilian Service*,” by Mary McNaught Yonkman and John Marshall Bridgeland, based on a nationally representative survey of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, found that “veterans are underutilized assets in our communities, and their continued service is likely to improve their transition home.” The report’s authors call for new initiatives “to unleash the civic talents of our nation’s veterans for the benefit of our country and themselves.”

Civic Assets will be a new state and national resource to post 9-11 recovering service members and veterans including those who suffer from PTS and/or TBIs who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and have had difficulties finding their way upon returning home. In addition, we

intend to hire as many veterans as possible to staff the program. Program organizers are contemplating future expansion of Civic Assets to other Americans who suffer from PTS and/or TBIs or have other brain conditions such as those caused by accidents or who suffer from Multiple Sclerosis or Parkinson's Disease among others. We also hope to identify opportunities that may prove to be both emotionally and physically therapeutic and that may slow or counter the onset of dementia or Alzheimer's.

CONTACT

Joanna Lennon, co-founder and CEO of Civic Assets, is the founder and former CEO (1983-2010) of Civicorps Schools—formerly the East Bay Conservation Corps—based in Oakland, California. The organization pioneered the civic engagement of urban youth through a combination charter high school and conservation corps; a charter K-5 school; a recycling program; and credential programs for teachers based on service learning. Civicorps was chosen in 1993 to pilot AmeriCorps by running the largest program in the nation during the Summer of Service. Civicorps has become a national and international model in the fields of education, national service and civic engagement. Lennon has advised the governments of Senegal, Scotland, Israel, Italy and Australia among others on national service program design and on the potential for national service as a force for societal change and increased civic engagement. A doctoral candidate in the School of Forestry and Resource Management and the holder of a Master's Degree in Wildland Resource Science, a teaching credential and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social and Political Philosophy from the University of California, Berkeley, Lennon was responsible for helping to design the World Conservation Strategy for Wales, as part of the strategy for the United Kingdom. She went on to design the program for the United Kingdom. She received the 2002 University of California, Berkeley Peter E. Haas Public Service Award, honoring an alumna who has made a significant voluntary public contribution to the betterment of society, particularly at the community level. joanna.lennon@civicassets.org (510) 506-2786

Bill Basl, co-founder of Civic Assets, is the current Director of Americorps and the former Executive Director of the Washington Commission for National and Community Service, established by the governor in 1994 to implement and expand volunteerism and national service initiatives. Prior to this, Mr. Basl founded the Washington Service Corps in 1983, the first statewide youth service initiative in the nation designed to address priority local education and human services needs. He has consulted with agencies and governments nationally and internationally to expand and strengthen national service, including work through the State Department to promote national service programming in Italy. A co-founder of Service America, a national program that places cadets from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point with AmeriCorps members to address critical community needs, Mr. Basl also developed the Leadership Forum for National Service Executives at the University of Washington, Evans School of Public Administration. He is Past Chair of Americas' Service Commissions based in Washington, D.C., and also served as a Steering Committee member of the John Stanford Public Service Academy at Franklin High School in Seattle. From 1970-72, he served as a VISTA

Volunteer in Walla Walla, Washington, helping migrant farm workers establish their own businesses and in Spokane where he was a VISTA Volunteer Leader and helped form a regional legal services network. A native of Pittsburgh, PA, Bill received a B.S. degree in Business Administration from the University of Rhode Island.