



Office of the Governor
State of Montana
Office of Community Service

Summer 2008

Service News

AmeriCorps Program Directors



Directors representing state AmeriCorps programs gathered last month for a training workshop sponsored by the Office of Community Service (OCS). Jeff Birdsall from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory led the group in discovering ways to recruit and retain national service members. OCS staff also presented during the event. Kathy Bean shared valuable information on Disability Inclusion and Tony Dean discussed important updates with the group.

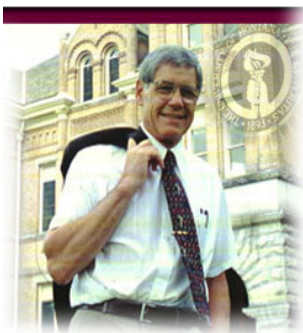


Trainer Jeff Birdsall



Directors Collaborate During Breakout Session

Commissioner's Corner



George M. Dennison
President,
University of Montana and
Chair of the Montana
Commission on Community
Service

George M. Dennison has served as Chairman of the Montana Commission since 1991. Under his leadership, the state's AmeriCorps, VISTA, Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve programs have expanded to help address Montana's myriad of social, economic, environmental, and educational needs. His vision created the Montana Campus Compact in 1993, which has grown to the largest higher education consortium in the state. Nineteen colleges and universities now have faculty, students, and staff committed to community service, service-learning, and civic engagement activities. As President of The University of Montana, he has inspired stakeholders to form meaningful campus-community partnerships that get things done for Montana, meet critical needs, and instill the skills of citizenship and habits of the heart within UM graduates.

President Dennison is the Chair of the Montana Commission and is held in high esteem by his fellow Commissioners. To that end, Lt. Governor John Bohlinger presented him with the "Spirit of Service" award at the Governor's Conference on Civic Engagement in September of 2007. Chairman Dennison has a lively spirit and a good sense of humor. The Montana Commission and OCS staff remain grateful for his time and commitment.

The Montana Commission on Community Service is a diverse, non-partisan, and Governor appointed body representing a broad cross-section of community service interests and statewide leadership in Montana. The Commission's administrative arm, the Governor's Office of Community Service (OCS), is a state agency funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the State of Montana and various private donations.



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More than 8,800 people of all ages and backgrounds are helping to meet local needs, strengthen communities, and increase civic engagement through 56 national service projects across Montana. Serving with national and local nonprofits, schools, faith-based organizations and other groups, these citizens tutor and mentor children, coordinate after-school programs, build homes, conduct neighborhood patrols, restore the environment, respond to disasters, build nonprofit capacity, and recruit and manage volunteers.



Serving Communities Across Montana

Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) member Adrienne Priess is the first MCC member to have served in both our youth and field crew programs.

Adrienne began her service with the MCC in 2002 as a youth crew participant. In 2005, she joined a Western Wildlands field crew as a member and worked extensively on the Salmon National Forest. She is currently serving as a field crew leader, spending her time in Idaho maintaining trails. Adrienne is highly dedicated to the MCC and the development of young people. When asked about



Adrienne Priess, Field Crew Leader
Montana Conservation Corps

Adrienne, Bobby Grillo, regional supervisor for the Western Wildlands region and Adrienne’s supervisor for all three of her service terms said, “It has been a pleasure watching her grow from a wild, undisciplined teenager to a mature, responsible, and motivated woman.” **Thanks Adrienne, for your commitment to Montana and the MCC!**

AmeriCorps Member Advisory Council (ACMAC)

The AmeriCorps Member Advisory Council (ACMAC) is a representative council of AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA members from across Montana who strive to encourage networking across all AmeriCorps programs in Montana through action, communication, and representation, and to enhance the national service experience in our state. ACMAC’s participation in statewide events provide community outreach and media coverage for Martin Luther King Day, Global Youth Service Day, AmeriCorps Week, and Make A Difference Day. Through the successful efforts of ACMAC, Montana received national recognition from the Living Legacy Foundation, an organ donor program. ACMAC, working with the Office of the Governor for the State of Montana, tripled the amount of organ donors in 2007.



ACMAC

From right to left: Heather Haas, Silke Popp, Jack Hughes, Jordan Lyons, Rebecca Harbage, Ebony Carter, Ashley Stevick, Tina Maples. Not pictured: Emily Clark, Julie Stevens and Amanda Megyesi-McCave.



