



# Expanding Service Years in States and Local Communities



A Better You.  
A Greater Us.



# Foreword

## A Vision for a Stronger Service Year Ecosystem

*By Jesse Colvin*

*CEO, Service Year Alliance*

The COVID-19 pandemic shaped a new landscape, one in which service years were and are a critical element in addressing challenges at a local and state level with flexibility and resilience in the face of crisis. Service Year Alliance saw this flexibility and resilience in our Impact Communities – local demonstration sites for how service year programs can come together with state and local agencies to utilize service as a strategy for addressing community needs.

In New York, NY, the Chief Service Officer served on a COVID-19 response task force and was able to call upon the local chapter of service year alumni to step up as volunteer coordinators. In Philadelphia, PA, programs came together to ensure much-needed resources and food were distributed to vulnerable populations. In Austin, TX, the collaborative worked with its state to utilize a portion of AmeriCorps members' time for contact tracing efforts. Our Impact Communities' response is representative of what we have seen in so many communities across the country during the pandemic: service stepping up to address existing, emergent, and exacerbated needs.

The pandemic highlighted just how crucial strong state and local collaboration is to ensure that service years not only survive, but thrive in their ability to address the diverse challenges surfacing in communities. It also underscored the need to ensure that underserved communities have equitable access to

national service and that members from those communities are represented in programs to provide culturally and linguistically competent service and to better build trust.

We call upon local and state leaders – policymakers, elected officials, community leaders – to build upon the great work demonstrated in this toolkit and within our [Impact Communities](#). We encourage them to:

- Be even more ambitious and creative in the ways they embrace and expand service years as a powerful tool to meet their communities' needs;
- Embed national service into their community and emergency response plans;
- Invest resources into powerful and effective local collaboratives that bring local and state government, state service commissions, programs, community leaders, higher education institutions, and business leaders together to ensure diverse participation and effective service for those who need it most; and
- Leverage service towards the common purpose of a stronger America.

Service Year Alliance stands ready to help policymakers, elected officials, and other leaders work toward our shared goal of making a year of service a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans.

## **Partnership with America's Service Commissions and the State Service Commission Network Leveraging State Strategies to Elevate Service**

*By Kaira Esgate*

*CEO, America's Service Commissions*

As the network of 52 state and territorial service commissions, America's Service Commissions (ASC) is pleased to partner with AmeriCorps and Service Year Alliance to feature innovative strategies and promising models for expanding national service positions around the country. At their core, state service commissions model the best in public-private partnerships by leveraging public funding (federal, state, and local) in combination with private dollars to support opportunities for community members to have significant impact in their respective communities.

Over the course of the past 25 years, state service commissions have partnered with governors and other elected officials to demonstrate that service is a cost-effective strategy to address both emerging and persistent community needs in education, health and human services, public safety, disaster preparedness and response, as well as environmental stewardship, to name a few. Further, through the development of AmeriCorps positions as well as other volunteer engagement strategies, elected officials and state service commissions provide real-life educational and professional development opportunities for the next generation of leaders in their states.

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related economic impacts will have long standing effects on our communities. Yet as detailed in this toolkit, state service commissions have consistently risen to the challenge and demonstrated the ways in which national service and volunteers can provide a flexible and impactful solution to emerging and evolving community needs – whether it be food insecurity, contact tracing, logistical support for vaccine distribution, public health information, or supporting K-12 institutions and students to prevent learning loss during this unprecedented time.

We hope the examples shared in this toolkit can serve as concrete models for how elected officials, regardless of political affiliation, have advanced service strategies in partnership with their state service commissions. ASC is pleased to be a partner in highlighting the work of our 52 state service commissions and their efforts to expand AmeriCorps and service year opportunities so that every individual who wishes to do so has the opportunity to serve in a meaningful and impactful manner.

## AmeriCorps: Partnering with State and Local Leaders to Get Things Done

*By Mal Coles*

*Acting CEO, AmeriCorps*

Over the past year, as our nation confronted a once-in-a-century pandemic and economic crisis, many state and local leaders turned to AmeriCorps for help.

Across the country, AmeriCorps members supported COVID-19 vaccination and testing centers, staffed food banks, checked on isolated seniors, and helped students stay on track in school. Their service reminded us that even in our darkest hours, Americans look out for one another.

Given the ongoing challenges stemming from the pandemic – and the fiscal constraints facing government at all levels – this is an opportune time for state and local leaders to explore how they can use national service to meet pressing needs in their communities.

As the federal agency for service and volunteering, we are pleased to join Service Year Alliance and America's Service Commissions to share the many creative ways governors, mayors, and county leaders are using national service to improve lives and strengthen communities.

For nearly three decades, our agency has united Americans of all backgrounds to get things done. Nearly 1.2 million Americans

have served in AmeriCorps – making a lasting impact in their communities while earning \$4 billion in college scholarships and gaining skills needed for 21st century jobs.

With members serving in 20,000 locations across the country, AmeriCorps is a vital resource for state and local leaders. AmeriCorps members tutor and mentor at-risk youth, tackle hunger and homelessness, respond to natural disasters, help seniors live independently, build and repair affordable housing, preserve public lands, and mobilize millions of volunteers to meet pressing community needs.

Congress created AmeriCorps as a federal, state, and local partnership to support community-driven solutions. Three-fourths of AmeriCorps State and National grant funding is managed by Governor-appointed State Service Commissions, and many city and county governments sponsor AmeriCorps programs.

As you learn about the many ways elected officials across the country partner with AmeriCorps, we encourage you to also explore our AmeriCorps Seniors program, which engages 175,000 older Americans in high-impact service to meet a wide range of community needs.

National service is a smart and cost-effective strategy that solves problems, expands opportunity, and strengthens communities. We hope this toolkit gives you new ideas to use service to improve the health and well-being of your state or city.

# Introduction

This publication – a joint effort between Service Year Alliance, America’s Service Commissions, and AmeriCorps – is a new edition to a previous toolkit published in 2017, *Expanding Service Years in States*. The new edition adds critical local level guidance and examples as local and state ecosystems build off of one another. As such, this toolkit provides strategies that can be used by governors, mayors, state legislators, county executives, and other government officials to address the needs of their communities through national service. We hope this toolkit will serve as an inspiration and guide for state and local leaders to expand national service opportunities through diverse funding sources to meet pressing economic and social needs.

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# What is a Service Year and What are State Service Commissions?



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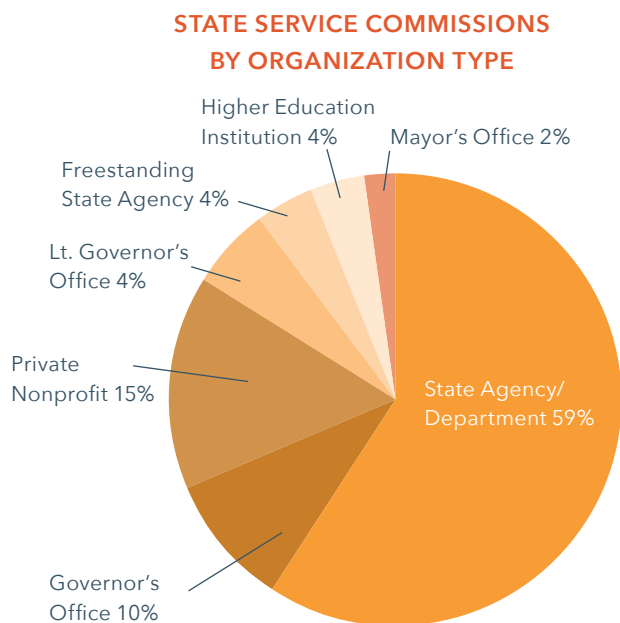
Find your state service commission and learn how to contact them here!  
<https://www.statecommissions.org/find-your-state-service-commission>

A service year is a paid opportunity to develop real-world skills through hands-on service. From fighting poverty to tutoring students to responding to natural disasters or public health emergencies – a service year is a meaningful and fulfilling way to tackle the most pressing challenges facing our nation in programs like AmeriCorps, YouthBuild, and thousands of others.

Currently, most domestic service years are funded by the AmeriCorps program administered by the federal agency AmeriCorps (formerly the Corporation for National and Community Service, or CNCS). Building on this foundation, there is tremendous opportunity for governors, mayors, state legislators, county executives, and other elected officials around the nation to expand service years in their states to address pressing community needs, advance gubernatorial or mayoral priorities, and provide valuable workforce pathways and higher education opportunities to individuals completing a service year.

Governors, mayors, and other elected officials have a powerful partner in expanding AmeriCorps and other service year positions within their cities, counties, and states – state service commissions. When Congress created CNCS in 1993, it envisioned national service as a shared federal-state partnership, creating a central role for governors in designing and implementing service through state service commissions. These commissions are a vital resource that help governors, mayors, and other elected officials tap the power of citizens to solve problems and strengthen communities. The nation’s 52 governor-appointed state service commissions are responsible for administering nearly eighty percent of AmeriCorps funding awarded by the federal agency on an annual basis.

