

Veterans & Community Service: What's In It For Me?



2013 Quick Reference Guide

“This will be a stepping stone to gain another job by having AmeriCorps on my resume, as it means a great deal to employers.”



Sponsored by



Welcome!

Center for Technical Assistance and Training (CTAT) at Denver Options and the National Service Inclusion Project (NSIP) at the Institute for Community Inclusion proudly recognize and honor veterans returning from the OIF/OEF military conflicts triggered by the unforgettable events of September 11, 2001. It is our goal to commemorate those who have served post 9/11 by connecting them to inclusive national and community service opportunities in Colorado. Thanks to funds from Serve Colorado, CTAT has created this Veterans AmeriCorps Quick Reference Guide. This guide highlights how national service is a life enhancing option for those transitioning from the military to the civilian workforce.

CTAT and NSIP thank you for your continued interest in service!



Contents:

What is AmeriCorps?.....4

What Can I Do?.....4

Why Join?.....5

What are the Benefits.....6

Legislation.....8

 Serve America ACT

 The HEART ACT

AmeriCorps Programs.....10

 AmeriCorps State and National

 AmeriCorps Vista

 AmeriCorps NCCC

Veteran’s Experience.....14

How to Join?.....15

How Do I Apply?.....15

Resources.....16





What is AmeriCorps?

AmeriCorps is an opportunity to make a big difference in your life and in the lives of those around you. It's a chance to apply your skills and ideals toward helping others and meeting critical needs in the community.

Each year, AmeriCorps offers 75,000 opportunities for adults of all ages and backgrounds, including Veterans and Wounded Warriors, to serve through a network of partnerships with local and national nonprofit groups. Whether your service makes a community safer, gives a child a second chance, or helps protect the environment, you'll be getting things done through AmeriCorps!

Additional Information about AmeriCorps:

- ✦ Over 1.6 million individuals of all ages and backgrounds serving this year.
- ✦ AmeriCorps programs provide human and other resources to community organizations to build capacity to meet local needs in:
 - ✦ Education
 - ✦ Environment
 - ✦ Senior dependent living
 - ✦ Public safety
 - ✦ Homeland security
 - ✦ Other critical areas
- ✦ AmeriCorps members recruit, train and manage an additional one million community volunteers.

What can I do?

AmeriCorps members address critical needs in communities all across America. As an AmeriCorps member, you can:

- ✦ Tutor and mentor disadvantaged youth
- ✦ Fight illiteracy
- ✦ Improve health services
- ✦ Build affordable housing
- ✦ Teach computer skills
- ✦ Clean parks and streams
- ✦ Manage or operate after-school programs
- ✦ Help communities respond to disasters
- ✦ Build organizational capacity

Why Join?

Service Members:

- ❖ Increase self-esteem & self-confidence
- ❖ Feel needed and valued
- ❖ Experience a sense of accomplishment
- ❖ Can add this on the college application
- ❖ Develop skills that are transferable to many areas of life, including PSE and/or employment
- ❖ Expand social and professional networks
- ❖ Learn to assume leadership and responsibility
- ❖ Develop a track record and demonstrate the ability to complete tasks
- ❖ Build experience and be able to practice resume-building skills
- ❖ Explore many career options

“I am a service-oriented person and a humanitarian at heart. AmeriCorps allows me to serve others instead of always being the one served.”

Serving Improves Lives

- ❖ People who serve the community improve their lives and make a difference in the lives of those they help
- ❖ People who serve are significantly more likely to be happy and satisfied with their lives (CNCS AmeriCorps Longitudinal Study 2008)

Why should we promote service?

- ❖ National Service is one path to preparing to become...something
- ❖ or to change course and become... something else



What are the benefits?

Whether you are tutoring kids, building homes, clearing trails or helping to start a local health clinic you will see the direct results of your work.

But there is more. As an AmeriCorps member, you'll be eligible for a variety of benefits that make the dedication of a year of your life worthwhile.

You Will Be Able to Pay Your Bills

Many AmeriCorps members receive a modest living allowance. You will not get rich from it, but most AmeriCorps members have found that it covers their basic expenses.

Segal AmeriCorps Education Award

After successfully completing a term of service, AmeriCorps members who were signed up for an education award are eligible to receive a Segal Education Award. This education award can be used to pay education costs at qualified institutions of higher education, to pay for educational training, and to repay qualified student loans. You can make payments from your award in full or in part, and you can take up to seven years after your term of service has ended to use your award.

The amount of the Segal Education Award is tied to the maximum amount of the U.S. Department of Education's Pell Grant. Since the maximum amount of Pell grants can change from year to year, so can the dollar amounts of education awards. To confirm the award amount for which you are eligible, call your program or project sponsor.

