

National Service A Resource for Cities



As Mayors and other city leaders work to meet increasing demands for social services, many are recognizing the critical role that citizen volunteers can play in meet community needs. Research has shown that cities with high levels of volunteering and civic engagement have a higher quality of life—stronger local economies, less crime, more parental engagement in schools. While volunteers have always been critical to a city's social and economic well-being, their importance is magnified in an economic downturn, as more residents experience social ills at the same time many service providers face declining resources.

The Corporation for National and Community Service is a federal agency that provides opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and country. As the nation's largest grantmaker for service and volunteering, the Corporation builds the capacity of America's nonprofit sector and expands the reach and impact of volunteers in addressing pressing social problems. The Corporation engages an estimated 5.5 million Americans in service through its Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America programs each year and supports thousands of nonprofit and public agencies that use volunteers through grants, training, technical assistance, research and other resources.

The Corporation encourages Mayors and other city leaders to explore how our grants and other resources can help increase your city's capacity to meet local needs through service, expand opportunities to serve, catalyze social innovation, and strengthen the civic infrastructure.

Below are some examples of how national service resources have been put to work in cities across the country.

AmeriCorps—Intensive Service to Meet Community Needs

AmeriCorps provides opportunities for more than 80,000 Americans each year to give intensive service to their communities and country through three programs: AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), and AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps). AmeriCorps members tutor and mentor youth, build affordable housing, teach computer skills, clean parks and streams, run after-school programs, help communities respond to disasters, and build the capacity of nonprofit groups to become self-sustaining, among many other activities.

AmeriCorps State and National: As the largest branch of AmeriCorps, the state and national grants program provides financial support to public and nonprofit organizations that sponsor service programs around the country to recruit, train and place AmeriCorps members to meet critical community needs in education, public safety, health, and the environment. Mayors and cities are eligible to apply for AmeriCorps grants, and most likely would apply through the AmeriCorps State program administered by their state service commission. Grant guidelines and deadlines for funds are determined by each state. For a list of state commissions go to <http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact/statecommission.asp>.

AmeriCorps State and National project examples:

■ **Fresno County Economic Opportunities, Fresno California:** This program, a subgrantee of California Volunteers, engages 55 AmeriCorps members at 10 host sites including the City of Fresno, City of Clovis, County of Fresno emergency response agencies to provide a critical menu of services to the community. Those services include increasing Neighborhood Watch involvement, presenting to school and adult groups on neighborhood safety, disseminating information on emergency preparedness, educating and disseminating information on fire safety and prevention, and giving presentations on public health topics such as pandemic flu.

In addition, members develop systems to recruit and manage volunteers to support homeland security activities and out of school programs.

■ **Albany Police Cadets, Albany, Georgia:** AmeriCorps Cadets spend their service year patrolling target neighborhoods, establishing neighborhood watches in each of the partner neighborhoods, and becoming well-known faces to the residents of the community. The Cadet members also spend time programming for seniors and youth in the neighborhoods. Members are supervised by an Albany Police Department Neighborhood Patrol Officer and do not have any law enforcement duties or capabilities.

AmeriCorps VISTA: VISTA members commit to serve full-time for a year at a nonprofit organization or local government agency, working to fight illiteracy, improve health services, create businesses, strengthen community groups, and much more. VISTAs improve the ability of organizations to alleviate poverty by raising funds, recruiting community volunteers, and designing sustainable programs. Applications to administer VISTA projects are submitted to Corporation State Offices. Mayors could apply for VISTAs that work directly out of the Mayor's offices or they might be placed in a coalition of organizations throughout the city. For a list of Corporation State Offices, go to <http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact/stateoffices.asp>.

