

# Surveying AmeriCorps

The goal of AmeriCorps is to meet pressing, unmet needs through service and to renew the ethic of civic responsibility among our citizens. As AmeriCorps helps to develop more active citizens, communities are strengthened throughout the country. A fundamental purpose of AmeriCorps is to help recruit, support, and manage the vast networks of volunteers and AmeriCorps members assisting nonprofit organizations in meeting community needs. AmeriCorps has been called upon to make volunteer recruitment and management a major focus of its efforts. To achieve these objectives, the Guide is designed to steer your journey to become a performance driven AmeriCorps community program.

The decision to consider starting an AmeriCorps program is a huge one. Becoming part of the National Service movement brings opportunities for both your organization and the community you serve. It also brings significant additional work for your organization.

As with the development of any building project, the first step is to design it, to lay out how things will fit together, to identify where the supporting beams need to go, how large the project will be, who or what else is needed to complete the project and so on. These questions are often answered through discussions and then laid out visibly in a blueprint. This section will help deepen your understanding of AmeriCorps and move you into designing the blueprint of a strong foundation for your AmeriCorps program.

## *Important AmeriCorps Components*

AmeriCorps\*State and National

National and community service through AmeriCorps includes full- and part-time opportunities for participants, called members, to serve their communities and build the capacity of nonprofit organizations to meet local environmental, educational, public safety, homeland security or other human needs. Through service with local organizations and agencies, in communities large, small, rural, urban, and suburban across America, AmeriCorps members provide meaningful a services to their nation.



*Interested in considering national service to address your community's needs?  
Read on!*

### **Eligible Applicants**

Now that you are interested and considering becoming a part of this great service network, we need to make sure that you are eligible to be an AmeriCorps legal applicant. Eligible applicants for AmeriCorps\*State/National funding are nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher education, state agencies, Indian Tribes and local governments. This includes faith-based and other community organizations. However, pursuant to the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995, an organization described in section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 that engages in lobbying activities is not eligible.

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If you are looking to operate in two or more states you should apply for AmeriCorps\*National funding. This includes applicants also such as national non-profits with locally-based affiliates in two or more states, partnerships or consortia formed across two or more states, consisting of institutions of higher education, Indian tribes, or other nonprofits, including labor and religious organizations. However, if you are interested in serving in one community or state AmeriCorps\*State funding would be most appropriate.



*My organization is eligible to receive AmeriCorps\*State/National funds. And based upon the location of our planned services, I know what funding (AmeriCorps\*State or National) to apply for. If applying for State funds, I need to contact my state's service commission. If seeking National funding I can contact the National Direct unit at the Corporation.*

## **Types of Programs**

You have great flexibility to design a program that is responsive to the needs in your defined community. Examples of service programs that address CNCS issue areas (education, environment, homeland security, human needs and public safety) include:

- Community-based service programs that tutor and mentor younger children and include opportunities for them to participate in service projects after school, on weekends and during school vacations;
- Programs that recruit, train and support several hundred college volunteers to serve elementary school students in schools to support a conflict resolution curriculum;
- College-based programs in which student AmeriCorps members, including Federal Work Study students, perform substantial service in local schools or other community settings;
- Faith-based programs that provide literacy and English as a Second Language training for low-income adults, reading improvement for homeless elementary school-age children, or teach and model social skills to children;
- Programs initiated by mayors and other local officials to integrate AmeriCorps members into community-wide strategies to meet local needs;
- Immunization programs that target young children and their families;
- A full-time, year round youth corps or summer youth corps program undertaking service projects with visible public benefits, including natural resources projects;
- Programs placing members as service-learning coordinators in schools and youth organizations; and
- Programs using qualified members as teachers, teacher aides and early childhood workers in communities with an inadequate number of such professionals.

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Experience shows that it is difficult for a program to demonstrate its community impact when it tries to meet several educational, environmental, public safety, and other human needs at once. However, certain programs such as volunteer generator models, youth service corps or programs that operate in rural areas may operate more effectively by developing activities in more than one issue area. Traditionally AmeriCorps members have provided direct service; however, as the needs of communities change the program has changed. Members are allowed to conduct capacity building services as well. You should develop a service strategy that works for your community and organization and be able to articulate this approach.



*I know what services are needed in my community.*

## Program Models

After identifying your program services (which should involve stakeholders and the overall community) you will need to determine what service model will work best. Examples include:

- **Intermediary** – Your organization would serve as the legal applicant for a Corporation grant, thereby assuming the responsibility for the technical and financial management of the program, while the members are out-sourced to other eligible local organizations to provide services. You may assign members to individual projects or organize them in teams. The intermediary model works well for an organization that has a successful history in managing federal grants and is committed to supporting other local grassroots in enhancing their services and capacity and or think that these other organizations, though structurally unable to manage a federal grant are better suited to provide the services and or address given needs.
- **Multi-site** – Your organization is responsible for the operational and fiscal management of all program matters and places members in multiple sites to conduct service. Intermediary models are also multi-site programs, but the legal applicant role distinguishes the two.
- **Team-based** – Your organization is responsible for the operational and fiscal management of all program matters and places all members at one or multiple sites to work in a team or cadre environment.
- **Residential** – Your organization provides room and board to members during their service term. As a result, you may submit a waiver request for consideration to the Corporation to reduce the living allowance match requirements.
- **Professional Corps** – Your organization recruits and places qualified AmeriCorps members in positions as teachers, nurses, doctors, police officers, lawyers, architects, engineers or other professionals helping to meet critical needs in communities with inadequate numbers of such professionals. Public or private nonprofit employers must sponsor AmeriCorps members and agree to pay 100% of AmeriCorps members' living

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allowance and benefits. This excludes the education award which the Corporation pays. For this type of program, the living allowance may exceed the maximum amount allowed in other national service programs.