Eligibility

You are eligible for a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award if you successfully complete your term of service in accordance with your member contract with one of the following approved AmeriCorps programs:

- ✦ AmeriCorps State and National
- ✦ AmeriCorps VISTA
- ✦ AmeriCorps NCCC



Alternative to the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award

As an alternative to the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, AmeriCorps VISTA members may choose to take a post-service cash stipend.

The College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 created two new federal programs: a new Public Service Loan Forgiveness program and a new Income-Based Repayment plan (IBR) for the repayment of federal loans. The new Income-Based Repayment plan helps to make repaying education loans more affordable for low-income borrowers, such as an AmeriCorps member living on a stipend; AmeriCorps service is also recognized as equivalent to a public service job for the purposes of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

Service Term Limitations

Currently, the maximum numbers of terms that you can serve in each AmeriCorps program are:

- ✦ four for AmeriCorps State and National;
- ✦ three for VISTAs
- ✦ two for NCCC

Full-time, half-time, reduced half-time, quarter time, and minimum time terms of service each count as one term of service.

Taxes

Remember, the IRS has determined that payments made from an education award are considered to be included in a member's taxable income in the year the payment is made to the school or loan holder. Interest payments are also considered taxable. This increase in your income could affect your tax liability for that year. See the web page on tax implications for additional information.

Professional Development

As an AmeriCorps member, you will gain valuable experience that translates directly into job experience in your chosen field. You will learn teamwork, communication, responsibility, and other essential skills that will help you for the rest of your life. Many find their AmeriCorps year to provide them with more experience and skills than they would have gotten in a traditional, paying job.

Veterans or soldiers with a disability and Wounded Warriors are encouraged to apply for national service positions. Reasonable accommodations and supports can be provided to assist in a successful national service experience and may be requested by talking to national service program staff during the recruitment, application and/or service phases.

Legislation

Serve America ACT

On April 21, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act at an elementary school in Washington DC. The Serve America Act reauthorizes and expands national service programs administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service by amending the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (NCSA) and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (DVSA). For more information visit: http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/10_0421_saa_implementation.pdf

The HEART ACT

On June 17, 2008, President Bush signed into law H.R. 6081, the Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax Act of 2008 (“the HEART Act”), making AmeriCorps more accessible to people with disabilities.

How does the HEART Act make AmeriCorps more accessible to people with disabilities?

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a Federal program that provides a monthly cash benefit to low-income individuals who are aged, blind, or who have a disability. In the past, receiving an AmeriCorps

living allowance could disqualify an individual from eligibility. The new law directs the Social Security Administration to ignore an individual's receipt of AmeriCorps benefits for purposes of SSI eligibility.

The HEART Act excludes "any benefit (whether cash or in-kind)" and so covers the living allowance, health insurance, child care, and the education award (and related interest payments).

Why doesn't the law cover both SSI and SSDI?

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is a Federal program that provides money to individuals with disabilities based on their having paid into the insurance program. There are separate laws and regulations for SSDI eligibility and the HEART Act moved through Congress too quickly to include SSDI. We hope that Congress will extend the AmeriCorps exclusion to SSDI in the near future.





AmeriCorps Programs

AmeriCorps is made up of three main programs: AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps).

Information can be found online at www.americorps.gov

AmeriCorps is committed to actively engaging individuals with disabilities in the service movement at all levels. AmeriCorps provides reasonable accommodations to members or applicants with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are available upon request to assist a member or applicant in any of the following:

- ✦ assure equal opportunity in the selection process;
- ✦ enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of the service position; and
- ✦ enable a member with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of National Service.

AmeriCorps State and National:

AmeriCorps State and National supports a broad range of local service programs that engage thousands of Americans in intensive service to meet critical community needs.

The largest of AmeriCorps programs, AmeriCorps State and National provides funds to local and national organizations and agencies committed to using national service to address critical community needs in education, public safety, health and the environment.

Sponsors include Habitat for Humanity, Teach for America, City Year, American Red Cross, Boys and Girls Clubs, and thousands of other non-profits. Each of these organizations and agencies, in turn, uses their AmeriCorps funding to recruit, place, and supervise AmeriCorps members.

After successful completion of their term of service, AmeriCorps members earn a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award that can be used to pay for college or graduate school at Title IV schools, or to repay qualified student loans. Fulltime AmeriCorps members also receive a modest living allowance, health care benefits, and child care assistance.



Where can you serve in AmeriCorps State and National?

AmeriCorps members serve in AmeriCorps State and National projects in every state, U.S. territories, and on tribal reservations.

