



## Toolkit Items

**Tool Name:** Arkansas – TANF Model

**Definition:** This is an example of the strategic deployment of AmeriCorps members in support of a specific initiative, in this case Welfare Reform, as a way to mobilize FBOs as effective partners.

**Purpose:** This is useful for considering leveraging partnerships with major initiatives in other state agencies and programs.

## **Arkansas Commission on National and Community Service AmeriCorps & Faith-Based Collaboration in Welfare Reform**

### **Background**

The Arkansas Commission on National and Community Service is housed in the Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Volunteerism, the state office of volunteerism. When welfare reform began to take shape on a national level in 1997 Selena Ellis of the Division of Volunteerism proposed using her Arkansas Mentors Program as a model for recruiting and placing mentors to help individuals make the transition from welfare to work. She developed videotapes to help publicize the program, recruit volunteers to serve as mentors and recruit welfare clients to enroll in the mentoring program. In the fall of 1997 Ms. Ellis, representatives of the Department of Human Services and representatives of the Arkansas Commission went to seven regional meetings to present the Arkansas Mentors program to interested parties. A local pastor hosted each meeting in a building belonging to the congregation. State and local faith-based organizations received information on the meetings and a special invitation to attend.

### **The Model**

In collaboration with the Department of Human Services Division of County Operations, Ms. Ellis agreed to set up the Arkansas Mentors Program in any of the state's 75 counties where the County Administrator expressed an interest. Working with the Commission, she obtained commitments of AmeriCorps\*VISTAs and Delta Service Corps (an AmeriCorps\*National Program) members to serve as volunteer coordinators for the program in participating counties. In some counties the County Administrator recruited and paid a volunteer coordinator as a member of the staff. Ms. Ellis and Division of Volunteerism staff then provided initial training for DHS County Office staff and the volunteer coordinators.

### **Results**

In the years the program operated, 16 AmeriCorps\*VISTAs and 24 Delta Service Corps members served as volunteer coordinators in the program. Volunteer mentors came from all sectors, but most were recruited from faith-based communities. Jefferson County and Mississippi County were among the counties that had the highest numbers on the welfare rolls at the outset and were the most successful in recruiting members of faith-based communities to serve as volunteers. A total of 23 congregations and 100 volunteers participated in the program in these two counties alone. The Arkansas Mentors Program, volunteers from faith-based communities and national service programs helped to make Arkansas one of the most successful states in the nation in moving people from welfare to independence.

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