



Talking about AmeriCorps





In duction

As an AmeriCorps member, you have a unique opportunity to help get the word out about what AmeriCorps is and how other people can participate. Just imagine the impact on communities if the 150,000 AmeriCorps members who have served during the past five years each recruited just one person to join. It's not that hard.

Whether you're telling a friend about what you do, talking to community members, or helping recruit more members for your program, knowing a little more about AmeriCorps will help.

Each member has a story and sometimes a story is the best way to describe AmeriCorps. If you've just started, you may not have too many stories of your own...yet. If you've been part of AmeriCorps for awhile, you have lots of stories. Throughout this guide you will find stories from other members illustrating the different experiences that are all part of AmeriCorps. Please feel free to share them.

This guide also gives you information about AmeriCorps and explains some of the differences between AmeriCorps programs, including AmeriCorps*NCCC and AmeriCorps*VISTA. Each program has unique aspects so it helps to know a few facts as well as the stories.

Whether you want to pass on information to a friend, plan your own presentation, or help an AmeriCorps recruiter, this guide will help you learn more about AmeriCorps.

Your AmeriCorps handbook, *Getting Started: A Guide for AmeriCorps Members*, is a great reference to learn more about the history of community service and other national service programs. You can find more great member stories and general information at www.americorps.org.



Spreading the Word

People who hear about AmeriCorps from a friend or relative are just as likely to join as people who see an ad or hear a radio or TV commercial. Telling people what you do everyday is easy. As you start talking to people, you may find they have lots of questions about AmeriCorps. Think about your experience and what others would like to hear. What sort of questions did you have before you joined? Here are some of the common questions people have when talking to AmeriCorps members.

Before you joined...

- How did you hear about AmeriCorps?
- Why did you decide to join?
- What doubts did you have about joining?
- Were your friends and family supportive of your decision? If not, how did you convince them it was a good opportunity?

After you joined...

- What's it like to be an AmeriCorps member?
- What have you enjoyed most about your experience?
- What are some challenges you have faced?
- What have you learned about yourself?
- What have you learned about your community and other people?

Telling people about your personal experience in AmeriCorps will help others to see how they can get involved. Or they might tell their friends or relatives about the chance to join. Word of mouth is one of the primary ways people hear about AmeriCorps.

Since experiences in AmeriCorps are different, some of the stories in this guide may be useful to show this diversity. Let them know you've read about these experiences. Other member stories are available on the web site at www.americorps.org.

“Being a part of such a diverse team opened my eyes to the fact that no two people are alike, and as obvious as that sounds, many people never realize how wonderful this really is.”

John Gilreath
Hometown—Arlington, VA
Served in San Diego, CA

I came from an ethnically diverse town. But the biggest challenge I faced was getting used to such a socially diverse scene. AmeriCorps brings together people of all ages, from all over, with many different beliefs and values. Eventually, a little bit of everyone you meet begins to rub off on you. It was a little overwhelming at first. But meeting so many different people at once was a great experience for me.

From blazing trails, assisting flood victims, building greenhouses, planting trees, tutoring, and painting an entire neighborhood in one day, AmeriCorps gave me a chance to do it all. At the end of each day, I felt a sense of accomplishment.

My greatest moment was as a mentor and tutor for eight middle school students. They were all in danger of not going on to high school. For three months I worked with these children, trying to motivate and excite them. On graduation day, all but one received a diploma. I've never been so proud in my life. The funny thing was, I was proud for them, not myself. I was just doing my job.

I joined AmeriCorps after high school. It was an invaluable experience to take a year off from school instead of going to college. The year off gave me a clearer sense of who I wanted to be and how to accomplish my goals. AmeriCorps also helped me pay for my tuition and get a double major in geology and geography at Mary Washington College.

The Big Picture

AmeriCorps members serve in a network of more than 1,000 local and national nonprofit organizations throughout the country to improve communities and better the lives of people. Since 1994, more than 150,000 members have served in neighborhoods and towns like yours.

Members work on different issues and in different communities on locally identified issues. They are all tied together by being AmeriCorps members and focusing on meeting community needs.

Some members serve in teams while others are one of a few organizers of a grass roots community initiative. They work in large and small organizations, in rural and urban areas.

Given the remarkable diversity of what AmeriCorps members do, how can you explain what AmeriCorps is? One way to describe it is to look at what all AmeriCorps programs have in common.

