

Youth Climate Corps FAQ

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Vision and Mission

Q: Where did the idea for this come from?

A: The idea takes historic inspiration from the U.S., where mobilizing young people domestically was a central part of Depression-era anti-poverty efforts. Under Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration, a Civilian Conservation Corps employed three million young men to build-out much of the national parks system that exists to this day. The young people enrolled in the program built roads, trails and bridges, camping infrastructure, prevented soil erosion, and engaged in tree planting and fire prevention (there was a smaller CCC program for women). We know we can do better today: a Youth Climate Corps shouldn't limit its opportunities to men, and should serve the role of accelerating our climate efforts while centering the goals of Indigenous guardianship and self-determination.

The Sunrise Movement in the U.S. drew inspiration from the old CCC model, and re-imagined a modern-day Civilian Climate Corps. And in his 2020 book *A Good War*:

Mobilizing Canada for the Climate Emergency, Seth Klein picked up on this idea and proposed a Youth Climate Corps for Canada.

In September of 2023, President Joe Biden announced the creation of the American Climate Corps, won only because of the sustained pressure from youth climate groups like the Sunrise Movement.

Q: Why are we defining 35 as our definition of youth?

A: While many others would assume a cut-off age of 30 or lower, we're calling for a higher cut-off age with the belief that many communities deserve an increased opportunity to serve in a YCC. In particular, rural and marginalized communities face some of the highest risks when it comes to climate and deserve a higher chance to fight for their communities.

Q: Are you just scaring youth with all this climate emergency talk?

A: The [climate emergency itself is scaring young people](#). We're responding to the real anxiety of seeing your future stripped away from you. The Youth Climate Corps responds to widespread climate anxiety by putting solutions in young people's hands, giving them a direct way to meaningfully build their communities.

Q: Would the YCC just be another way to expand false solutions like carbon capture and sequestration?

A: Our hope for the YCC is that it will focus youth jobs and investment on "tried and tested" solutions – building retrofits, wind & solar projects, public transportation, and ecological restoration – not wildcards like CCUS or hydrogen.

Enrolling and Employment Opportunities

Q: How many jobs would be created by a \$1 billion investment?

A: In short, the number of jobs created would depend on how the program was designed.

In a model similar to the federal Apprenticeship Service, the YCC would provide grants and other support to employers (mainly in the public & non-profit sectors, but in some cases in the for-profit sector) to hire participants. The employer would pay the going rate for apprentices or trainees in the particular profession, plus benefits. In such a model, a \$1 billion investment in the YCC could create up to 100,000 jobs per year.

Under models where YCC participants are directly paid by the program, fewer jobs would be created, with the number of jobs dependent on the wage level (see table for various options). The latter is our preferred model, as it would capture the intent of the YCC; namely, to create *new* jobs confronting the climate crisis (rather than merely serving as a wage top-up for jobs that other employers already planned to create). Under this model, and if the program paid a living wage of \$25/hour, then a \$1 billion annual investment could create almost 20,000 full-time, full-year positions.

Table 1: How many jobs could a Youth Climate Corps (YCC) create with a budget of \$1 billion/year?

Program Design Scenarios	Calculations	Number of Jobs
1. YCC funds entire salary of participants, with employers providing benefits and covering administrative costs. Participants are paid \$30/hour, approximately the average salary of Canadians with an apprenticeship or trades certificate.	$\$30/\text{hr} * 40 \text{ hrs/week} * 52 \text{ weeks} = \$62,400 \text{ per job}$ $\$1 \text{ billion} / \$62,400 = 16,025$	16,025 full-time jobs per year
2. YCC funds entire salary of participants, with employers providing benefits and covering administrative costs. Participants are paid \$25/hour, which is set higher than the average wage for a high school graduate in order to attract participants to the YCC and is close to the Living Wage for many Canadian cities.	$\$25/\text{hr} * 40 \text{ hrs/week} * 52 \text{ weeks} = \$52,000 \text{ per job}$ $\$1 \text{ billion} / \$52,000 = 19,231$	19,231 full-time jobs per year
3. Use the new federal Apprenticeship Service as a model. YCC provides grants and other support to employers to hire participants. Employer pays the going rate for apprentices/trainees in the particular profession, plus benefits.	Apprenticeship Service funds approx. \$9,880 per apprentice position $\$1 \text{ billion} / \$9,880 = 101,214$	101,214 jobs per year
4. Use the new federal Apprenticeship Service as a model. YCC provides grants and other support to employers to hire participants. Employer pays the going rate for apprentices/trainees in the particular profession, plus benefits. However, use the higher cost per job from the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program since setting up programming for jobs in emerging green technologies may be more costly than in established fields.	Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program cost per job is \$23,400 $\$1 \text{ billion} / \$23,400 = 42,735$	42,735 jobs per year

Q: What kinds of jobs would the youth train and work on?

