

A. Organization, program and contact information

Date of application: January 13, 2015

Organization name: Momentum Alliance

Organization address: 1631 NE Broadway, #453, Portland, OR 97232

Organization website: www.momentumalliance.org

Program contact:



Program partners: Northwest Youth Corps, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Foundation, Bureau of Land Management, Open Meadow, Outside In

Potential partners: Momentum Alliance works with multiple organizations that serve underrepresented youth, like Outside In and Open Meadow, and we work with more than 30 high schools and colleges across 15 school districts in the Metro region—all of which serve as potential partners for this program.

Program title: Opportunity Corps

Program summary (20-45 words): Momentum Alliance and Northwest Youth Corps are collaborating to improve the design of NYC's programming to make it accessible to local underrepresented youth through training, coaching, and an intensive summer internship for ten underrepresented youth to increase connection with nature, improve environmental literacy, and diversify conservation leadership.

Program length: One year

Estimated funding:

Estimated amount requested: \$15,000

Estimated match funds: \$26,000 (NYC)

Estimated in-kind match: \$15,000 (MA)

Estimated total program budget: \$56,000

“It took a lot of time to leave gang life and become a mentor and advocate. Still sometimes I feel lonely, start thinking negatively and feel like I don’t matter. Physical activity always helps me feel stronger in body and mind, bestowing positive energy and wisdom back to me.” – Cesar, 23

“Before we left Ethiopia and became refugees in Kenya, my siblings and I would walk from the city for hours into the countryside and farmland to visit our families. This time in nature helped us keep our minds off our families’ struggles. We would laugh, talk and run freely. I have not had the opportunity to do that here in Oregon in the six years I have lived here.” – Qanani, 20

B. Organizational preparedness

Experience and Capacity

Momentum Alliance (MA) and Northwest Youth Corps (NYC) are collaborating to improve the design of NYC's programming to make it accessible to underrepresented youth in the Metro region through training, coaching, and an intensive summer internship for ten underrepresented youth to increase connection with nature, improve environmental literacy, and diversify the conservation movement. NYC's expertise in outdoor youth education and conservation, paired with MA's proven track record of engaging and coaching young leaders from all backgrounds, create an incredible opportunity for youth from underrepresented communities to become part of and succeed in NYC's programming. MA requests \$15,000 from Nature in Neighborhoods conservation education grant to supplement NYC's existing model with the expertise, training, staff and funds necessary to recruit, prepare, sustain and maintain relationships with youth from underrepresented communities.

MA is a youth-led non-profit, with experienced coaches, whose mission is to inspire youth to realize their power individually and collectively and to mentor future social justice leaders. We emerged from the "Papers" Youth Crew, who helped produce the 2009 documentary film, "Papers: Stories of Undocumented Youth," which screened in 50 states, at the U.S. Capitol and on public television nationwide. MA recently won the Bank of West Innovators in Philanthropy Award and the Portland City Club Civic Leaders Award for inclusiveness of diverse youth in public policy and process.

Our collaboration is a remarkable opportunity to combine NYC's program expertise with MA's incredibly effective outreach to and support of underrepresented youth. MA's diverse community reflects our experience and capacity in this area: We are undocumented, immigrant, indigenous, LGBTQ, HIV positive, gang-affected and low-income youth, youth of color, youth with disabilities, youth transitioning from foster care, homelessness and incarceration, youth who have experienced war, domestic violence, sexual assault and abuse, teen parents and allies. We were raised in seven religious traditions. Our staff are aged 19-44, 70% of whom are people of color. More than 45% of MA youth report a history of trauma. Not coincidentally, just over 45% also report struggling with depression and anxiety and are in desperate need of the benefits of nature for their health and success.

MA exists in response to demand by youth (more than we can yet meet) to reduce isolation and prejudice among diverse youth; set and achieve health, educational, career and leadership goals; and find collective opportunities to affect public policy and systemic changes that get at the root causes of the obstacles we face. This past year, we directly impacted more than 375 youth and hundreds of educators in the region, and we presented at more than a dozen plenaries, conferences, and workshops—including the Intertwine Summit—to influence diversity in leadership in our community.

Effective culturally-specific work begins with leaders and program designers. In MA's case, 65% of board members are under the age of 25 and 75% are people of color. Among them are Qanani and Hani, Muslim and African immigrant college students; Nicole and Jeremiah, low-income African American young leaders; Megan Bateman, a special-needs adult; Annicia, Oscar and Karla M., unDACAmented students; and Carmilla, Elaine and Zaidi, all API and two LGBTQ. Some of us are gang-affected, formerly incarcerated and ELL. Three of our staff are Latina/o children of formerly undocumented parents. Ashley, a Youth Coach, has been paid by her Siletz tribe to work at MA. We know what we need. We listen to the needs of our peers and integrate this knowledge on issues ranging from food, prayer and physical contact to legal status, gender roles and domestic violence as well as ability, sexual orientation and gender-identify. Equally important is how we address the impacts of historical and current oppression, prejudice and isolation in our programs. We use storytelling and peer coaching to build trust, set goals, and overcome obstacles with youth from all backgrounds.