AmeriCorps VISTA project examples:

■ **NYC Civic Corps, New York City:** This AmeriCorps VISTA project, funded by the Recovery Act is building sustainable volunteer programs to impact pressing issues of poverty, growing demand on community services, and agencies' need for extra capacity to engage potential volunteers that have often been turned away. The Civic Corps promotes meaningful service by helping nonprofits and city agencies create volunteer opportunities in the areas of education, economic assistance for distressed families, quality open space, and energy efficiency for low-income communities, emergency preparedness, public health and strengthened community interaction. In 2009, 192 VISTA members were initially sworn into service with the Civic Corps. As of May 31, 2010 the VISTAs have engaged 48,722 volunteers. Their activities have led to \$862,046 in cash resources and \$3,337,645 in non-cash resources to support efforts by local nonprofit and governmental agencies to address identified poverty issues.

■ **City of St. Paul, Minnesota:** The city places and supports twenty AmeriCorps VISTA members at partnering schools, community-based organizations, and government units. The members expand early childhood education and literacy programs so that all children enter school ready to learn; enhance formal and informal learning opportunities for students, including before, during and after school activities; prepare students for post-secondary educational opportunities; and increase workforce training and preparedness.

■ **Building Bridges, Rural Oregon:** Fifteen AmeriCorps VISTA members are placed at agencies that serve the mostly rural areas of Linn, Benton, and Lincoln counties in Oregon. VISTA members strengthen the organizational capacity of small, budget-strapped host agencies by establishing, growing, and supporting groups of community volunteers that allow the agencies to serve more low-income clients with better targeted programming. Since 2006, Building Bridges' VISTAs have raised over \$1.5 million for their organizations and recruited more than 870 volunteers for over 16,000 volunteer hours.

AmeriCorps NCCC: AmeriCorps NCCC is a full-time, team-based residential program for men and women ages 18-24. NCCC members are organized into teams of 10-12 members and serve in the region's local communities by responding to community needs in the areas of: disaster preparation, response and recovery; environmental conservation; public safety; urban and rural development; and, education. Teams are available to carry out multi-week service projects. Mayors or city officials can apply for a team by going to http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/apply/nccc.asp.

AmeriCorps NCCC project examples:

- **Public Works Department, Gainesville, Florida:** In 2009, two teams from the NCCC Atlantic Region worked with the Gainesville Public Works Department to map city landmarks, businesses, and streets in order to assure the effective functioning of the 911 system and to help the city become more prepared to address community needs in the event of disaster. NCCC members, using GPS units, logged more than 16,000 sites, enabling the city to finish work that was otherwise projected to take up to four years to complete.
- **Mayor's Office, Baltimore, Maryland:** NCCC teams from the Atlantic region worked with the Baltimore Mayor's Office to support the Believe in Our Schools Campaign, one of the largest city-led and volunteer-based service projects in Baltimore's history. Corps members served more than 3,000 hours working alongside 300 community volunteers to help complete school renovations and create improved learning environments for Baltimore school children. NCCC teams worked at over 30 Baltimore schools to complete classroom and exterior painting, murals, and other renovations, as well as coordinating volunteer days for the Campaign.

Senior Corps: Engaging a Generation of Experience

Each year Senior Corps taps the skills, talents, and experience of nearly 500,000 Americans age 55 and older to meet a wide range of community challenges through three programs: RSVP, the Foster Grandparent Program, and the Senior Companion Program. RSVP volunteers help local police departments conduct safety patrols, participate in environmental projects, provide intensive educational services to children and adults, and respond to natural disasters, among many other activities. Foster Grandparents serve one-on-one as tutors and mentors to young people with special needs. Senior Companions help homebound seniors and other adults maintain independence in their own homes. Cities and other public agencies are eligible to administer these programs.

Senior Corps project examples:

- **Mobile County SCP, Sponsored by the Mobile County Commission, Mobile, Alabama:** In 2008, 73 Senior Companions responded to the needs of 99 Area Agencies on Aging clients by providing assistance with activities of daily living such as meal preparation, light housekeeping, getting to medical appointments, and reporting changes in health to family members or the client's physician. Clients received Senior Companion services for at least three to six months. Surveys indicated that the services of the Senior Companion have allowed 23 percent of the clients to remain at home living independently rather than having to move to an institution. Based on the average cost of \$4,500 per month in Mobile for nursing home placement, this created a savings of up to \$1,242,000 for the clients and the community.
- **New York City Foster Grandparent Program, Sponsored by the City of New York:** Foster Grandparents play a critical role in the success of the Legal Aid Society's Manhattan Juvenile Rights Office. While low income parents and guardians avail themselves of the free legal services in custody proceedings in Family Court, the children are read to by Foster Grandparents located on site. The Legal Aid's Books for Kids initiative also provides books that the children can take home as their own. The program, which is now going to be replicated in all five boroughs, has attracted the donation of thousands of books to date.
- **Mobile County RSVP, Sponsored by the Mobile County Commission, Mobile, Alabama:** For many senior citizens and individuals with limited means, tax season results in anxiety and associated stress. Affordable tax preparation is hard to find, especially in rural communities. RSVP volunteers attend training conducted by the IRS to become certified preparers. During 2008, 15 RSVP volunteers provided tax preparation and filing assistance to 487 elderly and low-income clients and completed 900 stimulus applications through the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA). Projected Federal and State refunds to the senior and low-income clients totaled \$274,164. Based upon the \$300 per client, a projected total of \$270,000 was received by clients filing the stimulus application.

Learn and Serve America: Engaging Students in Community Solutions

Learn and Serve America provides an "on-ramp" to a lifetime of civic engagement for approximately 1.3 million students each year. The program awards grants to state education agencies, schools, nonprofit groups, and institutions of higher education to engage students in service activities linked to academic achievement. This type of learning, called service-learning, increases academic achievement while developing in young people the habits of citizenship. Mayors that administer a local school district would be eligible to apply, or Mayors could form collaborations with local entities that receive Learn and Serve funds in cities where school districts are operated independently.

Learn and Serve America project examples:

- **Tufts University and the surrounding City of Somerville** are jointly providing community service for economic recovery using the many resources of all segments of the community. A collaborative crisis response planning approach engages university students, local youth, faculty, and community partners in creating bringing the community together to respond to current and future challenges. Project PERIS—Partnering for Economic Recovery Impact through Service—engages Tufts students along with community partners and youth as co-planners in this comprehensive approach to community problem solving.
- **CIRCLE/Massachusetts Campus Compact** is developing new software for use by a potential audience of up to 250,000 college students in the Greater Boston area to organize and recruit volunteers and to improve the impact of service initiatives across the region. The software powers a new social network site, comparable to Facebook or MySpace, except that the main focus is nonprofit organizations and social issues, not individual students. The site includes an interactive "map" of Greater Boston's civil society which can be used by students to identify needs, assets, and strategies. The new social network will connect to existing sites so that students can receive relevant information through the sites that they already use most heavily. The software has been piloted and will soon be put into broader use.

Other Resources for Cities

Beyond its program support, the Corporation offers a variety of resources that can help cities expand the scope and impact of volunteering by their residents.

Training and Technical Assistance

- The Corporation's **Resource Center** provides training and technical assistance to national service programs and nonprofit organizations seeking to expand their volunteer capacity.
- The **National Conference on Volunteering and Service** is the premier annual gathering of leaders of the volunteering and national service world, providing training, best practices, and professional networking opportunities.

Research

The Corporation's annual **Volunteering in America** report is the most comprehensive data on volunteering ever assembled, providing detailed information on volunteering trends and demographics in the U.S., all fifty states, and more than 150 major cities.

Each year, the Corporation produces **National Service State Profiles** that list all Corporation funding and projects for Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America in every state.

Days of Service

- The **Martin Luther King Day Jr. National Day of Service**, taking place the third Monday of every January, supports community organizations in their efforts to engage local citizens in service on the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday.
- The **9/11 National Day of Service and Remembrance** encourages Americans to remember the heroes and victims of 9/11 by honoring their memory through acts of community service.

Recognition

- The **President's Volunteer Service Award** promotes volunteer service by recognizing individuals, families, and groups for completing a certain number of volunteer hours. More than 28,000 certifying organizations have bestowed more than 1.5 million awards to the Nation's deserving volunteers since 2003. Mayor's offices are eligible to become certifying organizations.
- The **President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll** honors colleges and universities for the commitment of their students, faculty, and staff to community service.

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