A: We're currently envisioning the broadest range of jobs, which include but are not limited to works such as:

- Conservation and ecosystem restoration;
- Strengthening local food systems;
- Building retrofits and green construction;
- Community resilience and emergency response;
- Renewable energy apprenticeships;
- Aiding municipalities in developing and rolling out their climate emergency frameworks.

We envision a YCC that would be a barrier-free program that turns no one away (a position would be made available to anyone 35 and under who wished to enroll). Participants would be paid a decent wage, while engaging in work in three domains:

1. Emergency response in the face of extreme weather events (wildfires, heat domes, flooding);
2. Strengthening community and environmental resilience to climate change (helping to make forests more resilient to fires, enhancing natural ecosystems, improving local infrastructure, and strengthening community supports in anticipation of climate disruptions); and

3. Building infrastructure that drives down greenhouse gas emissions (installing renewable energy systems such as solar, wind and heat pumps; improving building energy efficiency; building public transit systems; etc.).

Q: Are you envisioning work opportunities that only include trades work?

A: No. We know the climate crisis demands more than just an infrastructural response. As we see its impacts today, we know it's time to expand the role of care work as a climate solution. We think the Canadian Union of Postal Workers' (CUPW) [Delivering Community Power](#) and Unifor's vision for [expanded public rail](#) show a great vision of non-trades YCC jobs. A YCC placement could provide extensive training in a field like wildfire fighting, and lead participants into a career doing such work.

That said, many of the jobs we envision *would* involve building trades (renewable energy and housing retrofits, for example), and we hope a robust YCC would give thousands of participants meaningful apprenticeship opportunities, and a two-year placement would get them close to a full "Red Seal" trades certification.

Q: Why only two years?

A: We see the YCC as a central part of a just energy transition but not its be-all-end-all. Two years fits neatly into the journey of a young person who may want to take a gap year (or two), who wants a good work and training opportunity right out of their high school or undergrad degree, who wants more experience, or who would like to try something new. The YCC is designed to offer jobs in specific fields without forcing alumni to definitively choose a career. However, unlike many current entry-level contracts in renewables, a YCC would offer apprenticeship hours to its alumni. Think of the YCC as a two-year stint doing meaningful work and getting in-depth training, which may well lead to a subsequent career tackling the climate emergency in a way that best suits your skills and passions.

Q: How would prospective workers apply to a Youth Climate Corps?

A: Regardless of which agencies are leading the YCC, any prospective worker would apply through a free-to-use central website. The website could showcase local initiatives and offer an online application process.

Q: Would enough youth actually enrol in the program?

A: Yes! A [2023 Abacus poll](#), commissioned by the Climate Emergency Unit showed that 15% of youth polled would "definitely consider" enrolling in a YCC for two years, if it existed. There are about nine million people in Canada between the ages of 18 and 35, so 15% represents about 1.3 million people. Now that is a genuine climate mobilization!

Operating a Youth Climate Corps

Q: Are there no programs that already do this?

A: While there are numerous federal and provincial youth training and employment programs, none are what we envision for the YCC. Some, like Katimavik, are small and only take a handful of people each year. Others are unpaid volunteer programs, like Canada Service Corps. And the largest, the Canada Summer Student Jobs program, offers wage top-ups to non-profits and for-profit businesses for short-term job placements (many of which

would have existed regardless). And none of these programs have an explicit climate and just transition focus. Overall, what currently exists is mostly short-term and small (many programs are over-subscribed).

There is currently only one national program that offers genuinely barrier-free access to paid job training for young people, with a special focus on vulnerable populations — the military. The YCC would be a compelling alternative offer.

In British Columbia, both the non-profit Wildsight and YCC-BC currently run Youth Climate Corps programs in about half a dozen communities. These programs offer a “proof of concept” for what an audacious national YCC could look like. But for now, they are very small and short-term programs, and generally get more applications than they have spaces. The national YCC campaign is working with both these organizations to win province-wide and/or national YCC programs.

There is an overlap between the YCC training we envision and current skilled trades apprenticeship training programs. Consequently, the YCC should be aligned with Red Seal apprenticeship systems across Canada.

Q: How much would this cost?

A: We are currently calling on the federal government to spend \$1 billion a year on the YCC, with the hope that this would be matched by provincial governments. However, we ultimately hope that the program would be demand-driven; we are proposing a YCC for which “no one would be turned away.” If this were indeed the model, the budget would need to rise to accommodate demand. Which of course is what it means to treat the climate crisis as the emergency it is. In WWII, the government did not turn people away who signed up to serve - that is not what one does in a genuine emergency.