Key personnel and approvals:

- **Vanessa Dominguez.** As Momentum Alliance Youth Director, Vanessa will oversee MA programming on the project. As an underrepresented youth herself, Vanessa co-founded Momentum Alliance and continues to train emerging leaders and develop programming and strategy. She was a Skidmore Prize Finalist, a Comcast Scholar, and winner of the Freedom Fighters Award.
- **Karla Castaneda or Jasmine Hernandez.** One of our MA Youth Coaches will support and champion MA youth to be successful NYC crew members. Each MA Youth Coach has considerable experience with organizing youth, leading cohorts, building teams, developing and managing Personal Development Plans for MA youth, and running programming like MA Summer, Winter and Spring Break Leadership Camps. Our Youth Coaches have tremendous capacity to create community, develop programming to set and achieve goals, and inspire youth to lead.
- **Tom Helmer.** As Northwest Youth Corps Program Director, Tom will manage NYC's programming for *Opportunity Corps*. Tom has been the director of the NYC Outdoor Oregon and Community Conservation Corps Programs since 2010. Tom has a background in crew management, habitat restoration, along with trail construction and improvement. He has also served as the Senior Field Operations Coordinator with the Coconino Rural Environment Corps.

Momentum Alliance has approval from its Executive Team to move forward with this program, and NYC will secure land use permissions within the Portland Metro urban growth boundary when appropriate for the program timeline.

C. Program description

Program narrative

Audience served, time spent in the field, program organization and execution

MA and NYC are collaborating to improve the design of NYC's programming to make it accessible to underrepresented youth in the Metro region through training, coaching, and an intensive summer internship for ten underrepresented youth to increase connection with nature, improve environmental literacy, and diversify the conservation movement. To start, MA staff will train NYC staff in cultural-specific work and education, and NYC staff will educate MA staff in conservation programming. MA Youth who take part in the program will work 30 hours each week for five weeks and will spend five to ten hours a week in formal conservation field education led by NYC staff. As part of the internship, each MA youth crew member will complete 150 hours of on-the-ground stewardship plus 35 hours of conservation education. Additionally, youth crew members will take part in nine weeks of pre-, during- and post-internship team-building, goal-setting, data collection, and leadership development with Momentum Alliance staff. NYC will choose a site and conservation project according to the needs of local partner agencies, seasonality, and appropriateness for a youth crew. Current and future NYC youth and staff will benefit from the equity training and experience with MA, and our youth will benefit from this amazing internship!

Specifically, Momentum Alliance will augment NYC's existing summer internship program in a number of ways before, during and after the formal internship program in the field:

- **2 months prior:** Recruit, interview and select underrepresented youth participants who we expect to meet intended outcomes; work with NYC staff to supplement existing curriculum as needed.
- **2 weeks prior:** MA staff hosts culturally-specific work training for NYC staff; MA Youth Coach meets with selected MA youth crew one-on-one and in groups to do team-building, earn trust, and identify potential obstacles; implement pre-internship survey and collate results; coach NYC staff.
- **During the internship:** MA Youth Coach will go on-site with MA youth crew to participate and be an on-site support; MA Youth Coach will supplement existing NYC curriculum with necessary MA content 3-4 hours per week; MA Youth Coach will do whatever else is necessary to support and champion youth crew member success in the program.
- **2 weeks post:** NYC and MA will work together to refine program as needed for future collaboration; MA Youth Coach will implement post-internship survey and collate results; MA Youth Coach will meet with MA youth crew members one-on-one and in a group to get feedback and create goals in health and wellness, education, career and leadership for individual youth with continued involvement in MA.

Participants who complete NYC's five-week summer program earn a \$1,000 stipend and are eligible to earn school credit. New program costs include MA coaching, gear, transportation and meals needed for the MA youth crew to be successful.

Proven methods and best practices

Northwest Youth Corps has operated community-based conservation programming for youth in the Portland Metro area since 2009. While the program has enjoyed incredible success, it has historically lacked diversity among participants. In order for NYC's summer internship program to be of greatest value to the community, it must have the capacity to recruit, prepare, sustain, and follow up with youth from underrepresented communities.