In addition, state service commissions play a central role in advancing service as a strategy in their respective states through determining the needs in their state, setting policy and program priorities, competitively awarding AmeriCorps and other grants (federal and state) to local nonprofits and agencies, providing training and technical assistance, monitoring grantees to ensure quality and compliance with federal and state law, and broadly promoting service and volunteering in their states. Commissions also support key gubernatorial initiatives, such as decreasing high school dropout rates, expanding student mentoring, helping veterans transition to civilian life, and managing volunteers and donations in response to disasters. In many instances, state service commissions also support service and volunteer recruitment and recognition efforts in the state in partnership with the Governor, the Office of the First Spouse, and/or the Lieutenant Governor.



**ESTABLISHED BY:**  
Statute (36%) or Executive Order (64%)

**CABINET-LEVEL:**  
Yes (8%) or No (92%)

**AMERICORPS STATE SERVICE COMMISSION FUNDING:**  
65% State Funding - \$43,780,159  
20% Corporate/Foundation - \$13,028,923  
15% Other Federal Funding - \$9,838,040

**STATE COMMISSION WRITTEN INTO STATE  
EMERGENCY PLAN OR HAVE A FORMAL AGREEMENT  
WITH STATE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY:**  
Yes (54%) or No (46%)

**8 STATE SERVICE COMMISSIONS HAD  
SERVICE-ORIENTED LEGISLATION INTRODUCED IN  
THEIR LAST LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

Source: 2019 ASC Commission Landscape Survey

This toolkit focuses on opportunities for governors, mayors, state legislators, and other officials to expand service year positions targeted for individuals ages 18+. Many of the same strategies outlined can apply to K-12 and senior service opportunities or expanding volunteer opportunities for community members. Currently, several states provide state funding to support service opportunities for K-12, as well as older Americans through the AmeriCorps Seniors programs.





# Why Expand Service Years?

As the economy continues to rapidly shift in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, many state and local leaders are looking for ways to both help get people back to work and address the exacerbated and emerging needs caused directly or indirectly by the public health crisis. In addition, young people throughout the country, some of whom have had their education or employment disrupted by the pandemic, are seeking ways to make a difference in their communities, expand their professional skills, and pay for increased higher education expenses. Service years provide a win-win-win solution for elected officials, young people, and communities alike.

### **State leaders are facing a variety of challenges that service years can address, including:**

- Significant social challenges including hunger, homelessness, substance abuse, and poverty that require human capital to solve;
- Emergency response needs and an ongoing public health crisis;
- Increased learning loss and educational inequity due to the pandemic;
- Racial, economic, religious, and political divisions, with trust in one another at historic lows;
- Millions of young adults who are not in school or working;
- Civic participation that is atrophying; and,
- A 21st century skills gap that is leaving millions of Americans behind.

Service years are a cost-effective and outcomes-driven solution to challenges facing states and communities nationwide. Individuals completing a service year tackle tough challenges – helping students read at grade-level, rebuilding communities after disasters, supporting veterans and military families, reducing crime and revitalizing cities, helping seniors live independently, preparing students for the 21st century workforce, preventing substance abuse and more. AmeriCorps and other service year corps members expand the reach and impact of thousands of nonprofit, faith-based, and community organizations through their direct service and by recruiting and supervising millions of other volunteers to serve.

Service years are a model of public-private partnership. In 2015, AmeriCorps-supported programs generated \$1.26 billion in outside resources from private businesses, foundations, and other sources in support of service positions – an amount exceeding the federal appropriation. These investments stretch the federal dollar and demonstrate confidence in the ability of service years to deliver results on America’s most pressing problems. Further, a [study](#) completed by Voices for National Service in 2020 found that for every federal and match dollar invested in AmeriCorps, there is an \$11 return on investment to government, corps members, and society.

Service years are a proven pathway to employment that help young people better define their career goals and provide valuable skills and experience to help them take the next step. Many of the skills they gain are specific to their service. In addition, they gain general, transferable skills of leadership, creativity, and problem-solving that all employers look for. Eighty percent of alumni say AmeriCorps benefited their career path, and 42 percent of alumni employed within six months of service found a job through a connection made in AmeriCorps. Research also shows that national service helps create new jobs. Findings from an Arizona State University study found that 82.7 percent of AmeriCorps host organizations hired at least one AmeriCorps member, that the positions were typically full-time, and that more than half the jobs were newly created.

In addition, service years completed through the AmeriCorps program help individuals cover higher education expenses by providing access to education awards that can be used to pay for college tuition or to pay down student loan debt. In 25 years, nearly 1.2 million AmeriCorps members have earned more than \$4 billion in Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards, \$1 billion of which has been used to pay back student loan debt – making college more accessible and affordable for those who serve. These educational awards give alumni a pathway to training and certification programs and college and university degrees, often in the places they have served.





# How to Expand and Strengthen Service Years



## Leverage Existing Public Investments to Build Service Year Opportunities

Billions of public dollars are invested annually in the areas of education, public safety, health and human services, and environmental stewardship. These federal, state, and local investments address critical needs; however, their impact could be significantly expanded by leveraging these investments to support service year positions. Education funding can support an expansion of tutoring to combat learning loss from the COVID-19 pandemic. Community services and development funding can support education and prevention activities or help expand broadband internet access in underserved communities. Funds dedicated to environmental stewardship can engage service year corps members in maintaining state parks and public lands, watershed restoration and the adoption of energy efficiency practices. With modest investments of local, state, or state-allocated federal funds, governors and local elected officials can create cost-effective service year opportunities that expand the reach and impact of public dollars while also exposing service year corps members to potential career paths and building their professional skills.

Governors, mayors, and county government leaders have a long legacy of partnering with AmeriCorps to develop new programs that address priority state and local issues. By combining federal AmeriCorps funds with state, local, and private funding, state and local leaders have created thousands of AmeriCorps positions to address a range of issues including dropout prevention, public safety, childhood literacy, workforce readiness, environmental stewardship, mentoring, watershed protection, and more.

### COVID Response Corps

The COVID-19 pandemic caused widespread and acute economic hardship across the country. Among adults who have lost work or income, nearly half report that their families have reduced spending on food. The Volunteer NH commission in collaboration with Campus Compact for New Hampshire, the NH Food Bank and Governor Sununu's (R) office have been leaders in the statewide effort to address food insecurity through the development of the AmeriCorps

VISTA Food Security Project. As one of four pilots in the country, this project is designed to address the systemic challenges of food insecurity. AmeriCorps VISTA has provided funding to support 20 members serving in regional teams across the state.

**The New Hampshire COVID Community Care Corps (NH-CCCC)** was also created in the state to address growing unmet needs in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic. CARES Act funding granted through Volunteer NH was leveraged to get the program off to a good start. Twenty AmeriCorps members hit the ground running to tackle challenges around the state. NH COVID Community Care Corps members have distributed more than 10,000 meals to youth and families struggling with food insecurity due to the pandemic, provided public health information related to COVID-19, led summer recreation activities for kids to support working parents during daytime hours, promoted volunteer recruitment for New Hampshire nonprofits and municipalities, and worked to expand Medical Reserve Corps to support vaccine distribution and other medical response needs.

The **WA COVID Response Corps** is another innovative private-public sector collaboration of Serve Washington, the Washington Department of Agriculture and the Schultz Family Foundation partners with four AmeriCorps programs to support a rapid response to the economic consequences of COVID-19. This initiative deployed 125 AmeriCorps members at more than 70 community-based organizations to increase the capacity of local nonprofits to address food insecurity in Washington. Response Corps AmeriCorps members support operations in regional foodbanks, distribute food through community-based food banks, assist with making meals and distributing them through community partners, including school sites, and cultivate food sources through community gardens. This partnership with national service and philanthropy included investments to subsidize AmeriCorps host site fees to broaden the network of nonprofits aware of and able to participate in this response effort. Resources were also invested to strengthen meaningful member development opportunities through a tailored set of on-demand professional development courses, a monthly speaker series featuring experts and frontline workers, and a capstone project that helps members develop storytelling skills and strategic use of social media



**Lead for America** is an effort to bring talented young people back to their hometowns to tackle pressing challenges in community-centric ways. Embedding young people in public service positions in towns and countries throughout the country and then supporting them through two years of service, this program is regularly expanding and could be leveraged in your community. <https://www.lead4america.org/>

for social good. Additionally, the effort invested in strategies to identify promising practices to further diversify the racial and economic makeup of AmeriCorps membership to give a broader set of young people an opportunity to gain new experiences and skills through service. Some of these strategies included increasing the member living allowance to 80% of the living wage of each county of service and providing an emergency assistance fund to support young people in service when they need access to emergency cash.

### Improving Education Outcomes with State Investment

A significant number of service year corps members serve in some capacity to improve education outcomes. Nationally recognized programs like Teach For America and City Year are well-known, but countless other state-based service year programs are approaching education in equally creative and innovative ways.

### Reading Corps and Math Corps

In Minnesota, education policy leaders saw a consistent gap between literacy science and the capacity of Minnesota's schools to effectively use proven research and tools to secure proficient reading skills for students in the shortest amount of time. In 2002, state legislative leader Alice Seagren, who was soon to become the state's Commissioner of Education, was simultaneously serving as a board member for the ServeMinnesota commission and as chair of the Minnesota House's K-12 finance committee. Seagren happened to be charged with crafting a solution to the state's persistently high rates of early literacy failure.