According to the Abacus poll we conducted, as many as 1.3 million people in Canada between the ages of 18 and 35 say they would “definitely” consider enrolling in a YCC for two years. If that many people were indeed keen to enrol, the budget would need to grow substantially.

Q: How would we pay for a Climate Corps?

A: Contrary to private subsidies that encourage employers to offer green job placements, the Climate Corps expands the public sector. Here are some ideas of where that money could come from:

- Windfall profits tax on oil and gas companies
- Redirecting fossil fuel subsidies.
- Make polluters pay (meaning, Sue Bg Oil!).
- Establish a Federal Just Transition Transfer.

Notably, the Canadian Armed Forces has consistently repeated that it [is not interested in being the first resort for domestic emergency responses](#). If that is the case, then the CAF should not be funded for work it won't do: let's redirect those funds into the creation of a Youth Climate Corps.

Q: Which department (s) in government would run it?

A: As is the case in the United States, a YCC should be a “whole-of-government” endeavour, uniting several agencies, departments, and ministries to get the job done. Federally, a Youth Climate Corps would fall under the mandates of the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, the Minister of Labour, the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, the Minister for Emergency Preparedness, and the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages. But one or two of these departments should probably take the lead and serve as the institutional “home” for the program. **The government should strongly consider establishing a new crown corporation or agency to administer the YCC**, drawing upon and coordinating personnel and expertise from the departments noted above, and to serve as the employer of the young people who enrol in the program.

Q: Would the YCC only be governed by federal agencies and departments?

A: No. We see the opportunity for a genuine regional approach to rolling out the program, giving direct leadership to Indigenous nations, municipalities, and provincial governments in aligning on which solutions to prioritize. We hope to see the YCC program embedded in legislation that would establish an advisory council with representation from youth, industry, labour, systematically marginalized populations, post-secondary institutions, climate experts, and all levels of government (including municipal and Indigenous) to advise on YCC program design and implementation and the allocation of the funds. The advisory council would ensure youth are deployed on projects that align with local climate priorities and labour market needs. In those provinces, territories and communities where multi-sector climate advisory bodies already exist, such councils could be tapped to administer regional/local YCC programs, to better ensure that work placements align with local climate plans and maximize greenhouse gas emission reductions.

In some cases, the YCC should partner with local post-secondary institutes, who would provide in-class training for some of the program (perhaps one-quarter or one-third of a YCC participant’s time would be in classroom training).

Q: Wouldn’t the YCC just be another colonial project? Can it serve the purpose of Indigenous self-determination?

A: We certainly think a well-designed YCC would advance reconciliation and decolonization efforts. A significant share of the budget should be allocated directly to Indigenous nations, and used to create placements for Indigenous youth doing work that aligns with local climate goals. Indeed, we hope to see YCC legislation that specifies that a portion of the funds should first be allocated to First Nations, Inuit, and Metis youth, organizations, and communities. Another portion should be allocated to other systematically marginalized youth such as Black, Brown, People of Colour, recent immigrants, lower income, youth with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIA+.

Q: How would you bridge the gap between a federal program in communities with little federal presence?

A: In communities where there is little federal presence, YCC funds will need to go to municipal or Indigenous governments, and aligned with local climate action priorities.

Q: Would these be new government jobs or would we subsidize existing programs?

A: A YCC that functions as merely a green jobs subsidy would fall short of its intended goals. The YCC isn't only about creating more green jobs, but about calling young Canadians into a collective effort to fight against climate change; a mobilization. Like many green job subsidies, a private subsidy would make the YCC difficult to identify publicly. Instead, recruitment under a united banner would create a real groundswell. As young people keep saying, no current programs communicate emergency mode and therefore no current programs have a chance of creating a cultural eagerness to enrol.

Thankfully, we are starting to see major investments in climate infrastructure. But as these programs ramp-up, they will face a skills shortage. The YCC can be just the solution – training young people to fill those positions.

Q: How can YCC fit into the money earmarked into the Sustainable Jobs Plan?

A: A YCC should certainly align with the federal government's [sustainable jobs plan](#). But we are envisioning a much larger program than anything currently included in the SJP.

Q: Do you have faith that the government would do this well?

A: Like anything government does, there are opportunities for success and failures. The benefit of having an American Climate Corps in the United States (and many state-level programs) is that we can learn from those mistakes and successes. Our prediction is that the ACC will exceed expectations and overshadow any Canadian attempt at fighting climate change – so long as a YCC doesn't exist.

In the end, the same movement that is currently pushing for the establishment of an audacious YCC will need to stay engaged – and keep holding the government to account to ensure the program is designed well and guided by clear and inclusive principles.



Prepared by the Climate Emergency Unit

For more, visit: www.GoodGreenJobsForAll.ca and www.ClimateEmergencyUnit.ca