It's Adventure. AmeriCorps is an adventure—a way to put idealism into action. AmeriCorps lets people live up to their dreams—to help children learn, protect the environment, or bring needed services to a low-income community. There are opportunities in AmeriCorps for anyone who's willing to do something special, something unique, something exciting.

It's Experience. AmeriCorps is a real-life education and work experience wrapped into one. Members learn teamwork, communication, responsibility, and other essential skills that will help them for the rest of their lives. And they gain the personal satisfaction of taking on a challenge and seeing results.

It's Benefits. Most AmeriCorps members earn a living allowance, health insurance, student loan deferment, and training. After they complete a full-time service term (usually 10 to 12 months) they receive a \$4,725 education award to help pay for college, graduate school, vocational training, or to pay student loans. Part-time members receive partial amounts.

It's Helping Others. AmeriCorps members serve communities in many ways by:

- tutoring children and adults
- building new homes for low-income families
- helping protect the environment by working in national parks
- working with homeless families as they move to permanent housing
- building computer learning centers for low-income communities
- developing education programs to help families transition from welfare to work
- helping families affected by domestic violence
- rebuilding communities effected by natural disasters
- and more!

“Every morning when I came in, all the kids in the classroom would shout my name and run up and give me a hug.”

Hamilton Simons-Jones
Hometown—Ghent, N.Y.
Served Boston, Mass.

I was burnt out on studying and wanted an experience outside of school that would be fun and give me a sense of what the “real world” is all about.

I was in an AmeriCorps program called City Year, an urban service corps for people ages 17-23. There were 300 young idealists in teams of 10-15 who worked in schools, after-school centers, and other programs for 10 months.

Through AmeriCorps, I got a more complete perspective on the world. I gained confidence in myself I didn't know I had—a direction in life—and learned to respect and care for people who were very different from me.

I also learned I can make a difference—that a group of young, committed individuals has the power to create change in the world.

Besides all of that, I now have lots of marketable skills—from organizing, to resume writing, to public speaking, and how to talk to two-year-olds and affect their education and lives.

Now I'm going to college at Tulane University, majoring in political science. I am chairing the campus community service organization, a member of the service-learning advisory board on campus, and part of the Urban Village planning committee—a living-learning community that focuses on urban issues.

AmeriCorps is like climbing a rough and ragged peak. It may be grueling at times, but it's good for you. We can't grow without some pain. When you get to the top, the view and sense of accomplishment is unmatched. Sometimes, the peaks rise up every morning, or week or month, but you're sure to overcome them.

Planning a Presentation

Once you tell your friends and family about AmeriCorps, it's time to start telling others. You can ask to talk at a local school event, address the congregation at your place of worship, or talk to fellow members of a community or social group. You can also write a letter to your community or college paper.

If you would like to help an AmeriCorps Outreach Specialist at an event, contact your local representative through the website www.americorps.org or call 1-800-942-2677.

Planning your own event. If you would like to give a presentation on your own, the easiest places to start are community groups and places of worship where you already have an affiliation. Other places to consider are local high schools, colleges, and community groups involved in community service, such as Rotary and Cooperative Extension/4H.

No matter how large or small your audience, be sure to plan your session in advance and bring materials to hand out if people want more information.

Here are a few things to keep in mind as you're planning:

- Contact the organization—call the meeting organizer or other person who helps arrange for guest speakers. Make sure an AmeriCorps presentation will be a good fit with their meetings.
- Find out who your audience will be—ask the general age range, if they are involved in community service, and about current events in the organization where AmeriCorps can be highlighted.
- Establish a date—find out if there are events where you can address a large audience or if you will be presenting with other guest speakers.
- Establish length of time—will your presentation be five minutes for a quick overview or 20 minutes with details and a chance for questions and answers.
- Contact other local members or alumni—remember that stories are a powerful way to describe AmeriCorps, especially if they are personal. If you're giving a longer presentation, it's a good idea to arrange for someone else to join you to talk about their personal experiences.

Once you know how much time you have to present, you can start planning what to say. The more time you have, the more details you can provide.

