

# 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 meeting 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 difficult economic times, as more residents experience social ills at the same time many service providers face declining resources.

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) 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, CNCS builds the capacity of America's nonprofit sector and expands the reach and impact of volunteers in addressing pressing social problems. CNCS engages more than five 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.

CNCS 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. National Service strategic priorities are: disaster services, economic opportunity, education, environmental stewardship, healthy futures, and veterans and military families.

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 disaster services, economic opportunity, education, environmental stewardship, healthy futures, and veterans and military families. 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:

■ **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.

■ **ReServe Elder Services, Inc., New York, NY:** ReServe AmeriCorps members, who are generally 55 or older, provide educational supports, mentorship, college assistance and adult literacy to students and adults residing in disadvantaged and immigrant-rich communities. Through their service, students have increased school attendance, better graduation rates and college access, and increased English competency. The program is a partnership with the New York City Mayor's office, the New York State Commission on National and Community Service, and the Corporation for National and Community Service.

**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 CNCS 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 CNCS State Offices, go to <http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact/stateoffices.asp>.

#### AmeriCorps VISTA project examples:

■ **Cities of Service:** Cities of Service is a bi-partisan coalition of more than 100 mayors from large and small cities who are working together to use volunteerism and service as a strategy to address needs of their communities. Twenty of these cities have received two year grants to hire chief service officers who have developed and are implementing high impact service plan to improve outcomes for children in education and youth, health, neighborhood revitalization, preparedness and safety, sustainability and for veterans. In at least 13 of these cities, the chief service officers are using 50 VISTAs to build their capacity and create sustainable structures to enable the service agenda to continue beyond the period of the grant.

■ **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.

■ **Cedar Rapids, Iowa:** Record-setting flooding in June 2008 drastically impacted the Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, Iowa, area, with damages to some 5,400 houses and 1,050 commercial properties. Working with the Iowa state service commission and local nonprofits, CNCS mobilized hundreds of AmeriCorps members—including more than 200 AmeriCorps VISTAs serving with the Community Corrections Improvement Association—in long term recovery efforts, connecting flood victims with resources, and supporting the volunteer reception center that coordinated more than 7,500 volunteers.

■ **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 individuals age 18-24. NCCC members are based at 5 regional campuses and are organized into teams of 10-12 members. Members serve in the region's local communities by responding to community needs in the areas of: Natural and Other Disasters, Environmental Conservation and Stewardship, Energy Conservation, Urban and Rural Development, and Infrastructure Improvement. Teams are available to carry out multi-week service projects. Mayors, city officials, municipal and state governments, national parks, or community organizations can apply for a team by going to [http://www.americorps.gov/for\\_organizations/apply/nccc.asp](http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/apply/nccc.asp)

#### AmeriCorps NCCC project examples:

■ **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.

■ **Joplin, Missouri:** Within hours after the nation's deadliest tornado in 60 years struck Joplin, the first teams of AmeriCorps NCCC members arrived. Since then, NCCC members have performed vital services including managing volunteers, assisting in search and rescue, providing homeowner assistance and casework, removing debris, and operating donation and distribution warehouses. Working with other AmeriCorps teams, NCCC members have supported a large-scale volunteer operation that has recruited, facilitated, and supervised more than 60,000 volunteers who have provided more than 579,000 hours of service, providing the bulk of the \$17.7 million of donated resources estimated by the City of Joplin.

## Senior Corps: Engaging a Generation of Experience

Each year Senior Corps taps the skills, talents, and experience of more than 300,000 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. For a list of CNCS State Offices, go to <http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact/stateoffices.asp>.

#### Senior Corps project examples:

■ **Social Development Commission (SDC) SCP, Sponsored by the Social Development Commission, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.** In 2010, 93 Senior Companions made 14,135 visits to respond to the needs of 402 Milwaukee County Seniors by providing assistance with activities of daily living. Two hundred fourteen of these clients would have needed institutional care without the support of the Senior Companions, saving an estimated \$11,256,586 in taxpayer's money for nursing home care. Senior Companions helped with 5,921 meals, 3,589

reading/writing needs, 3,528 shopping needs and 2,473 transportation needs including 1,038 trips to medical appointments. Surveys indicate that the services of the Senior Companions allowed 95% of their homebound clients to maintain their independence while aging in place. The SDC Senior Companion program has among its partners the City of Milwaukee Housing Authority and received the Program of the Year award from the Milwaukee Aging Commission, an organization of more than 150 professionals, organizations and businesses serving the elderly.

## Senior Corps project examples continued:

- **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 2010, 18 RSVP volunteers filed Federal tax returns for 695 elderly individuals. Eighty individuals were assisted with other needs including the filing of State tax returns. A total of \$411,738 in refunds was received by clients served by the RSVP volunteers.

## 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

- CNCS's **Resource Center** provides training and technical assistance to national service programs and nonprofit organizations seeking to expand their volunteer capacity.

### Data on Service and Volunteering:

- CNCS'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, CNCS produces **National Service State Profiles** that list all CNCS 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.
- 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 31,000 certifying organizations have bestowed more than 1.65 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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