We know from experience that our MA Youth Coach is an indispensable element of *Opportunity Corps*. Momentum Alliance Youth Coaches work with underrepresented youth to create Personal Development Plans that inform goal-setting in health and wellness, education, career and leadership. To build community, MA hosts monthly hikes, weekly one-on-one meetings, and Summer, Winter and Spring Camps. We have translated our best practices into an approach that will work for *Opportunity Corps*. As an underrepresented youth herself, the MA Youth Coach will serve as a mentor to build trust, set goals, and overcome obstacles with MA youth crew members, and she will know how to help them achieve success in the program. The MA Youth Coach's leadership, flexibility, and ability to problem-solve will make her invaluable on site not just for the youth crew, but for NYC staff as well. Her insight before and after the on-the-ground program will be crucial to the future success of equity-centered collaborations like *Opportunity Corps*.

Program impact on the organization, the community, and MA's mission and strategy

According to a recent nationwide evaluation (2013 Public Lands Service Corps Evaluation Report, Brigham Young University and North Carolina State University), young people who participate in NYC's program improve their leadership skills, community engagement, and environmental stewardship. Using data collected during the 2013 program season, researchers found that after a season of service, NYC corps members displayed numerous developmental advantages such as enhanced leadership and teamwork skills and a greater willingness to accept responsibility for personal actions. NYC participants experienced greater benefit than the average graduate of the other conservation programs under study.

The aim of *Opportunity Corps* is to make these incredible outcomes accessible to everyone in the community—not just to those who have existing financial resources and support systems to make full participation possible. The funding needed

to supplement NYC's existing programming with proven best practices from MA is the cost of diversifying conservation leadership and championing underrepresented youth as leaders in the community.

Opportunity Corps gets to the heart of MA's mission to inspire youth to realize their power and to mentor future social justice leaders. The program also helps us realize our strategic plan to formalize vocational and career programming for MA youth and to increase access to nature for our youth as part of our health and wellness initiatives. It also aligns strongly with our strategic goal to help diversify leadership in the community by creating scalable systems, partnerships and programming.

Goals

Program description, grant alignment, and strategic fit

Opportunity Corps gives us the opportunity to improve the design of NYC's programming to make it accessible to local underrepresented youth through training, coaching, and an intensive summer internship for ten underrepresented youth to increase connection with nature, improve environmental literacy, and diversify conservation leadership. This project aligns with the Nature in Neighborhoods conservation education grant in a number of specific ways. Primarily, *Opportunity Corps connects underrepresented youth with nature*. It improves the ability of all communities to learn about, help restore, experience and connect with the region's natural areas. It will increase capacity within NYC and our other partners to lead culturally relevant conservation education programming in local natural areas and parks. *Opportunity Corps* aids the effort to diversify the conservation movement. Ultimately, we hope this pilot will result in a scalable model for NYC, MA, and other organizations that wish to improve diversity in youth conservation programming across the region.

Opportunity Corps also champions environmental literacy. The program increases access to hands-on and place-based nature education for youth from underserved communities. It supports youth participants to become ecologically literate, inspired with curiosity and motivated by their knowledge from around the region. *Opportunity Corps* will also develop conservation leaders. MA's mission is to inspire youth to realize their power and to mentor future social justice leaders, and this program will equip participants with the foundation they need to become conservation leaders in their communities. Additionally, MA's involvement will increase capacity to build longer-term relationship with program participants to extend learning and continued leadership development. *Opportunity Corps* has built-in mentorship and job skill development, and the program prepares participants for continuing careers in conservation and nature.

Part of MA's strategic plan is to formalize vocational and career programming for MA youth. We are dedicated to increasing access to nature for our youth as part of our health and wellness initiatives. This pilot is the perfect opportunity to directly impact these two areas while still aligning with our mission.

Expected outcomes, results, follow up, and evaluation

Expected outcomes: 100% of youth crew members will be from underrepresented communities in the Metro region. MA youth crew members will: increase knowledge about nature; increase job skills; increase leadership skills; increase interest and knowledge for careers in nature and conservation. NYC staff will: increase skills in culturally-specific work. *Evaluation:* pre- and post-program surveys for youth and staff.