Here's a rough outline of how you might organize your presentation:

- Introduce yourself and others who are with you.
- Describe what you do as an AmeriCorps member.
- Talk about your personal experience including stories or how AmeriCorps has impacted your life or the lives of other people in the community.
- Describe AmeriCorps using the information in this guide.
- Have other AmeriCorps members talk about their experiences.
- If there are no other members available, use the stories provided.
- Provide an opportunity for questions.
- Thank the audience for listening and offer them a chance to talk with you after your presentation. Many times people have questions, but do not want to ask them in front of the entire group.
- Distribute information about AmeriCorps and tell your audience where they can get more information—call 1-800-942-2677, TTY 1-800-833-3722, or visit www.americorps.org.

**“Regardless
of where my life ultimate-
ly leads me, the life lessons I’ve
learned this year are irreplaceable. I
don’t think they could have been taught
anywhere else.”**

Esther Carolina Lugo
Hometown—Born in Caracas, Venezuela;
raised in Atlanta, Ga.
Served in Washington, D.C.

I’ve always known I wanted to work in the service field and the chance to work with young people really drew me in. I knew AmeriCorps*VISTA would give me the chance to learn project planning, address community issues, and deal with problems facing our society in proactive rather than reactive ways. I wanted to be a part of that.

I worked for Community IMPACT! It reaches out to young people and trains them to be leaders and invest in their communities. I was assigned to work in a Washington, DC high school, organizing community service projects at the school and encouraging the students to participate in community building projects.

It was hard trying to focus on the small accomplishments rather than having a ‘save the world’ approach. At times I was worried my projects weren’t reaching any ‘big’ goals, but after a while I realized that the problems in that community—and in all communities—need to be addressed one at a time.

I think the best thing for me was working with a special education class for severely emotionally and learning disabled children. We worked on a project to create a recycling contest. A lot of these kids were ones that been written off and nobody really believed they could deal with a complex project. But they astounded everyone with snazzy pamphlets on recycling and conservation issues, public service announcements for the school, and presentations for classmates. All these young people needed was someone to give them extra attention and extra planning time.

Now I have a job working for the Higher Achievement Program in D.C., an academic and cultural enrichment program for at-risk youth in grades 5-8. Anyone who says they want to improve our society needs to actually get down and dirty and give a year of service.

Opportunities to Serve

While you may be able to tell people about what you do day to day, you may not know as much about other AmeriCorps opportunities. Here are answers to some common questions.

What is AmeriCorps?

There are more than 1,000 AmeriCorps local and national programs. Many are run by organizations you may have heard of, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, Habitat for Humanity, City Year, and American Red Cross. Others are run by smaller, local organizations, such as community centers, local governments, and faith based organizations.

Where do AmeriCorps members serve?

AmeriCorps members serve throughout the country, and they have a variety of skills and interests. Some people stay in their own community or work nearby. Other people choose to relocate and work in a community across the country.

What training do AmeriCorps members receive?

Each program provides training to help members do the best job possible. For example, a member in an education project may receive training on how to teach or be a tutor. Another member who is recruiting volunteers to restore low-income houses will be trained in public speaking or volunteer outreach.

What are the requirements?

Applicants to AmeriCorps must be at least 17 years old, but each program sets its own requirements and age limits depending on need and structure. Some programs are looking for people with college degrees, and others accept people who have not finished high school. There is no upper age limit for most programs. All members must be U.S. citizens or permanent residents.

What are the benefits?

Members of AmeriCorps programs get the chance to try new things, learn new skills, and gain valuable experience. Many programs offer health insurance during the service term and may provide housing, transportation, and other benefits.

Some projects offer part-time positions for those attending school, working a job, or caring for a family.

How can people apply?

Visit the AmeriCorps website www.americorps.org to learn more and apply directly to specific programs. State commissions on community service also have information about most programs.

**“I traveled to new places,
made new friends, learned new
skills, and most importantly, challenged
myself in a lot of new ways.”**

Name: Todd Dapremont
Hometown—Gulfport, MS
Served in Charleston, SC

There were so many good moments when I was in AmeriCorps. But the most satisfying was doing disaster relief for a flash flood in Roan Mountain, Tenn. It was my first project away from campus as a team leader. It was a difficult, physical project and involved working outdoors in the cold and rain.

Sometimes it was difficult to keep going at times, but we could see the impact we were making. The feeling of accomplishment the whole team felt and the realization we were making a visible, substantial difference in the lives of the community members made all of the hard work more than worth it.

I joined AmeriCorps because I wanted to do a year of service between college and heading off to graduate school. And AmeriCorps*NCCC offered a variety of different experiences and locations in a relatively short amount of time.