From Seagren's original vision, the Reading Corps was launched in a handful of Head Start sites in 2003 and has expanded to more than 1,700 AmeriCorps members providing individualized tutoring to children age 3 to grade 3 who are not on track to

read proficiently by the end of the third grade in 700 preschools and elementary schools throughout Minnesota. Building on the success of Reading Corps and using a similar model, Minnesota Math Corps was launched in 2007 to address the math needs of 4th-8th grade students.

Today, [Reading Corps](#) and [Math Corps](#) have spread to 13 additional states and the District of Columbia. After initial one-time funding of \$150,000, the Minnesota legislature has continually increased the state appropriation for these programs from \$900,000 in 2006 to now \$5.2 million annually. Two rigorous evaluations of Minnesota Reading Corps conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago found that AmeriCorps members produced significantly greater increases in students' literacy outcomes, and that the model is highly replicable in multiple settings. Evaluation of Minnesota Math Corps found students who receive service are twice as likely to achieve math fact fluency and twice as likely to meet end-of-year math benchmarks.

Both Reading Corps and Math Corps adapted their proven tutoring models to deliver services to students in virtual, in-person, or hybrid settings.

As most of the nation's students have attended school virtually and schools have had to adjust instruction during a pandemic, state and local leaders in North Carolina looked to national service, leveraging state funding and corps members to meet changing needs. Governor Roy Cooper (D) built a partnership with the State Board of Education, 21 local school systems, and the N.C. Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service to launch the North Carolina Education Corps. This program is funded through the federal Department of Education's [Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund](#) as part of COVID stimulus packages. Corps members earn a living wage and work in a number of roles, including as tutors or contact tracers, or providing technology and social support. Governor





“AmeriCorps members are truly inspiring individuals who selflessly serve the needs of our communities. Those who participate in AmeriCorps programs have had a lasting benefit on New Hampshire. We are grateful for the compassion and optimism that you work so hard to spread.”

- New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu (R)



Cooper said, "[The North Carolina Education Corps](#) gives people a wonderful opportunity to help in local public schools at a time when students and educators really need it." The state sees it as a win-win, giving job opportunities and supporting families, students, and educators.

## Veterans Corps

Through an innovative partnership with the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs, the Serve Washington commission supports 50 AmeriCorps members who serve in the state's [Washington Vet Corps](#) who serve as peer mentors and navigators to veterans, active duty military members, and military families at colleges and community partner sites across the state. Each year, these AmeriCorps members – many of whom are veterans themselves – are responsible for outreach to 9,000 veterans and/or families on and off campus, connecting 400 individuals to services and benefits, and training 1,500 faculty, staff, administrators, and community stakeholders on veterans' cultural competency. This support increases the success of veterans transitioning from military service to civilian life, and increases the representation of those who choose the second mission to serve in AmeriCorps among veteran services providers and organizations across Washington. Other states have created Veterans Corps as a cost-effective way of providing employment services, benefits counseling, transportation, housing support, and other services to veterans, active duty military members, and military families.

## Conservation, Green Corps, and Habitat Restoration

For the last 40 years, states around the nation have supported conservation corps at both the state and local level. Today, conservation corps programming exists in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Territories, engaging more than 22,000 young people (ages 16-25) and veterans (up to age 35) annually in projects ranging from habitat restoration, disaster response and mitigation, and increasing access to public lands and waters through creating and maintaining parks, trails, and green spaces. In some states, these corps are administered by state conservation or parks agencies. Funding to support conservation corps is commonly a mixture

of state funding, and funds from federal agencies including AmeriCorps, the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In recent years, many conservation corps programs have expanded and new Green Corps programs have been created to focus on energy efficiency projects such as weatherization, all while training corps members for 21st century careers in conservation and renewable energy.

Among other conservation projects, The Corps Network is building conservation corps capacity in the five Gulf States – Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida – to train local youth in environmental restoration and restore coastal habitats that have been damaged in recent years by disasters including hurricanes and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. One such corps, [GulfCorps](#) launched in 2017, was made possible by a \$7 million RESTORE Act grant awarded through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Increasingly, these national service initiatives are seen by state and local officials as an effective way to combat the Gulf's environmental and economic concerns.

Several states have launched new national service corps to address the impacts of climate change. In 2020, Minnesota launched its first [Community Forestry Corps](#) to place AmeriCorps members at local nonprofits or public agencies to protect the environment, with a focus on preserving and increasing tree canopy and bringing locally developed forestry plans to life. Specific duties are determined by each site and include tree inventorying, tree planting, gravel bed nursery design and construction, Emerald Ash Borer management plan development, citizen volunteer recruitment, and outreach and education events. This work is being done in partnership with Minnesota's existing GreenCorps and Minnesota Conservation Corps to build synergy across the state's climate mitigation efforts.

## Resilience and Energy Corps

Launched in 2020, the [Greater Portland Resilience Corps](#) of Maine adds new capacity for local governments to adapt and proactively respond to both short-term and long-term challenges to economic, social, and environmental systems throughout the region. Directed by the Greater





“The unique state-federal partnership between our state service commission and the CNCS provides vital, cost-effective services to communities across Washington State by harnessing the power of our state’s most valuable resource - its people.”

- Washington Governor Jay Inslee (D)

AmeriCorps

Washington State  
State Service Commission  
202-401-3000 179-307-400-3000

STATE SERVICE COMMISSION  
AGC

Portland Council of Governments, which serves 30 towns, AmeriCorps members support local government and nonprofit agencies and regional cohorts in their recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Resilience Corps members' projects aim to increase resilience, accelerate civic innovation, climate action, racial equity, and digital equity.

Hosted through the Maine Campus Compact, [Maine Energy AmeriCorps](#) is a statewide program dedicated to building campus/community partnerships to improve energy efficiency throughout the State of Maine. Members' service facilitates behavioral and technical interventions that increase local and regional energy efficiency, particularly for economically disadvantaged individuals and households. This is achieved through energy education events, window insert builds, green energy assessments, green jobs training, and public awareness campaigns.

### Refugee RISE AmeriCorps

The [Refugee RISE \(Rebuild, Integrate, Serve, Empower\) AmeriCorps](#) program in Iowa currently pairs AmeriCorps members with refugees to provide services, education, training, and self-sufficiency counseling. Currently, \$300,000 in state funds serve as match to support the program. Since the launch of the program in 2015, more than 400 refugees have received services to assist with access to basic human services as well as connections to education and workforce development resources. Legislation has been introduced to provide additional funding to expand the pilot program currently operating in three communities statewide.

### AmeriCorps Urban Safety Corps

In 2013, former Michigan Governor and former Detroit Mayor partnered to launch the Detroit Urban Safety Corps as part of CNCS' Governors Initiative. This AmeriCorps program, now known as the [AmeriCorps Urban Safety Corps](#) (AMUS) is hosted by Wayne State University and is a joint endeavor with the Michigan Community Service Commission and the Skillman and Kresge Foundations. The program engages 150 AmeriCorps members each year to pursue reduction of crime and increased public safety within target areas throughout the city of Detroit. The program's vision is to help create safe and healthy communities in Detroit, especially

focusing on the most vulnerable children and youth of the community. Members perform six primary functions to increase public safety:

- Create partnerships of community stakeholders to identify crime "hot spots";
- Organize neighborhood block clubs and community patrols;
- Provide outreach and support to survivors of intimate partner violence;
- Implement safe routes for youth walking or biking to neighborhood schools;
- Board up abandoned, open structures; and
- Provide target hardening resources to residents (e.g., home safety assessments, anti-theft auto devices, strategies for safety of persons and property).

In the neighborhoods where AmeriCorps members serve, crime has declined by 27 percent, an estimated savings of \$338 million in law enforcement costs. Since the launch of the AmeriCorps Urban Safety Corps in Detroit, the program has expanded to Flint, Michigan, and additional communities around the country are working on replication.

### Supporting Aging-Related Initiatives

In collaboration with AARP, Maine announced an [Age-Friendly State Plan](#) in early 2021. This plan, drafted with the engagement of multiple stakeholders and community leaders, was spearheaded by AmeriCorps members from the [Livable Communities Corps](#), a national service program developed by AARP with the nonprofit Public Allies. The corps members, who served in the Maine Office of Aging and Disability Services, brought together all state agencies to determine how each could contribute to the plan, which can be used by other entities including businesses, civic groups, landowners, and municipalities. AmeriCorps members are helping implement the plan as the University of Maine replicates elements of the Livable Communities Corps to expand corps member placements in Age-Friendly Communities throughout the state. In doing so, they will engage many other individuals in ensuring that Maine continues to be a place where people of all ages can thrive.





“Senior Corps and AmeriCorps members were some of the first folks to step up to the plate to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, rising to the challenges in front of us by connecting virtually with students and those at high risk for COVID-19 by providing critical assistance of students, helping those that are the most vulnerable or in need in our communities, and by distributing meals and supplies and PPE... Our state is stronger because of folks like you.”

- Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers (D)





## Addressing the Opioid Epidemic and Other Emerging Challenges

Service year programs are flexible and can evolve to meet emerging needs. In response to the growing prescription drug and opioid crisis, AmeriCorps placed a funding priority for programs addressing opioid addiction in its 2017 and subsequent AmeriCorps funding competitions. The agency has also prioritized funding for programs addressing civil unrest and the breakdown of trust between police and community members. AmeriCorps provided grants to 22 state service commissions to help them identify and develop new AmeriCorps programs to tackle these emerging issues. Governors and other elected officials are in a position to replicate such efforts by directing funding to state service commissions and other organizations to explore and develop service-based program models that would address emerging needs and priorities. For example, in Arizona, the state service commission acted on Governor Ducey's (R) concerns about drug abuse by making substance abuse a priority in the state AmeriCorps funding competition. After extensive outreach, two organizations became AmeriCorps grantees, including the Administrative Offices of the Arizona Supreme Court.

One of the first AmeriCorps programs to address the opioid crisis was launched in Virginia. The [Richmond Healthy Futures Opioid Prevention and Economic Opportunities Program](#) (RHOPE) manages partnerships and services focusing on opioid recovery, including workforce development services for those disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Since its introduction in 2018, more programs have joined the fight to stop the spread of addiction and support recovery across the country.

In Wisconsin, the [Marshfield Clinic Health System \(MCHS\) AmeriCorps Recovery Corps](#) was formed in 2017 in response to the growing opioid and substance use crisis, in partnership with the HOPE Consortium to serve five counties and three tribal

nations in northern Wisconsin. The program aims to recruit individuals in recovery or those impacted by substance use to become recovery coaches to help address the crisis head-on through their lived experience. AmeriCorps members receive extensive training in the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery Model, providing them with the skills needed to guide, mentor, and support anyone who would like to enter into or sustain long-term recovery from an addiction to alcohol or drugs. Following their training, Recovery Corps members provide educational presentations with local substance abuse organizations, operate a hotline set up for referrals and open calls from individuals in the community seeking help, and serve as recovery coaches to help individuals struggling with substance abuse create and follow wellness plans to guide their recovery. These efforts have proven successful, as the program serves an average of 400 clients per year, 86% of whom made progress in their wellness plans and showed health improvement. It is estimated that each individual who stays in recovery saves the state \$40,000 per year, although the even greater result is the meaningful impact recovery has on the communities and families that have been affected. One Recovery Corps member states, "Recovery Corps is the best thing I have ever given myself." In recognition of the program's efforts, Recovery Corps was honored as AmeriCorps Program of the Year at the 2019 Governor's Service Awards by Governor Tony Evers.

Building on its strong track record of scaling data-driven AmeriCorps programs that work to meet state needs, the Minnesota commission helped launch the [Minnesota Recovery Corps](#) in 2018, a strategic partnership between ServeMinnesota, Reading & Math, Inc., and nonprofit organizations that annually serves over 300 individuals in recovery and builds the capacity of organizations to more effectively respond to the opioid epidemic. The Minnesota Recovery Corps was launched to provide peer support and recovery coaching to individuals working to

overcome opioid use and other substance use disorders. Participants increase their quality of life, self-esteem and self-efficacy, recovery capital, and confidence in staying substance free. As AmeriCorps members, individuals also build their own Recovery Capital and maintain sobriety. The program builds a pipeline of individuals prepared to work in the recovery field after service; members receive training toward Peer Recovery Specialist certification.

The misuse of and addiction to opioids is a national health crisis, inflicting tragedies of personal loss as well as harm to the economy, from healthcare and the criminal justice system to wages and productivity. Treatment, however, is only the first step in a lifelong process of recovery. Successful recovery starts with immediate and evidence-based treatment, but requires ongoing support to rebuild what was lost—something which Recovery Corps programs are well poised to provide.

## Partnerships with Other Federal Agencies

In 2013, President Barack Obama signed a Presidential Memorandum to create the [Task Force for Expanding National Service](#) to engage more Americans in results-driven service; expand economic and educational opportunities for those who serve; enhance federal agencies' capacity to achieve their missions and more efficiently use tax dollars; and build the pipeline of Americans ready to enter public service. Chaired by the CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, the Task Force developed strategies to expand national service in collaboration with 13 participating federal agencies and the private sector. AmeriCorps developed funding relationships with other federal agencies in which national service funds provided by AmeriCorps were matched by other federal agencies or the private sector to create new AmeriCorps positions to address pressing challenges.

## Examples include:

[FEMA Corps](#), a unit of the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), engages full-time AmeriCorps NCCC members in disaster response and recovery efforts. FEMA Corps has strengthened the nation's disaster capacity, prepared young people for emergency management careers, saved taxpayer dollars, and led to more efficient business practices to serve disaster survivors. FEMA Corps continues today.

[School Turnaround AmeriCorps](#), a partnership between the Department of Education and AmeriCorps, engaged more than 2,500 new AmeriCorps members in lowest-performing schools to boost student academic achievement, attendance, high school graduation rates, and college and career readiness.

[Resilience AmeriCorps](#): This partnership between AmeriCorps, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the White House Council on Environmental Quality, engaged AmeriCorps VISTA members in helping communities plan and implement efforts to become more resilient to the impacts of extreme weather, disasters, and climate effects.

Other interagency corps were developed to advance STEM and computer science education, restore public lands, and connect at-risk youth with mentors and career opportunities. In total, more than \$194 million was invested in this approach, resulting in 10,000 new AmeriCorps positions.

In many instances, states have used a similar approach to develop funding relationships with other state agencies utilizing state and federal funds to create new service year positions that address critical state priorities.

## Cultivate a Culture of Service in State and Local Agencies and Departments

Governors and mayors play a critical role in directing the approach and work of local and state agencies and departments. By encouraging local and state agencies and departments to incorporate service models into their delivery systems, investing in volunteer engagement training to better understand effective practices and approaches, and conducting assessments of current service and volunteer opportunities within state government, governors can ensure that state governments embrace service as a strategy in conducting daily business. This approach has many benefits including meeting state and local needs more cost-effectively, building an ethic of civic engagement, enhancing agencies' capacity to achieve their missions, uniting citizens from different backgrounds, building a pipeline of individuals ready to enter public service, and often saving taxpayer dollars. By raising the profile of service through the creation of a Secretary of Service or Chief Service Officer or otherwise cultivating a culture of service, governors and mayors can ensure that service strategies are considered at the highest levels of state and local government.

### Creation of Cabinet Secretary for Service or Chief Service Officer

In 2008, then California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) signed an executive order creating the nation's first Cabinet-level Secretary of Service and Volunteering to lead the state service commission, California Volunteers, and advise the Governor and other members of his Cabinet on strategies to integrate service year opportunities into state initiatives and programming. During this time, state agencies and departments, including the California Department of Veteran Affairs and California Conservation Corps, worked with California Volunteers to leverage AmeriCorps and other funding sources to expand service year opportunities in the state. Governor Jerry Brown (D) and current Governor Gavin Newsom (D) have continued this role, now known as the Chief Service Officer.

Governor Newsom and the California State Legislature have made an historic investment into service and volunteerism on three significant levels: 1) providing \$2.9 million in an ongoing General Fund to build the state's capacity to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as future emergencies, by increasing opportunities for Californians to serve their communities in a time of need; 2) providing \$10.1 million to sustain nearly 500 AmeriCorps service positions that were established with funding from the 2019 Budget Act; and 3) providing \$9.3 million in ongoing funding to increase the education award for AmeriCorps state members completing a full-time term of service (1,700 hours) in California to \$10,000. As a result of Governor Newsom's commitment to service, California Volunteers has been able to create programs that engage Californians to tackle the state's most pressing problems.

#### CALIFORNIA INITIATIVES

**#CaliforniansForAll:** Volunteer corps of individuals who actively support their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic by checking on older neighbors, volunteering at food banks, and more. Since April 21, 2020, more than 48,000 people have signed up to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

**Operation Feed California:** At the onset of the pandemic, Governor Newsom took early action to stabilize strained food banks with personnel and logistical support which developed into Operation Feed California, an unprecedented collaboration between nonprofits, state agencies and individuals to keep vulnerable Californians fed through the pandemic. During COVID-19, Operation Feed California has guided the stabilization of 36 food bank operations in 27 counties, establishing a statewide volunteer ecosystem and coordinating cross-state agency solutions to increase resource deployment, adapt programs and address shortfalls. This key statewide infrastructure led by California Volunteers in partnership with the Governor's Office of Emergency Services, California National Guard, and local partnerships supported food banks serving more than 306 million meals to vulnerable Californians since March 2020.

**California Climate Action Corps:** As part of California's comprehensive climate strategy, California Climate Action Corps is the country's first statewide corps of its kind with the mission of empowering all Californians to take meaningful action to protect their homes, health, and communities against the harshest impacts of climate change. California Climate Action Corps engages people through a variety of levels and activities, from those who have an hour to commit at home, to those who can commit a year of service, and everything in between. This includes deploying more than 250 Climate Action AmeriCorps Fellows in 2021 to frontline and low-income communities with state and local government agencies, nonprofit organizations, universities and colleges where they will focus on developing and implementing climate action projects.

