



# Green to Our Corps

*Official newsletter of the Greenest Region Corps*



**Greenest  
Region  
Corps**

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## 2019-2020 Service Year

As our service year comes to a close, the GRCorps Members 2019-2020 wanted to use this last edition to reflect on the lessons we learned, the challenges we pushed through, and the hopes we have for our future. We express sincere gratitude to our program administrators, host communities, Metropolitan Mayors Caucus, U.S. EPA, guest speakers and supporters, AmeriCorps, and Serve Illinois. Finally, we wish the upcoming Corps success in their endeavors to further sustainability in the Chicagoland region and look forward to seeing how they evolve the Corps.



*Green to Our Corps* is crafted by the GRCorps Communications Committee:  
**Brittanie Giroux, Ivy Klee, Julia Linares, and Cheryl Scott.**  
We have greatly enjoyed putting together these newsletters and are excited to see what the future committee will create.



## Final Thoughts: GRCorps Members 2019-2020



### Brittanie Giroux, City of Evanston

As I reflect on my time with the Greenest Region Corps, I'm very proud of building my professional development skills. There's a distinct difference between reading about sustainability in your textbooks and the actual process of implementing actions in a city of 70,000 residents. This year there were a lot of firsts that I encountered: putting together a virtual Earth Week, facilitating a webinar on COVID-19, health disparities, and the environment, presenting at community meetings and creating content alongside

residents, etc. I've been challenged throughout this year and I feel confident that I gained many skills that I can implement wherever I go next. I've had a lot of support during this year from my direct supervisor, colleagues, Metropolitan Mayors Caucus admins, my cohort, and all the wonderful members of my community that I've interacted with. I can truly say that serving the people of Evanston was an experience I wouldn't trade for the world!

### Leslie Hernandez, Village of Oak Park

Out of all the rewarding experiences throughout my year of service, this cohort has allowed me to continue realizing my own strengths and weaknesses, and identify what my ideal next position consists of.

It's also been a joy to witness the growth of our young professionals over the last ten months. After assisting Oak Park with benchmarking facility energy usage and collecting utility information to obtain greenhouse gas emissions, I'm looking forward to continuing my work with data research and analysis to help communities become more sustainable.





## Final Thoughts: GRCorps Members 2019-2020



### Robin Grooms, Village of Hawthorn Woods

The biggest surprise of being a Greenest Region Corps member was the trust involved; this program selects young sustainability professionals who have education and experience in doing sustainability work and places them at host sites where they can be part of a team that lets them stretch their wings. Whether I was developing the Sustainability Plan, certifying Hawthorn Woods through Audubon International, or writing grants through AARP, my insights and experience were regarded as a true asset to the community. Being able to

apply knowledge and connect my practical experience in this position has been an incredible experience for me. I believe it is programs like these that will usher in new generations of leadership in the Chicagoland area.

### Julia Linares, Cook County

In my role as a Greenest Region Corps member in Cook County's Department of Environment and Sustainability, I am proud to have gained confidence in my skills as a professional while deepening my understanding of the implementation of environmental programming. Throughout these months, I learned to shy away from "recreating the wheel" and instead to engage with those already operating in these sustainability fields. My experience underscored the importance of collaboration across departments and

organizations. Above all, I am most thankful for the relationships I was able to foster both in my department and my Corps. In the future, I look forward to bringing these lessons with me as I broaden my focus from environmental justice to social justice and hope to establish a career focused on legal advocacy for all people.





## Final Thoughts: GRCorps Members 2019-2020



### Ivy Klee, Solid Waste Agency of Lake County

In reflecting on a year of service with the Greenest Region Corps, I am sincerely grateful for the relationships and the experiences that were created as a result of this program. I have learned so much over the course of this year about how the professional, governmental and sustainability worlds collide and where I see myself intertwined. The opportunity to see firsthand how my service and my work directly impacted and created positive change in my community makes me so proud. I am thankful for the GRCorps program coordinators, my

incredibly talented Corps members and my Solid Waste Agency of Lake County colleagues for the opportunity to learn from such a diverse group of sustainability leaders. I will leave this program with a sense of accomplishment and appreciation to represent the GRCorps during a time in history unlike any other.