- **Fixed Amount Awards** - Fixed Amount Awards are an innovative grant-making strategy initiated by the Corporation for its AmeriCorps Education Award programs. The premise of the fixed amount awards is that grantees will spend more of their own resources and are less dependent on the Corporation's grant funding. Additionally, the fixed amount award programs reduce the administrative burden of managing the grant.



*Our selected program model will best address the needs and utilize the resources of our community.*

## AmeriCorps Members

AmeriCorps members (not referred to as volunteers) are special because they chose to give a substantial amount of their time to serve their community. While this is not without benefit to them, the benefit truly comes from how much effort and heart they put into the service. Because of their commitment, the Corporation believes in providing members with as many opportunities for development and growth as possible. Therefore, the selection of members and their development is a very important component of all AmeriCorps programs.

### Member Eligibility

Programs must ascertain and document the eligibility of all of its members. A person who is eligible to enroll as an AmeriCorps member is a person

- Who is a U.S. citizen, U.S. national or lawful permanent resident alien of the United States;
- Who is at least 17 years of age at the commencement of service unless the member is
- out of school and enrolled
  - in a full-time, year-round youth corps Program or full-time summer Program as defined in the Act (42 U.S.C. 12572 (a) (2)), in which case he or she must be between the ages of 16 and 25, inclusive, or
  - in a Program for economically disadvantaged youth as defined in the Act (42 U.S.C. 12572 (a)(9)), in which case he or she must be between the ages of 16 and 24, inclusive; and
- Has a high school diploma or an equivalency certificate (or agrees to obtain a high school diploma or its equivalent before using an education award) and who has not dropped out of elementary or secondary school in order to enroll as an AmeriCorps member (unless enrolled in an institution of higher education on an ability to benefit basis and is considered eligible for funds under section 484 of the Higher Education Act of 1965, 20 U.S.C. 1091), or who has been determined through an independent assessment conducted by the Program to be incapable of obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent.

### Member Terms of Service

Members may serve in a variety of capacities. The number of hours that they commit to serving

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should be driven by the needs of the community and the capacity of the organization to manage them. Full-time members must serve at least 1700 hours during a period of not less than nine months and not more than one year. Half-time members must serve at least 900 hours during a period of one or two years as indicated in the approved budget. No member may serve less than 300 hours during a one-year period. Programs may propose at least 300 hours for minimum-time, at least 450 hours for quarter-time, and at least 675 hours for reduced half-time members based on the program design. However, within a program, we generally require all reduced half-time, quarter-time, and minimum-time members to serve the same number of hours. If any less than full-time program has a need for greater flexibility, we will consider a proposal for two different sets of hours within the same program.

## Member Benefits

During his or her term of service a member is eligible to receive certain benefits. Benefits include the following:

**Education Award** means an award provided to a member who has successfully completed a required term of service in an approved national service position and who otherwise meets the eligibility criteria in the Act. An education award may be used: (1) to repay qualified student loans, as defined in the Act; (2) toward educational expenses at a Title IV Institution of Higher Education; and (3) toward expenses incurred in participating in school-to-work programs approved by the Secretaries of Labor and Education. The amount of the award is determined by the number of hours completed. See the following chart.

<b>Position</b>	<b># of hours</b>	<b>Education Award</b>
Full-time	at least 1700	\$4,725.00
One Year Half-time	at least 900	\$2,362.50
Two Year Half-time	at least 900	\$2,362.50
Reduced Half-time	at least 675	\$1,800.00
Quarter-time	at least 450	\$1,250.00
Minimum-time	at least 300	\$1,000.00

**Living Allowance** – The living allowance is designed to help members meet the necessary living expenses incurred while participating in the AmeriCorps Program. Programs must not pay a living allowance on an hourly basis. It is not a wage and should not fluctuate based on the number of hours members serve in a given time period. Programs should pay the living allowance in increments, such as weekly or biweekly. Programs may use their organization’s payroll system to process members’ living allowances. However, if a payroll system cannot be altered and must show 40 hours in order to distribute a living allowance, then members' service hours should be documented separately to keep track of their progress towards the Program’s total required AmeriCorps service hours.

**Health Care Coverage** – The Grantee must provide a health care policy to those fulltime members not otherwise covered by a health care policy at the time of enrollment into the AmeriCorps program, or to those members who lose coverage during their term of service as a result of participating in the Program or through no deliberate act of their own. The Corporation

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will not cover health care costs for family members or for less than full-time members. See AmeriCorps Grant Provisions for additional detail.