**Civic Action Fellowship:** To meet Governor Gavin Newsom's vision of reaching 10,000 service members in the state, California Volunteers along with a coalition of public and private universities launched the AmeriCorps Civic Action Fellowship designed to help students pay for college through public service while using a combination of federal and state funding. As part of this fellowship program, current undergraduate and graduate students sign up as AmeriCorps Fellows and commit to serve their communities as they tackle local and regional community challenges. The service is tailored toward students' academic curriculum while encouraging four-year completion, graduate school, job placement, and an engrained commitment to civic engagement.

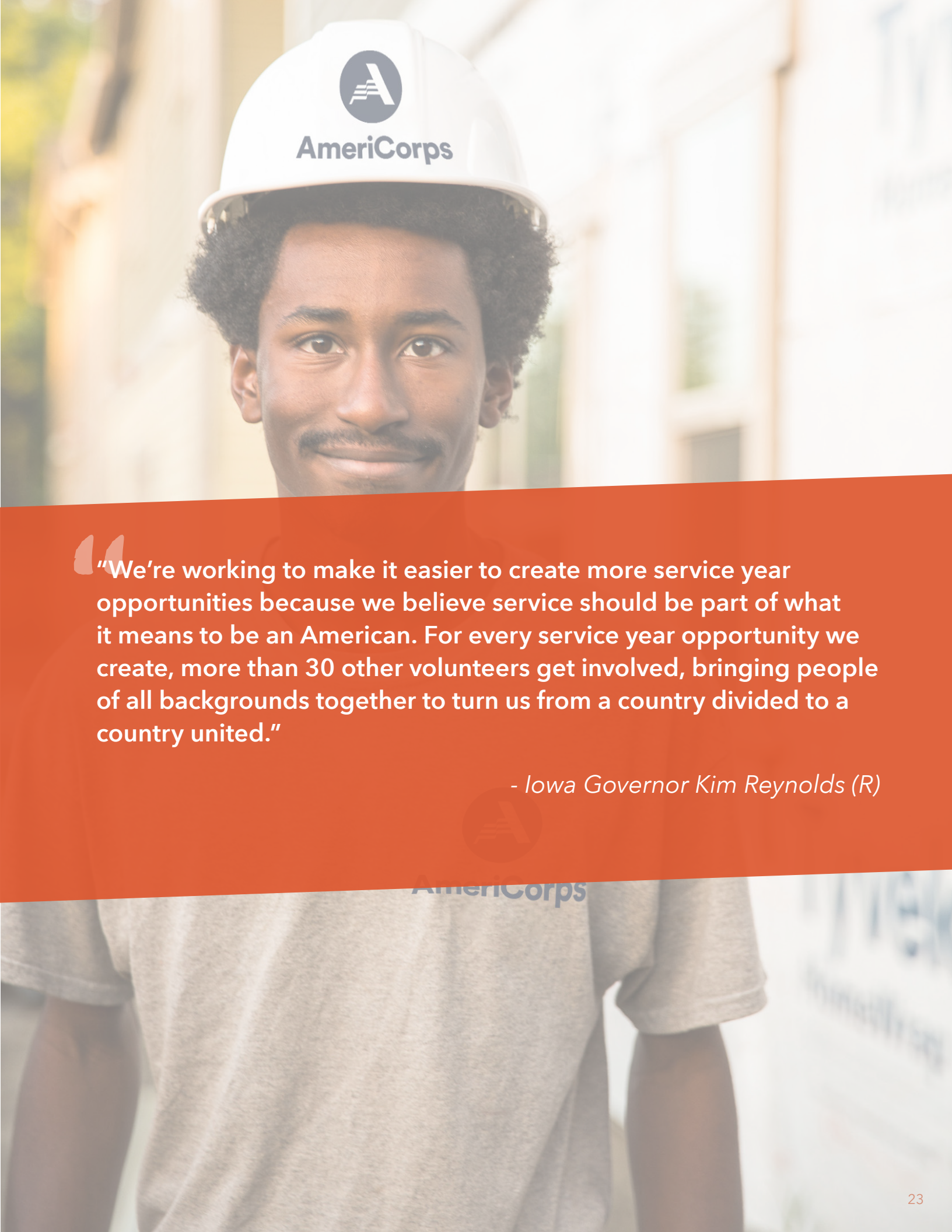
**San Joaquin Valley AmeriCorps Expansion:** California Volunteers expanded AmeriCorps into the San Joaquin Valley in 2019-2020 to establish the region's first network of AmeriCorps programs. Supported by great partners such as the Fresno Center, California Teaching Fellows Foundation, Equality California Institute, Porterville Unified School District, Community Action of Kern and many more, nearly 500 Californians, recruited from their communities, are committing to a year of service in over 200 locations across the region. AmeriCorps members are addressing critical community needs throughout the region by providing needed support in low-income schools, increasing healthcare access for those in need, promoting restorative justice, enhancing social-emotional wellness, and mentoring first-generation students as they navigate high school and transition to and through college.

On the local level, in Philadelphia, a Chief Service Officer sits in the Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Services (MOCEVS), providing strategic direction, best practices, and convening power to service year programs across the city. Having a position in the mayor's office facilitates the integration of service years into addressing a variety of community needs. MOCEVS and the state service commission, PennSERVE, work closely together on multiple initiatives and were strategic partners throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. When additional capacity was needed to support the city's COVID response, the city was able to quickly deploy AmeriCorps members to support food distribution and staff meal sites. MOCEVS and PennSERVE also worked to connect partners at the National Nurse Led Consortium and the Department of Public Health, creating a new

AmeriCorps program funded by PennSERVE to assist in contract tracing and supportive isolation.

In large part due to the work of [Cities of Service](#), other cities across the country have also created Chief Service Officer positions within mayors' offices, including New York City, NY, San Jose, CA, Flint, MI, Orlando, FL, and Austin, TX. These roles have substantially increased the local coordination and collaboration of service year and volunteer programs, increased the impact of service, embedded service in emergency response needs, and generally made service more effective and resilient.





“We’re working to make it easier to create more service year opportunities because we believe service should be part of what it means to be an American. For every service year opportunity we create, more than 30 other volunteers get involved, bringing people of all backgrounds together to turn us from a country divided to a country united.”

- Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds (R)

AmeriCorps



## Governor's Council on National Service in Iowa

In 2014, via [executive order](#), Iowa Governor Terry Branstad (R) directed Volunteer Iowa (also known as the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service) to support the creation of the [Governor's Council on National Service](#) to develop a set of recommendations to expand service and volunteering opportunities in the state of Iowa. The [Council's final report](#) included recommendations for policies and practices to expand service, state and local government strategies, as well as public-private partnership opportunities. To date, through implementation of the recommendations, Iowa has increased the number of national service programs and participants by approximately 20 percent.

## State Employment Hiring Preferences/Retirement Service Credits

Inspired by AmeriCorps' [Employers of National Service](#) and other efforts, states around the nation have developed their own Employers of National Service initiatives by developing hiring preferences and offering retirement service credits to individuals completing a year or more in a domestic national service position or term as a Peace Corps volunteer. Virginia and Montana were the first states in 2016 to have joined and provided hiring preferences for AmeriCorps and Peace Corps alumni. In addition, states such as California have enacted policies to allow AmeriCorps and Peace Corps alumni the [opportunity to purchase state retirement service credits](#) for up to three years of service.

In 2018, the Iowa state legislature also established a new "[National Service Corps](#)" alumni designation to foster a cultural expectation of service in Iowa through a unified service corps and to certify programs that meet state and local needs while providing more opportunities for Iowans to serve their state and country. Existing service year programs such as AmeriCorps are covered by this legislation, and other programs created and/or

operated locally can apply for certification as part of the Iowa National Service Corps. When it went into effect in 2020, this state legislation authorizes a state hiring preference for AmeriCorps and similar alumni who have served a full-time (or equivalent) term of service, eases administrative requirements around state agencies entering into agreements for services with national service corps programs, allows state agencies or political subdivisions of the state to give priority to grants or projects that utilize Iowa national service corps programs, and permits state agencies to utilize third-party vendors to help them with establishing and administering national service corps programs.

## Raise the Profile of Service through Recognition Programming

Governors, mayors and other elected officials have a unique role and opportunity to highlight service year opportunities and recognize the efforts of those who serve. By using the prestige of the Governor's office, for example, governors, first spouses, or lieutenant governors can increase understanding of the impact of service years in local communities while recognizing the efforts of community members. Governors throughout the country have supported annual recognition events for their states' outstanding service year participants and volunteers in addition to daily, weekly, and/or monthly recognition programming.

