

# New York City “Green Job Corps” Initiative

## Concept Paper

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### Lead Agencies:

**Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies**  
**STRIVE International** (FPWA Member Agency)

For more information about this proposal contact:  
**Bich Ha Pham** at 212-801-1311 or [bhpham@fpwa.org](mailto:bhpham@fpwa.org)  
**Angelo J. Rivera** at 646-924-6725 or [arivera@striveinternational.org](mailto:arivera@striveinternational.org)

**Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA)** is a membership organization with almost 300 community-based social service agencies and church-based human service programs located throughout New York City in its network. **STRIVE New York** is an exemplary non-profit service provider located in Harlem that helps hard-to-employ people gain attitude and job skills to start their climb on the career ladder, no matter where they have been in the past.

## **I. Major Economic, Social, and Environmental Problems facing the U.S. Today**

Cities across the U.S. are facing an escalating economic and social crisis with rising numbers of families living in poverty, disconnected youth, and individuals re-entering the community after a period of incarceration. Individuals in each of these groups face significant barriers to sustainable wage employment. These barriers continue to have a particularly devastating impact on communities of color, particularly young adults. According to the latest data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the official Black youth unemployment rate for 16-to-19 year-olds remained at a Great Depression level of 32.3 percent in November 2008!<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the economic recession is compounding the problems that we face as a nation. For New York City, the December 2008 overall unemployment rate was 7.4 percent. According to an October 2008 report by NYC Comptroller William C. Thompson, the City will likely lose 165,000 private sector jobs over the next two years,<sup>2</sup> and the Fiscal Policy Institute has predicted that the City unemployment rate could reach 8.5 percent in 2009.<sup>3</sup>

For those in poverty, the impact of the economic recession is even worse. With the loss of living wage manufacturing jobs in recent decades, there was also a growth in minimum wage service sector jobs that contributed to the increase in income inequality. In the mid 2000s, New York State had the widest income gap between the rich and poor of all 50 states. In New York City, income inequality is even more extreme. Now that the economy has taken this plunging turn downward, there is even greater competition for low-wage work, since recently unemployed workers are seeking many of the jobs that those in poverty could have accessed in the past.

In terms of environmental problems, the debate over whether global warming is happening is over. It has now been confirmed that carbon dioxide emitted from burning fossil fuels is resulting in an increase in greenhouse gases that is disrupting our global ecosystems. Therefore, climate change is an urgent crisis that we must address to restore ecological balance and ensure a sustainable healthy environment will exist for future generations. In particular, minority and low-income communities must face the devastating impact of disproportionate environmental burdens, such as factory pollution, medical waste incinerators, and toxic air and water contaminants. Therefore, the combined effects of poverty, the economic downturn, and environmental deterioration in low-income communities have created an urgent crisis we can no longer ignore.

## **II. Solution**

To directly address our environmental, economic, and social problems, the government should support workforce development programs that offer education and training for “green collar” jobs to individuals in low-income communities with the greatest barriers to employment.

In a recent letter to Congressman George Miller, Chair of the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor, Congressman Charles Rangel wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Economic News Release, Table A-2. Employment status of civilian population by age, sex, race. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t02.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Office of NYC Comptroller William C. Thompson, Jr. News Release, *NYC Comptroller Forecasts 165,000 Job Losses over Next Two Years*, October 15, 2008. [http://www.comptroller.nyc.gov/press/2008\\_releases/pr08-10-142.shtm](http://www.comptroller.nyc.gov/press/2008_releases/pr08-10-142.shtm).

<sup>3</sup> Fiscal Policy Institute, *NYC Unemployment in 2009 – The Emerging Crisis*, December 11, 2008. [http://www.fiscalspolicy.org/FPI\\_NYC\\_EmergingUnemploymentCrisis2009\\_December2008.pdf](http://www.fiscalspolicy.org/FPI_NYC_EmergingUnemploymentCrisis2009_December2008.pdf).

“As we work to put people back to work rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges, modernizing schools, and building wind farms and solar panels, fuel-efficient cars and alternative energy technologies we must consider the education and job training imperative. Infrastructure based economic stimulus legislation provides the opportunity to level the playing field in terms of gender equity and minority participation in the construction trades and other related fields. With proper enforcement and monitoring, this could be the basis of an historic civil rights movement.”