**Childcare** – The Grantee must ensure that childcare is made available to those full-time members who need such assistance in order to participate. Members are not eligible to receive childcare from AmeriCorps while they are receiving childcare subsidies from another source for the same period of AmeriCorps Service. See AmeriCorps Grant Provisions for additional detail.

**AmeriCorps Gear** – AmeriCorps members and programs are identified by their common logo and gear. Members should receive service gear (i.e. t-shirts, hat, pin, sweatshirt, buttons and decals) to connect them to the nationwide network of AmeriCorps service providers.

**Reasonable Accommodation** - Programs and activities must be accessible to persons with disabilities, and the Grantee must provide reasonable accommodation to the known mental or physical disabilities of otherwise qualified members, service recipients, applicants, and program staff. All selections and project assignments must be made without regard to the need to provide reasonable accommodation.

**Member Training** – Consistent with the approved budget, the Grantee must provide members with the training, skills, knowledge and supervision necessary to perform the tasks required in their assigned project positions, including specific training in a particular field and background information on the community served. The Grantee must conduct an orientation for members and comply with any pre-service orientation or training required by the Corporation. This orientation should be designed to enhance member security and sensitivity to the community. Orientation should cover member rights and responsibilities, including the Program's code of conduct, prohibited activities (including those specified in these grant provisions), requirements under the Drug-Free Workplace Act (41 U.S.C. 701 *et seq.*), suspension and termination from service, grievance procedures, sexual harassment, other non-discrimination issues, and other topics as necessary.

The Corporation can provide you with training materials on this topic. Go to [www.nationalservice.org/resources](http://www.nationalservice.org/resources).



*Members are the central means by which “things get done” in the community. My organization will be committed to their development.*

## Community Involvement

The community in which the program operates and in which members serve should play an integral part in developing and supporting the program. Partnerships should be developed to improve services and involve larger segments of the community in addressing community problems. In addition, the involvement of community stakeholders helps to promote the sustainability of the program and its services.

## Sustainability

By building their capacity and achieving sustainability, organizations are able to help communities effectively respond to local needs without substantial reliance on federal funds. Strengthening communities in this way is important for all of the Corporation programs. From

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day one, the organization should be thinking about ways to integrate the program services into the community.

\_\_\_\_\_  *My organization will be a catalyst for community partnership.*

## Organizational Capacity

To foster and sustain effective AmeriCorps programs, organizations must be both financially viable and well-managed. Organizations must ensure that they are able to provide the proper management structure to maintain compliance with program requirements, have the capacity to manage a federal grant and can conduct on-site monitoring of financial and programmatic systems. Programs will be monitored by the Corporation and or State Commission to ensure that they meet program requirements.

\_\_\_\_\_  *My organization has the expertise and systems to successfully manage this federal program.*

## Support for Community-Based Organizations (Faith-Based and Secular)

The Corporation expects applicants to support the efforts of civic, community, educational, and faith-based organizations to solve local problems and meet critical needs of individuals and communities. Applicants and continuing programs should demonstrate partnerships (such as, sub-grantees, host sites, or volunteer recruitment partnerships) with faith-based or other community organizations.

\_\_\_\_\_  *My organization has considered a diverse set of partnerships.*

## Citizenship

The National and Community Service Act of 1990, as amended, has as one of its basic purposes to “renew the ethic of civic responsibility and the spirit of community throughout the United States.” Program applicants should include plans to offer a civics-training program for members that will focus on what it means to be an American citizen, the responsibilities of democratic citizenship, and the obligations of freedom.

\_\_\_\_\_  *My organization incorporates civic responsibility in its program plan.*

## Evaluation

Evaluation should begin before the program. Ultimately evaluation should compare the observed program outcomes with what would have happened in the absence of the program. Organizations and programs should develop ongoing systems and tools that allow them to assess the success of the program. See the AmeriCorps Grant Provisions for specific and detailed information on Performance Measurement and Evaluation.

## Performance Measures

Performance measures are indicators that allow a program to clarify its purpose and goals, identify how specific services and program components contribute to the achievement of a desired

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result, document the actual results and impacts of program activities, and improve program performance by identifying program successes and areas for improvement. See the AmeriCorps Grant Provisions for specific and detailed information on Performance Measurement and Evaluation.



*Evaluation begins today!*

While coming up with the best service program structure for your community needs, you must also be mindful to integrate the other required components of an AmeriCorps program. The information above was provided to lead you through identifying the best service program structure for your organization and community.

From this point forward, the Guide is targeted toward the audiences we discussed earlier. If you are interested in assessing your organization's capacity to start an AmeriCorps program or identifying the activities necessary before submitting the AmeriCorps Grant Application, the **Preparing the Ground** section is designed to lead you through that process. If you have already submitted your grant application and received notification of award, but have not yet received your grant, the **Laying the Foundation** and **Framing the Program** sections will lead you through a step-by-step program design and implementation process. If you are an existing AmeriCorps program or a staff member new to AmeriCorps you might choose to review the entire Guide or use the table of contents to identify sections of the Guide that can assist you in your review and strengthening of your organization's systems and operations.