In many states across the country, Governors partner with their state service commissions to host annual Governor's Service Awards to honor and thank individuals and community volunteer groups for their service. In states like Wisconsin, the awards have been expanded to include recognition for outstanding AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps Seniors participants and programs, veteran volunteers, volunteer coordinators, and other local volunteers and agencies that address critical social needs. The awards also honor AmeriCorps alumni for their continued contributions to Wisconsin communities in the years following their service, as well as individuals

or organizations that have been exemplary supporters of national service programs. Throughout their history, the award categories have been adjusted to recognize specific concerns impacting the state, including the addition in 2020 of recognitions for individuals and organizations

Another example is in Texas, where the [Governor's Volunteer Award for Community Leadership](#) was awarded by Governor Greg Abbott (R) to the [AmeriCorps Central Texas](#) (ACT) Collaborative in 2020. This award honors the extraordinary impact of individuals and organizations in Texas that have made a significant and measurable difference in their communities through exemplary service and volunteering. It specifically recognized the eight service year programs that have strengthened the community through intentional partnerships, understanding the importance of service and developing connections between groups, and collaborating on solutions to meet local needs.

Another opportunity for state and local officials to recognize the efforts of national service members is [National Service Recognition Day](#), an annual event that takes place the first Tuesday of April. Now in its ninth year, National Service Recognition Day is a bipartisan effort to recognize the positive impact of national service, to thank those who serve, and to encourage more citizens to give back to their communities. Across the nation, elected officials participate in a variety of activities, including visiting national service programs, hosting roundtable discussions, issuing proclamations, and communicating the impact of national service through social media. AmeriCorps, which leads this national effort, produces a toolkit with recognition ideas, sample proclamations and media materials, and other helpful resources,

Recognition at this level helps spur interest in volunteering, demonstrates an elected official's commitment to civic engagement, and positions service as a meaningful way to address the needs of the state.

## Supporting an Existing or Founding a New Service Year Impact Community

In cities like Philadelphia, San Jose, and Flint, regions like Eastern Kentucky, North Texas, Central Florida, and states like South Carolina, coalitions of programs are working with state and local governments and state service commissions to ensure programs are highly effective both in the impact of their service and in the benefits they provide their corps members. They collaborate on a national level with other communities in the [Impact Community](#) network managed by Service Year Alliance to share best practices.

Striving to make universal national service a reality in their communities, Impact Communities develop local coalitions and collaboratives that share resources, professional development training for corps members and staff, and improve the overall quality of service. Because these Impact Communities work across programs, they have a greater opportunity to create an experience for corps members that makes them feel part of a larger whole – part of the community that hosts them – rather than just a member of their program.

Establishing or supporting an existing Impact Community in your city, region, or state can help service year programs and their corps members flourish, contributing to an even stronger culture of service.

## Incentivize Service Years as a Pathway to Higher Education

With the rising costs of higher education, elected officials can incentivize individuals to serve by reducing the cost of tuition at public colleges and universities. By matching the value of the federal education award earned by AmeriCorps members, providing in-state tuition for those serving in the state, offering academic credit for service years, or offering admissions preferences for those who complete a service year, elected officials can do a great deal to put students on a path of service. Further, eliminating state taxation on the value of the AmeriCorps education award stretches the impact the award has in financing post-secondary education. Finally, investments in service year opportunities in K-12 schools as well as career/guidance counseling that highlights service year opportunities exposes potential service year corps members to the various options available to them.

### Connecting Service Year Experiences to Academic Credit

The [Virginia Compact on National Service](#), which was spearheaded by Governor Terry McAuliffe (D) and First Lady Dorothy McAuliffe in 2016, continues today as part of Campus Compact. The effort outlines ways in which colleges and universities can support the creation of additional service years through aligning service years to academic credit, providing admission preferences and/or enrollment deferrals to students completing a year of service, as well as raising the profile of service year opportunities through recognition programming and integrating service into other existing efforts. All of Virginia's public and private universities, as well as community colleges are part of the initiative.

### Waiving State Taxation on the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award

Currently, and [unlike military service members](#), AmeriCorps service members are required to pay federal and state income tax on the value of their Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards after their service. In 2008, the Minnesota State Legislature passed a [bill to eliminate state tax](#) on the value of the AmeriCorps education award. This provision took effect in January of 2008 and since that time, Minnesotans earning an educational award from the National Service Trust have

been able to exempt it from their taxable income on their individual state tax returns.

Following Minnesota's lead, [Iowa](#) and [Nebraska](#) passed similar state legislation in 2009 and 2020, respectively, allowing thousands of AmeriCorps members across those states to benefit from this state tax exemption each year and to serve without fear of financial consequences after their year of service. Since taking effect, Iowa's AmeriCorps Education Award state tax exemption has assisted more than 16,000 AmeriCorps members, saving them nearly \$1.7 million in taxes on their service benefits, for example.

### Matching the Education Award at Public Universities

Around the nation, more than 250 higher education institutions, including both private and public schools, match the value of the AmeriCorps education award or provide other incentives to individuals completing an AmeriCorps term of service. AmeriCorps members earn an education award after completing a full-year term of AmeriCorps service equivalent to the Pell Grant. The value of the education award and match is approximately the equivalent to that of the average cost of one year of tuition at a public four-year university. This incentive is powerful in encouraging young people to complete a service year as a means to fund their education and is an excellent way for public universities to attract talented, experienced, and civic-minded students to attend their institutions.

In 2020, AmeriCorps launched its [Schools of National Service](#) initiative, which aims to encourage more higher education institutions to participate in education award match. With the aid of elected officials, the initiative can substantially improve college access for AmeriCorps members.

### In-State Tuition for Those Who Serve

In 2016, the Arizona Legislature enacted [House Bill 2547](#) which allows individuals who served in AmeriCorps in Arizona for at least one year to be classified as in-state students for the purposes of public university tuition in the state. Governor Ducey (R) signed the legislation into law and it went into effect on August 6, 2016. Given that Arizona State University is one of the largest public universities in the country, this legislation has the potential to incentivize individuals to complete a year of service in the state of Arizona.

The Maryland Legislature passed similar legislation to encourage service within the state of Maryland.

In April 2021, the Nebraska legislature unanimously passed [LB 197](#), groundbreaking state legislation providing in-state tuition eligibility to all AmeriCorps alumni no matter what state they served in. The legislation, sponsored by Senator Tony Vargas, an AmeriCorps alum, enhances the AmeriCorps experience, increases college access and affordability, and is expected to draw more students to Nebraska universities. As Senator Vargas said, “We should be bringing those dollars to our local colleges and universities and making our state a destination spot for volunteers after their service is completed.”

## Develop a Local or State Talent Pipeline

Many counties, cities, or states have an industry that is flourishing, but may lack residents with the skills or credentials needed to fill those needed roles. For many sectors, service years can act as a talent pipeline, offering corps members the exposure to a career that they had perhaps not considered and giving them opportunities to learn the skills needed to enter that career, all while they spend a year getting paid and addressing the needs of a community. From programs that connect opportunity youth to a career path, to professional corps that expose corps members to a career in need of additional human capital, service years can help ensure that local career pathways are well-maintained.

### Green City Force and PowerCorps PHL

[Green City Force](#) in New York City enlists and trains young people from low-income public housing communities in using green technologies to develop a new and more equitable economy. Through leading environmental and health initiatives in public housing and other frontline communities, corps members develop a life-long passion for sustainability and service. New York’s public housing communities are stronger, greener, healthier, and save residents money because of Green City Force’s corps members. With a focus not only on the impact the corps members have on their community, but also on ensuring a bright future

for the corps members themselves, Green City Force has designed its program as a path to greater well-being. Graduates go on to jobs or college, directly or through alumni initiatives that build towards jobs and apprenticeships in the sector. Green City Force alumni have an 83 percent job placement rate within six months of completing their service year.

[PowerCorps PHL](#), an AmeriCorps program funded and supported by PennSERVE, similarly engages disconnected young adults and returning citizens in paid service years and centers career advancement and apprenticeship practices in their service experience. PowerCorps PHL is powered by EducationWorks. It works closely with the City of Philadelphia through partnerships with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, the Philadelphia Water Department, and partners in the public and private sector tackling pressing environmental challenges throughout Philadelphia. At the same time, it helps corps members develop skills to have meaningful options in post-secondary education, career paths in green infrastructure, electrical and solar, or urban forestry, or offering peer mentorship, youth work, and leadership to other corps members as a crew leader. Among their many successes, PowerCorps PHL has significantly reduced recidivism among its corps members from the city average of nearly 50% to less than 10%.

### MedServe

Founded in 2016, [MedServe](#) is a Professional AmeriCorps program in North Carolina that takes recent college grads with pre-medical qualifications and places them in underserved community clinics for two years, filling a talent and skills gap in those communities. They are shaped into future service-oriented health professionals with real life experiences in primary care practice who go on to become champions of health equity. MedServe fellows often find that their AmeriCorps experience offers them a unique perspective into the health field, demonstrating, among other things, the value of understanding a patient’s historical context, the barriers that underserved communities face in receiving care, and the importance of being a culturally competent provider. In 2021, MedServe members also leveraged these skills to support COVID-19 testing and vaccination efforts at community health clinics across North Carolina.

To learn more about this strategy and how some programs are already using it, read [Service Years as a Talent Pipeline](#).

## New Hampshire Service Year Workforce Commission

The [NH Service Year Workforce Commission](#) was established with bipartisan, unanimous support and signed into law by Governor Chris Sununu (R) in 2019 with the goal of promoting pathways between service year programs, higher education institutions and employers. Members of the Commission – including leaders from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors – made recommendations to expand these pathways in order to support New Hampshire’s future workforce needs. [Establishing ServeLearnEarn-NH.org](#) is one step that has already been taken toward this end. This website, launched by the Volunteer NH commission, serves to connect current and future AmeriCorps members and alumni to all service, higher education, and employment opportunities available in the state.