Clearly, based on this letter, Congressman Rangel strongly supports investments in workforce development programs to create the supply of human capital that will be needed to perform major infrastructure and energy efficiency improvements across the country. The incoming administration has already indicated a commitment to investing significant resources in green public works projects as part of an overall economic stimulus package. As reported in the *Washington Post* on December 6, 2008:

“President-elect Barack Obama today proposed an economic recovery act that spends billions of dollars to make public buildings energy-efficient, to rebuild the nation's crumbling highways, to renovate aging school buildings, to extend high-speed Internet to underserved areas and to modernize hospitals.” ...His plan includes: “*A massive effort*” to make federal buildings energy-efficient by replacing aging heating systems and installing efficient light bulbs. Obama said the effort would save taxpayers “billions of dollars each year and put people back to work.”<sup>4</sup>

### III. Opportunity

The “**Green Job Corps**” (**GJC**) **Initiative** is an Action Plan that would produce the workforce needed to complete the public works projects announced by President Barack Obama’s economic recovery proposal. The overall program goal is to provide low-income, at-risk individuals the opportunity to obtain employment in green construction jobs that open career pathways in high-growth energy efficiency and environmental conservation industries. A filtering process would be put into place to advance only those participants ready for the rigors of hard skills training needed to become part of a competitive green workforce. Two distinct sets of construction-based trainings will be required to produce a well prepared entry-level green corps workforce.

The basic curriculum would include:

- 1) Complete a one-month **Job Readiness (soft skills) Training** program (utilizing the STRIVE CORE+ model or similar model).
- 2) Complete an entry-level **Construction Skills Course**. The course can be an existing 150 hour basic construction skills course that covers:
  - 45 hours of basic electricity
  - 45 hours of basic plumbing
  - 45 hours of basic carpentry, sheet rocking, and plastering

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<sup>4</sup> Shear, Michael D., *Obama Offers Highlights of His Economic Stimulus Plan*, Washington Post, December 6, 2008. [http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/12/06/obama\\_offers\\_highlights\\_of\\_his.html](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/12/06/obama_offers_highlights_of_his.html).

**The course also includes 15 hours of green skills training, including:**

- Introduction to Green Buildings – Basic concepts in Green building, including energy and water usage, air and water quality, and operating cost reduction.
- Green Building Materials and Techniques – Options for Green wall treatments, countertops and flooring.
- Green Products and Supplies – Emerging Green products including paints, caulks, sealants and adhesives.
- Green Cleaning and Maintenance – Strategies for low-impact cleaning and housekeeping, appropriate disposal of liquid waste and HVAC maintenance.

In addition to offering green techniques and methodologies as part of the basic construction training, the construction pathway hedges against possible “green specific” placement difficulty by preparing participants for a range of construction related jobs, including Brownfield remediation and hazardous waste handling, light construction, building maintenance and repair, and custodial services.

**3) Complete a Green Skills Sub-Track course depending on education level and literacy skills.** Based on available literature on green pathways (sourced below), we can offer the following realistic possibilities:

LEVEL	EDUCATION	READ	MATH	GREEN SUB-TRACK OPTIONS
<b>Level (I)</b>	Participants has no HS diploma and no GED	n/a	n/a	<b>Level (I) Options</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hazardous Waste Management and Removal</li> <li>• Building Envelope (Air-sealing, Insulation, Weather-stripping)</li> <li>• Green Roofing</li> </ul>
<b>Level (II)</b>	Participant has a HS diploma or a GED (or attained a GED before starting sub-track)	(TABE) 8.0 to 9.0	(TABE) 7.1 to 8.9	<b>Level (I) Options (plus) +</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recycling, deconstruction, recycling of building construction waste</li> <li>• Appliance Retrofit</li> <li>• Lighting Retrofits</li> </ul>
<b>Level (III)</b>	Participant has a HS diploma or a GED (or attained a GED before starting sub-track)	(TABE) 9.1 +	(TABE) 9.0 +	<b>Level (I) / (II) Options (plus) +</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean energy (renewable systems, solar photovoltaic, etc.)</li> <li>• NABCEP® Photovoltaic (PV) Entry Level Certificate</li> <li>• Heat / Hot Water Retrofits</li> <li>• House audits: 1-4 unit homes energy audits</li> </ul>