Eligibility for AmeriCorps State and National:

AmeriCorps State and National programs are open to U.S. citizens, nationals, or lawful permanent resident aliens age 17 and older. Members may serve full- or part-time over a period not to exceed 12 months.

What are the benefits?

AmeriCorps members receive a modest living allowance, student-loan forbearance, health coverage, and child care for those who qualify. After successfully completing their term of service, they receive an AmeriCorps Education Award.

In addition to these benefits, AmeriCorps members learn new skills, acquire qualities of leadership, and gain a sense of satisfaction from taking on responsibilities that directly affect peoples' lives.

AmeriCorps VISTA:

AmeriCorps VISTA provides full-time members to community organizations and public agencies to create and expand programs that build capacity (raising funds, recruiting volunteers, and designing sustainable programs) and ultimately bring low-income individuals and communities out of poverty.

What is AmeriCorps VISTA?

AmeriCorps VISTA is the national service program designed specifically to fight poverty. Founded as Volunteers in Service to America in 1965 and incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs in 1993, VISTA has been on the front lines in the fight against poverty in America for more than 40 years.



What VISTA Members Do

VISTA members commit to serve full-time for a year at a nonprofit organization or local government agency, working to fight illiteracy, improve health services, create businesses, strengthen community groups, and much more. With passion, commitment, and hard work, you'll create or expand programs designed to bring individuals and communities out of poverty.

The Benefits of VISTA Service

By serving through VISTA, you'll gain new skills, friends, and experiences—plus you'll get the satisfaction that comes from helping others. During your service, you'll also receive a modest living allowance, health care, and other benefits. And, upon completing your service, you can choose to receive either a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award or post-service stipend.

Did you know that President John F. Kennedy came up with the idea for VISTA? Or that the 170,000 VISTAs who have served since 1965 have played a key role in establishing many of the best-known anti-poverty programs, including Head Start, Upward Bound, and the credit union system?


AmeriCorps NCCC:

The AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) is a full-time residential program for men and women, ages 18-24, that strengthens communities while developing leaders through direct, team-based national and community service.

Service Through Teamwork

AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) is a full-time, team-based residential program for men and women age 18–24. Members are assigned to one of five campuses, located in Denver, Colorado; Sacramento, California; Perry Point, Maryland; Vicksburg, Mississippi; and Vinton, Iowa.

The mission of AmeriCorps NCCC is to strengthen communities and develop leaders through direct, team-based national and community service. In partnership with non-profits—secular and faith based, local municipalities, state governments, federal government, national or state parks, Indian Tribes and schools members complete service projects throughout the region they are assigned.



Drawn from the successful models of the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s and the U.S. military, AmeriCorps NCCC is built on the belief that civic responsibility is an inherent duty of all citizens and that national service programs work effectively with local communities to address pressing needs.

How AmeriCorps NCCC Works

AmeriCorps NCCC requires an intensive, 10-month commitment. Members serve in teams of eight to twelve and are assigned to projects throughout the region served by their campus. They are trained in CPR, first aid, public safety, and other skills before beginning their first service project.

AmeriCorps NCCC serves communities in every state. Members are based at one of five regional campuses and travel to complete service projects throughout those regions. Sponsoring organizations request the assistance of AmeriCorps NCCC teams by submitting a project application to the regional campus that covers that organization's state. The campuses provide assistance in completing the application, developing a work plan, and preparing the project sponsor for the arrival of the AmeriCorps NCCC team.

Benefits of Serving with AmeriCorps NCCC

AmeriCorps NCCC members receive a living allowance of approximately \$4,000 for the 10 months of service, housing, meals, limited medical benefits, childcare assistance, if necessary, member uniforms, and a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award upon successful completion of the program.

Each year, AmeriCorps NCCC engages teams of members in meaningful projects in communities across the United States. Service projects, which typically last from six to eight weeks, address critical needs related to natural and other disasters, infrastructure improvement, environmental stewardship and conservation, energy conservation, and urban and rural development. Members construct and rehabilitate low-income housing, respond to natural disasters, clean up streams, help communities develop emergency plans, and address countless other local needs. What would it be like if your organization had the resources of 8-12 enthusiastic, talented, and dedicated young adults working on a short-term, intensive project? Think of the impact!



Veteran's Experiences

Ivan Mason, U.S. VETS - Los Angeles, CA

Ivan Mason served in the U.S. Army from 1979 until 1982. He spent the next 15 years homeless or in prison. In 1997, he entered a residential treatment and employment program in Los Angeles by run U.S. VETS, the nation's largest provider of services to homeless veterans. While in the program, which was supported by AmeriCorps members, Ivan worked on his sobriety and quickly became a mentor for other individuals in the program.