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Opening Doors

Promoting the inclusion of individuals with disabilities within AmeriCorps programs.

By Kathy Bean
OCS Disabilities Outreach Specialist

THE HEART ACT

ON JUNE 17, 2008 AMERICORPS BECAME MORE ACCESSIBLE TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. PRESIDENT BUSH SIGNED H.R. 6081, THE HEROES EARNINGS ASSISTANCE AND RELIEF TAX ACT OF 2008 "HEART ACT."

How does the HEART Act make AmeriCorps more accessible to people with disabilities? Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a Federal program that provides a monthly cash benefit to low-income individuals who are aged, blind, or who have a disability. In the past, receiving an AmeriCorps living allowance could disqualify an individual from eligibility. The new law directs the Social Security Administration to ignore an individual's receipt of AmeriCorps benefits for purposes of SSI eligibility.

Which AmeriCorps benefits are excluded from countable income? The Heart Act excludes "any benefit (whether cash or in-kind)" and so covers the living allowance, health insurance, child care, and the education award (and related interest payments).

What other items are excluded from countable income under the SSI program? The SSI program rules exclude specific amounts of earned income, unearned income such as tuition scholarship and disaster relief payments, and resources such as a residence or household automobile.

Why doesn't the law cover both SSI and SSDI? Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is a Federal program that provides money to individuals with disabilities based on their having paid into the insurance program. There are separate laws and regulations for SSDI eligibility and the HEART Act moved through Congress too quickly to include SSDI. We hope that Congress will extend the AmeriCorps exclusion to SSDI in the near future.

When does the new law take effect? The exclusion of AmeriCorps benefits takes effect for benefits payable after August 16, 2008.

Does the HEART Act affect former AmeriCorps members as well as current members? Yes, the exclusion covers benefits beginning on the effective date, regardless of the status of the AmeriCorps member.

Will the Corporation be issuing guidance? We are working with the Social Security Administration to update guidance and will provide guidance resources on the Corporation's Accessibility page at http://www.nationalservice.gov/home/site_information/accessibility.asp. We plan to provide training and technical assistance on this topic at the National Conference on Disability Inclusion & National Service, October 15-18, 2008, in Alexandria, Virginia.

This information was taken from the National Service Information/Help Web site.

Thank you for your efforts toward promoting disability inclusion. Please call or e-mail with any questions or concerns: 406- 444-5547 or kbean@mt.gov.



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Office of Community Service Highlights



**Tony Dean
AmeriCorps
Grant Officer**

Tony Dean joined OCS last September. Drawn by the mission of OCS to promote volunteerism, Tony's role is to manage the federal grants that OCS administers for service programs across the state. Through a grant monitoring process and working with sub-grantees, Tony provides assistance for programmatic and financial compliance as well as technical assistance to programs.

After graduating from Montana State University with a Bachelor of Science in Business/Finance, he moved to Washington D.C. to serve as a senior analyst for a merger acquisition firm in Washington D.C. He is glad to be back in his home state of Montana where he enjoys hiking, fishing, kayaking and skiing. Tony volunteers for the Lewis and Clark Search and Rescue team, and is a certified EMT first responder. He likes to build and fix things, and one of these days, he hopes to drive his prized vintage automobile (a 1969 Toyota Land Cruiser FJ40) which currently is in 100 pieces in his garage.

Office of Community Service

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- Linda Carlson**, Executive Director
- Kathy Bean**, Disabilities Outreach Specialist
- Tony Dean**, AmeriCorps Grant Officer
- Scott Peterson**, Citizen Corps Program Manager
- Lorri Ward Brown**, CERT Program Manager
- Andee Dunick**, Training & Marketing Officer

The Montana Office of Community Service seeks to renew the ethic of civic responsibility by:

- Encouraging citizens of all ages and backgrounds to engage in service,
- Involving youth in the life and work of communities, and
- Expanding service opportunities for all Montanans.

Upcoming Events

July 10-12, 2008

CERT Training

Bozeman

CERT training provides critical skills in emergency preparedness and response, and prepares citizens to help emergency responders in the event of a disaster.

August 6-7, 2008

Community Building Institute

Helena

Training event for community organizers that focuses on developing strategies and action steps to create sustainability for community projects.

Look for Service Opportunities at:

<http://www.mt.gov/MCSN>