My friends and family were very supportive, but I don't think any of them really knew exactly what I was doing or what AmeriCorps*NCCC was about, at least at first. But when I was able to tell them what I was doing and how it was making a difference, they were able to understand better.

AmeriCorps was an opportunity for me to show my commitment to making America better in a tangible way, and have a great personal experience at the same time. It changed my outlook on service and the difference individuals can make.

After my year of service, I decided to go back to school. I'm now in the doctoral English program at Stanford University.

The logo features the word "An" in a purple serif font, followed by a purple asterisk and the word "VISTA" in a larger, bold purple serif font. The text is positioned inside a white speech bubble shape that is partially cut off by the left edge of the page.

An *VISTA

What is AmeriCorps*VISTA? AmeriCorps*VISTA is part of AmeriCorps. Their aim—to help residents in disadvantaged communities create programs and structure them to become more self-sufficient. Members serve with an organization for one-year, full-time, and they may do a wide variety of activities during the year.

Currently, more than 4,500 AmeriCorps*VISTA members serve in almost 1,000 projects across the country and create programs designed to continue with the support and participation of the community after they serve.

They may be the only AmeriCorps member at their site or work with a team of members at the sponsoring organization. Some members may be part of a larger effort spread throughout a city or state and are encouraged to collaborate with other AmeriCorps*VISTA members.

Where do AmeriCorps*VISTA members serve? AmeriCorps*VISTA members serve with sponsors in rural and urban areas in all 50 states. Since 1965, more than 130,000 VISTA members have served in homeless shelters, community development corporations, local credit unions, literacy coalitions, and other community-based programs.

They may serve in their own communities or relocate to another. Members who move to serve receive relocation assistance for expenses. Members are responsible for locating their own housing, with some assistance from the sponsor agency. AmeriCorps*VISTA members are encouraged to live in the community in which they serve.

What training do AmeriCorps*VISTA members receive? Members attend a three-day orientation with other AmeriCorps*VISTA members and an in-service training with members from their area. The project sponsors provide additional training to help the member meet the needs of their assignment. Members are encouraged to attend trainings during service which will help them do the best job they can.

What are the requirements? Members come from throughout the country and range from recent college graduates to retired school principals, to longtime active community members. AmeriCorps*VISTA members must be at least 18 years old and there is no upper age limit. AmeriCorps*VISTA projects may request people with some college education, a bachelor's degree, or professional experience in a particular field. Community service experience is desirable. Spanish fluency is helpful in certain areas.

What are the benefits? While participating in the program, members earn a living allowance, health coverage, student loan forbearance, and may qualify for childcare assistance. After service, members have the choice between the educational award or a \$1,200 cash stipend. They also receive “non-competitive eligibility” for federal employment—meaning they may have a better chance of getting certain federal jobs.

How can people apply? Applications are accepted year-round. Submit a complete applications four months prior to the month you're available. For an application packet, please call 1-800-942-2677 or check out the web site at www.americorps.org.

“I can’t say enough about the wonderful new challenges that taught me so much about myself and the community where I live.”

Allison Pendell
Hometown—Bloomington, Ill.
Served in Evansville, Ind.

I worked for a small micro-enterprise project. It was just the director and me. We helped small businesses with technical and financial assistance. The people who owned them were low-to-moderate income and needed help getting their businesses off the ground or keeping them running.

I went into the community and encouraged the small business owners to take a 12-week-long small business planning course. I had to do some of the instruction, but it was amazing how other community members came out to help other small business owners learn. I found excellent volunteers from the community to help out on most of the sessions.

I also organized peer groups for program graduates who wanted to keep in touch with the other small business owners and have the on-going support only they could give to each other.

My biggest challenge was becoming comfortable getting up in front of people and leading class each week! When I started I was only 23 years old, and the people in the class were all older. But knowing that what I was doing was making an impact, really got me through. But it was all worth it to see how far the students came in just 12 weeks—to see the hope and excitement in their eyes.

My AmeriCorps experience gave me the opportunity to know many wonderful people and a direction for my future. I’m going to graduate school for my masters in International Economic Development.

I think everyone should experience something eye-opening like AmeriCorps. You have the chance to develop all kinds of new skills, meet amazing people, and learn about yourself and the community where you live.



An *NCCC

What is AmeriCorps*NCCC? AmeriCorps*NCCC is also part of AmeriCorps. It is a 10-month, full-time residential program for young adults ages 18 to 24. Approximately 1,000 members serve every year.