## Invest in National Service Infrastructure and Programming

There are a number of strategies on the local and state level for embedding service years into agencies or plans to facilitate better responses to a variety of needs as they arise. At the highest level of infrastructure in a state are state service commissions, which play a critical role in supporting the development of high-quality service year opportunities. By providing state funding to secure the required match for federal administrative funds available to state service commissions, governors ensure that sufficient resources are available to explore and build partnerships that lead to new service year opportunities. In nearly half of states, these state service commissions are actively involved in disaster response activities, often serving as the designated lead organization for volunteer and donations management in partnership with the state emergency management agency.

Further, state service commissions are well-positioned to provide technical assistance to state agencies and departments and other statewide organizations in developing service positions in support of each agency’s respective mission. A 2020 evaluation report, [The Value of State Service Commissions](#), conducted by Dialogues In Action in partnership with America’s Service Commissions, found that the value

commissions bring to their states actually extends far beyond AmeriCorps grant administration, training, and technical assistance. Report data revealed that state service commissions are trusted entities within their states as connectors between on-the-ground community needs and state and federal government resources and identified 11 notable impacts that commissions have in their states and communities.

### Impact Findings - State Service Commissions:

- Help AmeriCorps programs navigate complexity
- Humanize compliance to help AmeriCorps leaders and programs evolve
- Build capacity for impact, innovation, and sustainability
- Improve the state’s ability to understand and meet community needs
- Develop the next generation of social sector leaders
- Enrich nonprofit culture and practices
- Build bridges to strengthen collaboration
- Place greater emphasis on elevating national service and volunteerism
- Balance ensuring compliance with supporting impact and innovation
- Reduce barriers to equitable and inclusive service and volunteerism
- Play a more significant role in building the capacity of the social sector
- Rural communities, in particular, see commissions as their ally and partner to help them access much-needed resources.

Local entities like cities and counties can similarly embed service years into their plans. In some cases, as mentioned above, creating a Chief Service Officer position can help facilitate this. Here are several examples for how a local or state entity might take advantage of service years to address the many emerging needs of the public sector.





“Lt. Governor Karyn Polito and I are thankful for the leadership and hard work demonstrated by AmeriCorps and Commonwealth Corps members and volunteers as we all work together to give back to our 351 cities and towns and meet the needs of residents across Massachusetts.”

- Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker (R)



## Establish a State or City Service Corps

In 2007, the Massachusetts Governor and state legislature created the [Commonwealth Corps](#) to engage Massachusetts residents of all ages and backgrounds in direct service to rebuild communities and address unmet community needs. Each year, the Massachusetts Service Alliance selects host sites for Commonwealth Corps members. Full-time corps members serve 10.5 months and receive a living stipend, health insurance, and a completion award (up to \$2,500). Since the inception of this fully state-funded program, more than 950 Commonwealth Corps members have served in the program. In 2016, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan (R) signed House Bill 1488, legislation creating the [Maryland Corps Program](#) to allow the state to provide similar service year opportunities and benefits in the state of Maryland.

In 2015, New York City created a City Service Corps to make the city's initiatives more effective and efficient, and to better engage residents by embedding service year members in local government agencies to build capacity and address local community-related issues. The [City Service Corps Blueprint](#), released in 2020 by NYC Service, seeks to offer a guide to other cities and municipalities that want to build a culture of service through agency corps.

The City Service Corps has seen many successful outcomes – 35 percent of the over 500 members who have served since the program's start have been hired by the city, forging a new workforce development pathway. Members have benefited and expanded key services, such as composting and recycling education, immigrant support, emergency preparedness for high risk communities, environmental stewardship, and support for foster care families.

There are several agency corps across the country. The [Serve Philadelphia VISTA Corps](#) places AmeriCorps VISTA members in city agencies with a focus on alleviating poverty. Current placements cover four areas: economic opportunity, education, healthy futures and homelessness, and affordable housing. In

Orlando, FL, [two city-run AmeriCorps programs](#) have 64 corps members that reach thousands of middle and high school students. During virtual schooling, service year corps members were able to work directly with families to make sure students had sufficient internet and technology to stay connected. A newer program, [Lead for America](#) is a national organization that launched in North Carolina with the Hometown Fellows, mobilizing young professionals ages 21-30 to serve in their hometown local governments and nonprofits. Fellows have already made big impacts in their communities, including being elected to city council, launching a city-wide talent marketing campaign, and creating a COVID relief network that has raised over \$17 million for food and supply distribution in the Navajo Nation. They added an AmeriCorps program in Minnesota and have made placements in 85 towns and cities where resources are most needed. Lead for America is actively expanding its programming with new city and town partnerships, and plans to have 100 new Fellows in 2021, including the [American Connection Corps](#), which will bring leaders back to their hometowns to help develop broadband infrastructure.

## Creating or Supporting an Impact Community

As mentioned previously, Impact Communities not only have the opportunity to create a culture of service, they can help create a national service infrastructure on a local, regional, or state level to make service years more impactful for both those serving and the communities they serve.

Impact Communities like the [Flint National Service Accelerator](#) in Flint, Michigan, encourage the development of a community plan. A community plan aims to identify the needs of a community that service years can address, and determine which programs are best able to address those needs with the additional capacity of service year members. Such a plan helps ensure that the community is strategically aligning new service year positions with the community's priorities and supporting new organizations and program ideas.



Indeed, Flint went from 20 to over 400 AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps Senior members in a matter of a few years.

In Flint, the National Service Accelerator, in coordination with the mayor's office, utilized the city's already established master plan to build its growth strategy in an effort to support the community's recovery. Flint has demonstrated that Impact Communities can have a great deal of success when they operate out of a mayoral or gubernatorial office, a state commission, or in close partnership with these elected or appointed officials, as service years can be strategically incorporated into a variety of initiatives to strengthen the community. A report released by Voices for National Service with support from the Mott Foundation in 2020, [AmeriCorps and Senior Corps: Quantifying the Impact](#), indicated that for every \$1 of funding invested in AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs in Flint, there is a \$27.40 return on investment – more than double the return than that of communities without such a coordinated effort.

## **Include Service as Part of your Disaster Response or Emergency Management Plan**

In some cities and states, service years are an established way to leverage human capital to respond to a crisis. Though AmeriCorps has national emergency response capabilities in the AmeriCorps NCCC and its FEMA Corps unit, there are additional ways governors have been able to mobilize national service. Most disasters are local, and while federal support is often crucial to the effective management and mitigation of a disaster, having an effective and pre-existing local or state emergency management plans with defined roles for agencies, programs, and corps members can make a huge impact faster and more efficiently. Further, recruiting local corps members to interact with the community can go a long way in ensuring that the response is relevant, culturally competent, and community-driven. Work with your local or state government to explore ways in which local service year resources can be tapped in an emergency to support the response.

### **The Flint Water Crisis**

While most of the disaster response and recovery work of national service has been related to weather

events, corps members have been used to respond to public health disasters even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. When the vast impact of the Flint water crisis became clear in 2015, Flint was in the midst of its [National Service Accelerator](#) five-year plan, aiming to increase its service year positions tenfold in five years. Using a combination of corps members already working in the community and AmeriCorps NCCC members, national service became a significant part of the crisis response. They provided aid to more than 100,000 people, including distributing bottled water, information, filters, and preparedness kits, as well as recruiting and coordinating volunteers and facilitating trainings. Anticipating about twenty years of long-term needs associated with the water crisis, Flint then established the Flint Urban Safety and Health Corps, which addresses many of those needs and continues to assist in Flint's recovery.

The community already had a plan and relationships in place to organize existing corps members and the infrastructure to quickly take on additional corps members throughout the crisis. This allowed service years to help provide immediate relief to those affected and be part of the long-term solution, building the community's resiliency to this and any other potential crises.

### **California Conservation Corps**

The [California Conservation Corps](#) (CCC), another example of a state service corps, is an integral part of the state's emergency response plans, and its programs are mandated to make emergency response a high priority. The CCC enrolls about 1,500 corps members at a time. Established in 1976, it has contributed more than 11 million hours of emergency work to California and, on occasion, to other states as well.

**There are many ways to leverage AmeriCorps for emergency response, including FEMA Mission Assignment and AmeriCorps Disaster Response teams, both of which are trained year-round to respond to a variety of disasters and are a nationally-deployable. [Learn more about leveraging these resources or getting your local AmeriCorps programs A-DRT certified here.](#)**

Much of the work of the CCC during non-emergencies involves disaster preparedness and mitigation. By doing conservation work that reduces the likelihood or impact of natural disasters like floods, droughts, fires, and earthquakes, and then responding to disasters when they do occur, the CCC contributes to a more long-term and sustainable disaster management strategy in the state of California.

