“Having AmeriCorps on my résumé will be a stepping stone to gain another job.”

“Having AmeriCorps on my résumé will be a stepping stone to gain another job.”

“My experience as a volunteer in the AmeriCorps program has given me the will to get out of bed everyday. It has given me the education and the knowledge to understand my disability ...”

“I am a service-oriented person and a humanitarian at heart. AmeriCorps service means being involved in the community more.”
Background

As part of its mission to engage all Americans in service and as directed by the 2009 Edward M. Kennedy Service America Act, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) places a high priority on engaging veterans in community service, including those with disabilities. In 2010, the CNCS launched the Engaging Veterans with Disabilities Initiative to enhance the capacity of national service programs to recruit, engage and support veterans with disabilities as active service members in structured volunteer experiences. The Corporation is conducting the Engaging Veterans with Disabilities in National and Community Service Initiative through its National Service Inclusion Project, housed at the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston, in partnership with CTAT (Center for Technical Assistance and Training) and Operation TBI Freedom at Denver Options.

Objectives

The purpose of the initiative is to identify promising practices, products and delivery strategies that can be used to guide the practice, policies and procedures of service programs as they recruit and support veterans with disabilities.

Methods

1. Interviews with veterans who are current or former AmeriCorps or other national service volunteers.
2. Discussion groups with active duty soldiers from the Wounded Transition Units and veterans to speak about what would engage them in national or community service.

Target Participants

The initial target of the initiative is enlisted soldiers who served in Afghanistan or Iraq and veterans who experience traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder and other combat-related issues. In a later phase, the project will explore how the strategies and products can be generalized to additional groups of veterans.

Poster presented by Joanne E. Cohen, MA, CTAT at Denver Options, and Fredia Johnson, Operation TBI Freedom at Denver Options
Common Themes from 2010 Interviews

- Veterans feel a sense of belonging and regain their identity through service and volunteerism.
- AmeriCorps gives veterans and soldiers the opportunity to get back into the workforce and develop new skill sets.
- Service and volunteerism is a satisfying and structured opportunity to serve our country in another way.
- AmeriCorps gets soldiers and veterans out of their comfort zone and teaches them a great deal.
- Veterans find that helping others is a way to help themselves.

How to Engage Veterans

Veterans indicated in the first interviews and discussion groups that they preferred marketing materials that considered the following:

- Knowing what’s in it for them upfront, such as the stipend and benefits, including the educational benefits, and their value.
- Messages that are authentic.
- Creating materials that use patriotic colors.
- Stressing volunteer service is way for veterans to serve their country and a way to serve those in their communities who need help.
- Emphasizing that service gives soldiers a sense of belonging, purpose, inclusion, human connection and helps with self-esteem and identifies challenges.
- Wanting to have their interests matched with program goals and activities.

Project Funding Provided by

Engaging Veterans with Disabilities in National and Community Service Initiative is a project of the National Service Inclusion Project (NSIP), a training and technical assistance provider on disability inclusion, under a cooperative agreement (#08TAHMA001) from the Corporation for National and Community Service. NSIP partners with CTAT and Operation TBI Freedom at Denver Options to increase the participation of veterans with disabilities in national service.