Members serve in teams of 10 to 14 on a variety of service projects in the areas of education, the environment, and public safety as well as on other community needs including disaster relief and public housing restoration. Teams serve together throughout the 10 months of service.

Where do AmeriCorps*NCCC members serve? Members relocate to one of five campuses Charleston, S.C.; Denver, Colo.; Perry Point, Md.; San Diego, Calif.; and Washington, D.C. Members are provided with transportation to their campuses and to their homes at the end of their service. They are assigned to a campus based on the need of the program.

Each campus serves as a regional headquarters for a number of states in the surrounding area. In addition to the many projects completed near the campus, teams travel throughout the region working with a variety of community organizations.

What training do AmeriCorps*NCCC members receive? Members spend the first few weeks training at their campus. Training activities include team building, community issues, service learning, communication, and leadership development. Members receive skills training throughout the 10 months as determined by each project.

What are the requirements? AmeriCorps*NCCC members are between 18 and 24 years old and work in a structured environment. Members should be prepared to serve on a team. The projects require a great amount of teamwork and small group collaboration.

What are the benefits? While participating in the program, members receive room and board, health coverage, clothes to work in, a living allowance, and childcare if necessary.

Members leave the program knowing how to use new tools. They have improved interpersonal skills and the ability to work with a team. They also have a chance to meet and work with people from throughout the country.

How can people apply? Applications are accepted in the spring for fall placement and in the summer for winter placement. For an application packet and deadlines, please call 1-800-942-2677 or check out the web site at www.americorps.org

All AmeriCorps*NCCC applications should be sent to: AmeriCorps*NCCC Selection and Placement, 1201 New York Avenue, Washington, DC 20525

When you're talking about AmeriCorps, remember these things:

Do

- Tell your family and friends about your experiences.
- Contact your high school or college and offer to talk to a class.
- Keep up with AmeriCorps by reading information from your project and visiting the website.
- Send a letter to the editor of your local paper. Encourage others to join in the effort to improve your community and the country.
- Get to know other AmeriCorps members in your community and learn their stories.
- Continue to talk about your experience after you finish service. People want to hear about your experiences.

Don't

- Make up answers. If someone asks you a question and you are not sure of the answer, it's OK to say, "I'm not sure. But you can call the 800 number and find out for them." Or get their contact information.
- Make promises. Don't ever say someone will definitely get in. You can encourage them and say they have a good chance, but make no guarantees.
- Assume other programs are like yours. Don't make generalizations about other programs unless you are sure of the answer.

For information or to get materials, contact the AmeriCorps Hotline at 1-800-942-2677.

To read more information about AmeriCorps and read more profiles about members, go to the web site at www.americorps.org/joining.

Resources

Print Materials

To help you tell others about opportunities with AmeriCorps, you can order the following publications by calling 1-800-942-2677 or questions@americorps.org:

- AmeriCorps brochures
- AmeriCorps*VISTA brochures
- AmeriCorps*NCCC brochures
- AmeriCorps applications
- AmeriCorps brochures in Spanish
- audio tapes
- large print materials
- other useful material

Web Resources

Visit www.americorps.org for the following information:

- profiles of AmeriCorps members and programs
- a complete list of AmeriCorps programs
- contact information for AmeriCorps outreach specialists
- downloadable application
- other useful information

Got questions?