### **Emergency Response Initiative**

In 2020, ServeMinnesota leveraged AmeriCorps members to launch the Minnesota Emergency Response Initiative to help Minnesota organizations and communities affected by COVID-19. More than 300 AmeriCorps members served across the state to address issues including food insecurity, homelessness, distance learning, help for older adults and more. The Minnesota AmeriCorps Emergency Response Initiative is a prime example of how state service commissions and AmeriCorps can quickly respond to emerging issues. It gave nonprofit organizations, government agencies and school districts the opportunity to apply quickly for AmeriCorps members to help them with an increased demand for services related to the global pandemic. This initiative also provided an opportunity to connect with nearly 100 community organizations across the state – large and small – many of them new to national service.

### **State Service Commissions and Disaster Response**

Engaging your state service commission in disaster management support can provide significant benefits when disasters do strike. Some state commissions have helped establish and fund their own AmeriCorps Disaster Response Teams (A-DRTs) or Disaster Corps collaborations to minimize reliance on out-of-state resources, as Iowa, Wisconsin, and Kentucky have done.

Three state service commissions are now recognized federally as deployable AmeriCorps Disaster Response Teams (A-DRTs) by the AmeriCorps agency and FEMA, including Volunteer Iowa, Serve Wisconsin, and Serve Kentucky. This has certain

strategic advantages; for example, Volunteer Iowa is able to quickly activate and deploy Iowa AmeriCorps members during times of disaster from across any Iowa AmeriCorps programs and receive federal resources to make training, activation, and deployment financially feasible. This allows the state to be more nimble to deploy AmeriCorps and voluntary resources where needed during times of disaster. The Iowa A-DRT members have since responded to disaster events within the state of Iowa as well as across the country.

Similarly, OneStar Foundation, the Texas state service commission, includes a Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery clause in its grants with all of its AmeriCorps programs across the state. In the case of a state emergency in Texas, the commission can activate a percentage of AmeriCorps Texas members' time to support emergency response as needed. Remote activities are preferred, such as staffing call centers or monitoring social media, though corps members can be deployed in direct service roles as well. Those corps members receive appropriate training for the emergency services they are providing.

OneStar Foundation activated AmeriCorps members using this clause in 2017 to respond to the devastation caused by Hurricane Harvey. Most corps members were used at the Crisis Cleanup's virtual call center, where they returned a backlog of calls and fielded incoming calls. Other corps members implemented a Volunteer Reception Center or assisted with the operation of a donations warehouse. Recently, this clause was used to put AmeriCorps Texas members to work on contact tracing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



## Other Strategies

### Make a Call to Service

Governors can generate interest and share a vision for increased civic engagement for their states by making a call to service. By challenging community members to serve, and providing incentives for doing so, including reduced tuition at public colleges and universities, governors make a powerful statement regarding the importance of service years to address community needs. Governors can leverage all of the tools at their disposal, including speeches, social media, and special events, to ask and inspire community members to make a commitment to service. In addition, governors, first spouses, or lieutenant governors can participate in national days of service, such as the [MLK Day of Service](#) or [9/11 National Day of Service and Remembrance](#), as well as AmeriCorps induction and graduation ceremonies, provides another venue to model the call to service and give young leaders with stronger connections to the state after their service term ends.

For example, during the 2020 state legislative session, Volunteer Florida helped promote and provide technical assistance for the state to pass a new [Disaster Volunteer Leave Act for State Employees](#). This legislation amended and expanded the previous Florida Disaster Volunteer Leave Act, allowing Florida state employees to take up to 120 hours of administrative leave to volunteer after a disaster with a 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) organization to provide disaster response and recovery services to an area that has been declared a disaster by the Governor.

In 2019, Florida First Lady Casey DeSantis helped make a call to service to all Floridians, by launching Volunteer Connect, Florida's official statewide volunteer opportunities platform administered by Volunteer Florida. The platform serves as an intermediary between Floridians who are interested in engaging in community service and nonprofit organizations and governmental entities that mobilize volunteers.

### Encourage Companies and Philanthropy to Support Service Years

Through their interactions with corporate and philanthropic leaders, governors can encourage private investment to expand service year positions, especially in areas of critical importance for their state. Corporate and philanthropic dollars can fund the required federal match for AmeriCorps positions or fund initiatives to make service years a higher quality experience. Such investments can create and/or match state funding to develop new service year opportunities that align with the giving priorities of companies and foundations alike. Further, companies can leverage their corporate engagement efforts by engaging employees in the development of new service year opportunities and/or creating service year positions to more effectively leverage the skills and interests of employees donating their time to local nonprofit organizations. Finally, foundations can prioritize grant funds to organizations that identify and commit a portion of their grant funds to support service years and other volunteer opportunities.

#### Some examples include:

- Philadelphia, PA, where [American Airlines](#) gave the local Impact Community and National Service Task Force a grant to explore equity initiatives.
- Colorado, where [Gary Community Investments](#) directly supported technology needs of the COVID Containment Response Corps by providing AmeriCorps members with laptops, headsets, and hotspots.
- Austin, TX, where the [Michael & Susan Dell Foundation](#) supports an Impact Community, made up of a local collaborative of service programs, AmeriCorps Central Texas, as a local recruitment initiative.

- Washington, where the [Schultz Family Foundation](#) not only helped launch the Washington COVID Response Corps, but also launched a [\\$1 Million National Service Challenge](#) grant initiative in 2021 to provide matching grants of \$100,000 to \$250,000 to state service commissions who partner with philanthropy to fuel new or existing programs that increase the number and diversity of young people participating in AmeriCorps, strengthen the value proposition of a year of service, and provide AmeriCorps members with high-quality support and mentorship during and after their service.

## Offer Tax Relief for Homesharing or Other Creative Housing Solutions

One of the biggest barriers to service years is a lack of affordable housing, especially in cities where the cost of living is substantial. Exploring creative housing solutions can offer significant relief to corps members, while also supporting other populations as well. In Oregon, seniors who participate in home sharing receive a tax abatement – offering such a tax incentive for those who offer affordable housing to corps members would be an effective way to signal the value of service years while further supporting corps members' ability to serve. In another example, Baltimore worked with a developer to create [Miller Court](#), housing specifically targeting teachers including those participating in teaching service programs. A handful of programs throughout the country offer established housing or housing stipends for their corps members, ensuring that the basic needs of their corps members are met, thereby allowing them to focus on making the biggest impact possible during their service year.

## Host a Statewide Service and Volunteering Conference

ServeOhio has hosted the annual [Ohio Conference on Service & Volunteerism](#) for 26 years. Supported by the American Electric Power Foundation and Honda of America Mfg, the conference has brought together a

variety of stakeholders, including nonprofit volunteer administrators, national service staff and members, corporate social responsibility professionals, the faith-based community, high school service-learning programs, and higher education professionals to build 21st century skills and create opportunities for connection and inspiration that support the continued evolution and impact of Ohio's service and volunteerism professions. By hosting or supporting a similar opportunity for the service sector, elected officials can not only provide an opportunity for professionals in the sector to connect, but can also provide a venue to strategically align the service sector with the priorities of their city or state, increasing the effectiveness and impact.

## National Days of Service

In partnership with state service commissions, elected officials can also play a key role in prioritizing and encouraging participation in national days of service and volunteerism – including providing funding via mini-grants to communities and organizations that step forward to organize volunteers and AmeriCorps members locally or regionally. For example, the ServeOhio commission provides grants of up to \$2,000 to support community volunteer projects organized each year for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service (January), Global Youth Service Day (April), ServeOhio Day (June), and Make a Difference Day (October) – thanks to support from partners American Electric Power Foundation and the federal Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF). These mini-grants support projects across the state that create or improve community assets or infrastructure, such as parks, schools, senior centers, community gardens, and low-income homes. ServeOhio has provided this funding for 26 years; it is the only consistent source of funding in Ohio for National Days of Service volunteer projects. Last year, ServeOhio awarded over \$63,000 to communities that coordinated and supported 68 local volunteer projects. Those projects engaged 3,000 volunteers who served 7,700 hours to improve their communities.

# Service Year Alliance

Service Year Alliance is working to make a year of paid, full-time service – a service year – a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans. To achieve our mission, Service Year Alliance develops and documents evidence in priority focus areas to persuade decision makers to increase public and private investments in the service year ecosystem. We build coalitions and foster strategic corporate, community, and research partnerships and develop service year programs and resources in priority focus areas to strengthen the case for service years. We advance policy proposals that unlock public funds for service years to create the opportunity for all young Americans to serve. We elevate service years as an experience that transforms lives, strengthens communities, and fuels civic renewal. Finally, we manage ServiceYear.org, a technology platform that matches those who want to serve with paid service year opportunities. Learn more at ServiceYearAlliance.org.



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# America's Service Commissions (ASC)

America's Service Commissions (ASC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization representing and promoting the 52 Governor-appointed state service commissions across the United States and its territories. ASC's mission is to lead, support, and elevate the state service network. State service commissions are Governor-appointed public agencies or nonprofit organizations made up of more than 1,000 commissioners – Americans engaged in leading the nation's service movement.



statecommissions.org



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# AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteering, brings people together to tackle the country's most pressing challenges. AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers serve with organizations dedicated to the improvement of communities. AmeriCorps helps make service to others a cornerstone of our national culture. Learn more at AmeriCorps.gov.



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