Partnership

Forming, strengthening and extending partnerships

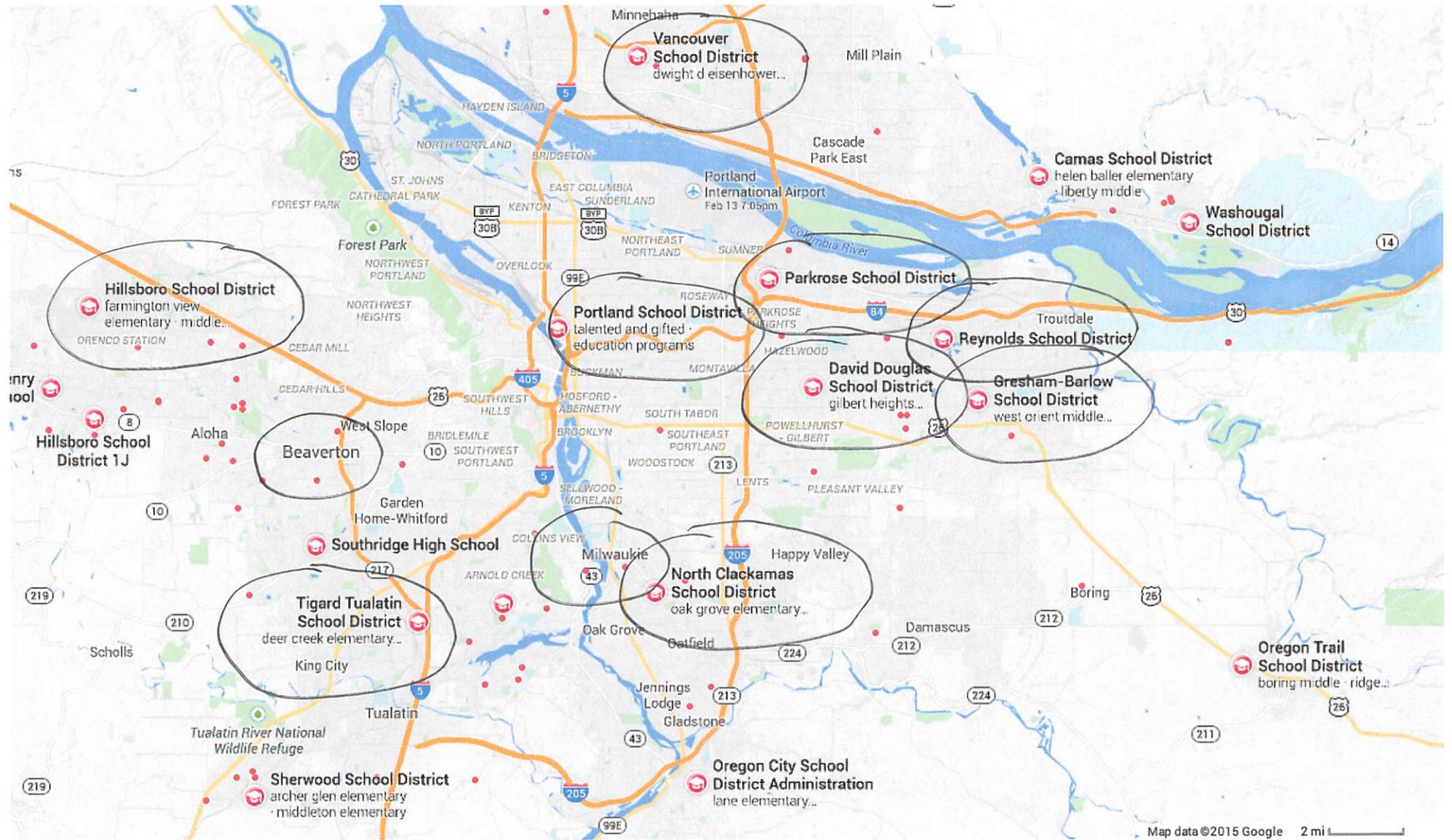
Connecting with NYC about the Nature in Neighborhoods grant was the first step in building a partnership! NYC first approached us after we presented at the Intertwine Summit, and we hope our collaboration will result in an ongoing partnership to increase connection with nature among underrepresented youth, improve environmental literacy, and diversify the conservation movement. We have already collaborated with new organizations (e.g. USFWS, BLM) as a result of this program, and we know NYC will find opportunities in new partnerships from us as well. It's exciting!

Committed and potential partners

Committed: The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will take a lead role in planning and project implementation, identification of projects on federal lands, and identification of the proper partner and land owners for projects that occur on private properties. NYC will lead the job training and conservation portion of the program. MA will recruit, prepare, sustain and maintain relationships with youth from underrepresented communities. Open Meadow and Outside In will offer support as well-established channels for participant recruitment. *Potential:* We will work with a whole host of non-profits and government agencies, and we will reach out to them as needed.

Plans to sustain the program

One goal of *Opportunity Corps* is to identify obstacles to participation among underrepresented youth, as well as in staffing, curriculum, training and funding. To do this, MA and NYC will be in regular communication about what works and what doesn't, and we will work together to formalize an ongoing, well-funded, scalable program to connect underrepresented youth with nature, improve environmental literacy, and diversity leadership in conservation.



Momentum Alliance Demographics

Demographic	Percent
Youth of color	82%
Free and reduced price lunch eligible youth	82%
Immigrant and/or refugee youth	44%
Experienced trauma due to war, gang violence, abuse or sexual assault.	46%
Homeless youth	24% are or were at one time homeless
Youth with disabilities	19% not including learning disabilities
Language other than English spoken at home	38%
LGBTQ Youth	23%
Involvement in the juvenile justice system or gang-involved	36%
Not in labor force	89%
Lack legal status	20%