For nearly 25 years STRIVE has been transforming the lives of the hardest to employ. The key to STRIVE’s success has been CORE – a soft skills job readiness training model that prepares job seekers for the next step in gaining hard skills and work experience. A central element of the CORE workshop is that it is a simulated work environment from which participants can be dismissed. Those who are dismissed are rolled over into the next workshop until the participant conforms to the pattern of behavioral norms and discipline required for workplace success. Changes were recently made to rename the program “CORE+” to enhance clients’ long-term employability. In addition to (1) Attitudinal and (2) Job Readiness Training, the program also offers (3) Introduction to Career Development and Career Pathways module, (4) Civics module, (5) 18-hour MS Word/Excel module, and (6) 4-hour Customer Service module.

The results are highly encouraging: over 100 participants have completed a hard skills option this year (an 83% completion rate). Importantly, 88% of those who started a construction skills training course completed it. The average wage outcome for construction skills participants (\$11 per hour) is 35% over minimum wage (\$7.15 per hour). This “leapfrogging” over minimum wage effect is a significant achievement for the type of clients that STRIVE serves (over 65% are ex-offenders year-to-date).

<b>STRIVE - 2008 YEAR-TO-DATE (Core+ / Hard Skills Data)</b>			
<b>Program Type</b>	<b>Program Length</b>	<b>Completion Rate</b>	<b>Average Salary</b>
<b>CORE+ (only)</b>	5 Weeks	59%	\$8.85
<b>A+ Certification</b>	20 weeks	73%	\$11.73
<b>Construction</b>	12 weeks	88%	\$11.00
<b>Office Operations</b>	12 weeks	92%	\$9.80

**NOTE:** As a model that has been replicated nationally and around the world, STRIVE has a four day “STRIVE Academy” train-the-trainer workshop that offers a unique opportunity for the program staff of interested agencies to personally engage the CORE program's exercises and processes. Held in New York City, the comprehensive 4-day program is designed to deepen each trainers relationship with the STRIVE philosophy and methodology by placing them "in the client's shoes." In the case of the GJC project, the Academy could also outline the programmatic elements and objectives of a green corps training initiative.

To implement Green Pathways out of Poverty most effectively and efficiently, the government should support a consortium-based model of community-based agencies with deep ties to people living in low-income neighborhoods. These agencies are best-suited to conduct outreach and recruitment of those facing the greatest barriers to work. They can also provide basic job readiness, soft skills training, Adult Basic Education (ABE), GED preparation, and other wrap-around support services. Then, a direct link should be established between these agencies and those providing hard skills training in specific green collar industries. This model would allow participants to develop a broad skill base that can be expanded with additional work experience and training over time. In addition, these skills would be transferrable to a variety of industries.

The latest version of the federal economic recovery package contains significant funding amounts for capital infrastructure projects and workforce development, with specific set-aside amounts or priority given to grants in the energy efficiency and clean energy sectors. Furthermore, the New York State Department of Labor (DOL) data on employment prospects projects a “very favorable” outlook for construction laborers and management and repair workers, and a “favorable” outlook for hazardous material removal workers and heating, air conditioning and refrigeration workers.<sup>5</sup>

#### **IV. Bringing GJC Initiative to Scale**

The GJC Initiative accomplishes multiple goals set forth by policymakers and economists to move the country out of a recession and set us back on track towards sustainable economic growth. Specifically, this GJC Initiative is a consortium-based model that will reduce poverty,

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<sup>5</sup> NYS Department of Labor, Employment Prospects to 2016, Source: Occupational Employment Statistics Survey, Statewide. <http://www.labor.state.ny.us/workforceindustrydata/descriptor.asp>.

mitigate climate change, conserve the environment, and produce the skilled workforce needed to improve energy efficiency and rebuild infrastructure to revitalize low-income communities.

This concept paper should be used for consideration as a model for the development of government agency Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to establish “National Green Job Corps” programs on a large scale in cities and rural areas across the United States. This model could be financed relatively quickly using workforce development funding included in the federal economic recovery package. It would create jobs across the country on a scale that would mirror FDR's "Civilian Conservation Corps" – the type of massive job works program that helped the country work its ways out of the Great Depression in the 1930s. Most importantly, it would embrace the principles of environmental justice to ensure that people in poverty and communities of color would be connected to the new green workforce development opportunities.