### Maya Dutta, City of Waukegan

I feel so lucky to have been able to serve the City of Waukegan with the Greenest Region Corps over the last year. In this role, I was given the opportunity to engage with a new community and understand how to respectfully and effectively integrate sustainability into their everyday operations and goals. One of the most rewarding aspects of my work was being able to interact with a variety of stakeholders in this process - city department heads, community members, city officials, various project partners, and more. I was able



to connect with a wide variety of people all committed to making Waukegan a better place for everyone. I know I will carry these relationships and the knowledge of the interdisciplinary nature of sustainability to my future endeavors.



## Final Thoughts: GRCorps Members 2019-2020



### Charmaine John, Village of Northbrook

The most rewarding aspect of my service was directly connecting with residents regarding their passion for environmental sustainability. It was great to tap into the grassroots efforts that already existed in Northbrook and use that initial momentum to catapult new sustainability projects, such as our Climate Action Plan. I'm very proud I helped the municipality prioritize sustainability for the first year and implemented waste reduction programs that will continue to benefit Northbrook for years to come. Moving forward, I hope to

use the skills I have developed to support sustainability programs in the West Coast.

### Daniel Gonzalez, City of Highland Park

Throughout my year of service with the Greenest Region Corps and the City of Highland Park, I am very proud of the work I did for the community I grew up in. My work finalizing and executing tasks of Highland Park's Sustainability 2020 Plan taught me about the unique nature of local governments' role in environmental work. The Greenest Region Corps program brought me a greater understanding of the regional effort of governmental entities to grow sustainability. In addition, my supervisor leveraged



my position to grow my professional development. Some responsibilities I had included drafting and implementing numerous projects, working with local stakeholders to achieve higher commercial waste diversion, improving residential renewable energy access, and continuing community environmental education. I am looking forward to continuing my education in environmental policy and advocacy at Indiana University. I am pursuing a Master of Public Affairs degree with a concentration in Natural Resource Management and Environmental Policy.



## Final Thoughts: GRCorps Members 2019-2020



### Katya Obrez, Lake County

As a Greenest Region Corps member for Lake County, I assisted with the implementation of sustainability initiatives while learning about the inner workings of local government. During my year of service, I learned about energy efficiency, waste, clean air, local food systems, and the natural environment. I was given the opportunity to collaborate with various departments and organizations in order to create programs and recommendations that would benefit both the community and the environment. My experience as a Greenest Region Corps member

provided me with professional development skills, excellent leadership, great networking, many friends, and an invaluable experience.

### Cheryl Scott, Metropolitan Mayors Caucus

When I started in local government several years ago, I initially envisioned that I'd be convincing municipalities to go solar and buy electric vehicles (EVs). I was able to do just that in my role at the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus. I promoted our SolSmart communities and community solar program in communications to our members. The largest project I worked on was our "Becoming EV Ready" program. We helped municipalities to prepare for the future increase in EVs and expected grant funds by creating a first-of-its-kind



EV Readiness Checklist of actions municipalities can take. To inform items on the checklist, I helped to coordinate 17 listening sessions throughout the region with local government officials and other stakeholders and compiled feedback from 260 participants. I'm glad I achieved my initial local government goal during the past year and that I was able to work with so many inspiring sustainability professionals.



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### Haley Crim, Village of Park Forest

The biggest takeaway from my time in Park Forest is that sustainability is infinitely broad. The work over my service year involved building community, saving people money, addressing food insecurity, and so much more beyond what I thought a sustainability office would do. The most rewarding aspect of this work was being out in the community and watching people realize that same thing – sustainability doesn't have to cost additional time or money and they're already doing sustainability work. My biggest challenge was finding partners that

serve the South Suburbs. I'm proud of how I was able to draw the attention of solar installers to the Village, but I was never able to get a compost company to agree to service our area – which could be something for a future Corps member to take on!

### Katie Friedman, GRCorps Program Advisor

This year's cohort played an instrumental role in laying the foundation for the future of this program. Outside of the day-to-day tasks of their host communities, members formed committees and task forces in order to document the amazing work that the Corps was doing throughout the region; identify opportunities for further education, training, and professional development; and strengthen relationships with their communities through volunteerism and community service. Their dedication, teamwork, and creativity as they tackled these topics together was both impressive and inspiring.





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