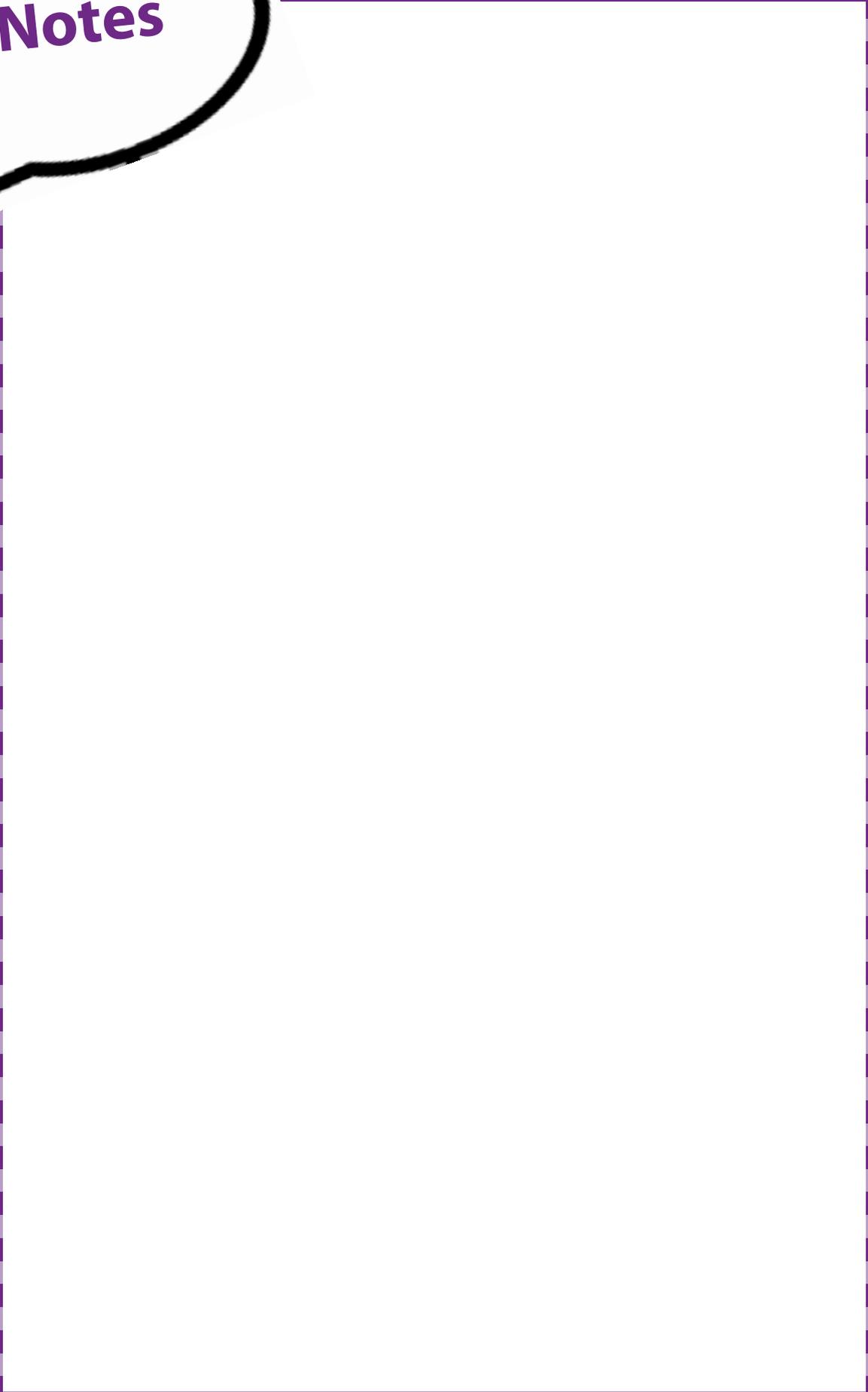
Call 1-800-942-2677 or send an e-mail to questions@americorps.org.

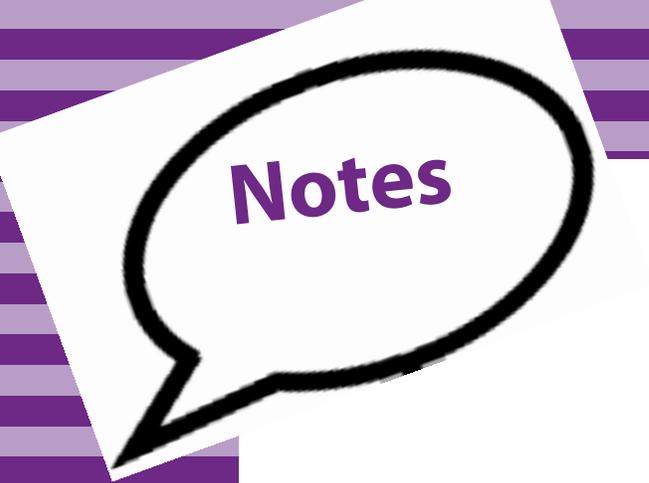
AmeriCorps Recruiters

If you need help organizing a recruitment event, or would like to help one of the AmeriCorps outreach specialists, call 1-800-942-2677 or go to www.americorps.org/joining/recruiters.



Notes





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Corporation for National Service

1201 New York Avenue, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20525

(202) 606-5000

www.americorps.org