The following year, Ivan became a U.S. VETS AmeriCorps member, where he flourished as an outreach coordinator – reaching out and helping more than 300 homeless veterans. After his AmeriCorps service, he became the coordinator of a U.S. VETS outreach program in San Gabriel Valley. Just a few months after taking the position, a federal agency conducted a surprise audit of the program, which resulted in comments that the program was “exceeding all goals and expectations.” The federal administrator couldn't say enough wonderful things about the program. Her one curiosity: How was Ivan, this articulate, well-dressed gentlemen, able to get so many homeless veterans to turn their lives around?” Ivan let her know that he was once where these individuals were.

Ivan used his AmeriCorps Education Award to finish his bachelor's degree, and is now working on his Masters in Public Administration at California State University. In 2001, Ivan directed an innovative initiative to help veterans who are fathers and owe child support or may be disenfranchised from their children.

According to Ivan, “People believe that a non-custodial fathers program is about the fathers only. It gave me the opportunity to tell fathers, ‘You need to play a more important role for your children.’”

Today, Ivan is the director of U.S. VETS' Riverside facilities, where he manages a base closure property and directs a team of AmeriCorps members to provide services to close to 120 formerly homeless veterans each day. He continues to try to lead others by example and believes strongly in the impact that AmeriCorps can make both on individuals and organizations.

“Once our AmeriCorps members take hold of a program, they're the ones that drive it until it becomes self-sustaining.”

Read more stories at: http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/current/stories.asp

How to Join

There are thousands of opportunities to serve in AmeriCorps. Each one provides an incredible opportunity to make a difference in your life and in the lives of those around you. Whether your service makes a community safer, gives a child a second chance, or helps protect the environment, you have the ability to find solutions and make a difference.

To join the ranks of more than 70,000 individuals who are currently getting things done for their community and country, choose the type of service you would like to participate in and the state in which you'd like to serve. AmeriCorps is committed to actively engaging individuals with disabilities in the service movement. For more information visit: www.americorps.gov

How do I apply?

On line at www.americorps.gov

Or contact AmeriCorps at:

AmeriCorps

1201 New York Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20525

Tel.: (202) 606-5000

TTY: (800) 833-3722

For more information, call toll-free at 800-942-2677.

Or, you can visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/questions/app/ask>.



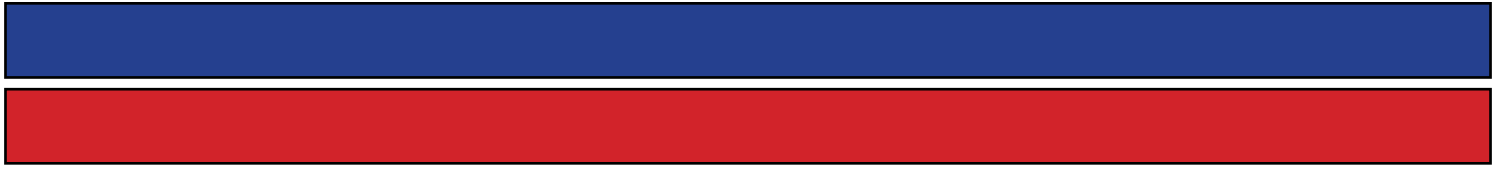


Resources

- ❖ Engaging Veterans with Disabilities in National Service Initiative
<http://www.serviceandinclusion.org/veterans>
- ❖ CNCS Veterans Corps
<http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/serviceamerica/veterans.asp>
- ❖ CTAT
www.ctat-training.com
- ❖ Denver Options
www.denveroptions.org
- ❖ Operation TBI Freedom
www.operationtbifreedom.org
- ❖ America's Heroes at Work
www.americasheroesatwork.gov
- ❖ Invisible Wounds: Service Service Members and Veterans with PTSD and TBI
<http://www.disabilityrightsoregon.org/search?SearchableTest=invisible+wounds>
- ❖ Recovering from Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (MTBI) A Handbook of Hope for Our Military Warriors and Their Families
www.braininjuryhopefoundation.org
- ❖ National Service Inclusion Project (NSIP)
<http://www.serviceandinclusion.org>

Notes:





Information in this resource guide was gathered from the AmeriCorps website at www.americorps.gov. Basic information is the same, however there have been a few changes since the guide was published in 2011.

* Findings from Engaging Veterans with Disabilities in National and Community Service Initiative at the National Service Inclusion Project, UMASS Boston, in partnership with CTAT at Denver Options and the “Operation TBI Freedom” project, with funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service.